

Below the sea – below the radar? The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an opportunity for raising awareness of the ocean?

Rundt Christine¹, Kellett Paula², Heymans Sheila² and Koedam Nico³

¹ Oceans & Lakes, Master of Marine and Lacustrine Science and Management, Pleinlaan 2, 1050 Brussel, Belgium

E-mail: christine.rundt@vub.be

² European Marine Board (EMB), InnovOcean site, Wanderlaarkaai 7, 8400 Oostende, Belgium

³ Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Ecology and Biodiversity, Marine Biology, Pleinlaan 2, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

People all over the world depend and rely on the ocean. The ocean and seas provide fundamental ecosystem services for mankind supporting the livelihood of people worldwide. [1] In 2015, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the document 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' including a list of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 accompanying targets. The agenda is a universal call to action which recognizes the need for sustainable management of natural resources for social and economic development and includes a goal on the conservation and the sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources (SDG 14 – 'Life Below Water'). [2] Several studies on the interrelation of the different SDGs indicate that SDG 14 interacts with all other SDGs and associated targets and plays a central role in achieving the 2030 Agenda [2]. However, in spite of the recognition of the importance of the marine environment to advance sustainable development and its relevance across the whole scope of the agenda, the awareness of the ocean and the ocean literacy is still poor and there is a need for enhanced capacity building and awareness raising [3].

In this context, the aim of the present study is to gain insight on possibilities to raise awareness of the importance of the ocean in society and politics. For this, an online survey was launched in January 2019 targeting the Alumni of the Master's Programme 'Oceans & Lakes' investigating the perception of different aspects regarding the Sustainable Development Goals. This includes the perception of the relative importance of different goals, the interrelation of SDG 14 with other SDGs, and how and at which level the SDGs can be operationalized. Furthermore, the survey tries to give an insight into the influence of education on the perception of SDGs. The online survey is combined with the output of a workshop with an interdisciplinary group of experts from the EU funded Horizon 2020 project SOPHIE (Seas, Oceans & Public Health in Europe) (www.sophie2020.eu). The workshop, conducted at the end of January 2019, aims to develop concrete actions to raise awareness of the ocean using Citizen Science. A focus is placed on the interrelation of the ocean with other developing areas, like human health (SDG 3 – 'Good Health and Well-Being') or 'Zero Hunger' (SDG 1) to increase the impact of possible actions.

The expected results of this research will give insight into the perception of people with a marine education with regards to the SDGs and SDG 14's relative importance and will propose concrete actions that could be taken to promote ocean literacy and improve the awareness of the ocean in the society and politics. The research is timely in regard to the starting planning phase for the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021 – 2030).

References

- [1] European Commission (2018) Sustainable development in the European Union: Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context, 2018 edition. Statistical books. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg
- [2] United Nations (2015) Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- [3] International Council for Science (2017) A guide to SDG interactions: From science to implementation, Paris

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Interdisciplinary; Perception; Ocean Literacy; Citizen Science; Ocean and Human Health; SOPHIE; Survey; Expert Workshop; Ocean Decade