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New Dialogues with the Ocean as a Recreational Diver—Case Study: Mallorca, the Balearic Islands (Spain)

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Title: New Dialogues with the Ocean as a Recreational Diver—Case Study: Mallorca, the Balearic Islands (Spain)

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Abstract:

Pablo Neruda said, “*I need the sea because it teaches me,*” and after time, science proved him right. Oceans are of great importance in both ecological (climate regulation, biodiversity) and societal (economic activities, environmental services, and residence) terms. Healthy oceans are therefore fundamental to achieving global sustainability. The European Union has identified ‘blue growth’, or the sustainable use of the oceans, as a core societal challenge for its research programmes (e.g., Horizon 2020). However, at present, we still face the challenge of promoting ocean literacy in order to help citizens understand the influence of the oceans on our lives and the impacts of our behaviour on it. Aiming to tackle this, an educational programme, called Ocean Literacy, started over 10 years ago in the United States.

The main motivation for this program project was recognising a clear absence of marine knowledge within the general population (Change, 2015). In this sense, given our dependence on the health of the ocean for a wide range of ecosystem services, various sectors must take responsibility for the ‘meaning’ and ‘attachment’ to the largest ecosystem on Earth. As a key interface, marine tourism has an important role to play in achieving this.

The contemporary tourism industry is measured by individual experience; therefore, tourism research of the 21st century is being defined by the motivations, behaviours, and choices of travellers every day (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Álvarez Sousa, 2004). Within this Experience Economy context (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), ‘place meaning’ contributes to showing the value and significance of a setting through the cognitive concepts or beliefs the individual has (Stedman, 2002). And, concurrently, ‘place attachment’ reflects the degree of bond to the setting (Kyle et al., 2003). In response, this study asks, how can underwater marine ecotourism contribute towards marine environmental awareness through Ocean Literacy? To answer this central question, an ethnographic study from an emic perspective was implemented through a case study of Mallorca (Balearic Islands, Spain). The fieldwork was conducted over six months (the season of 2016), using participant observation and semi-structured and unstructured interviews with divers, staff, and stakeholders from science, the government, NGOs, and professional associations.

The case identified was an industry involved in a transitional period. It is suggested that this is due to the fact that diving is still conducted a ‘sport’, but where its industry is tourist driven, with tourists being the main clients. At the same time, experience is based on ‘what you see’, but without a systematic transfer of knowledge, and where staff are poorly trained in heritage interpretation and communication skills.

Consequently, the entire structure loses the opportunity to connect divers to the Mediterranean Sea through a ‘sense of place’. Nevertheless, suitable conditions for further development are present: motivated staff, a clear demand of ocean knowledge from tourists, proper facilities, and an active network of knowledge production close to them.

This presentation will focus on a suggested structure to put in place an Ocean Literacy program in the current recreational diving industry in Mallorca, in order to contribute to the aspiration of improved global ocean citizenship.

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