

Supporting Marine Research Knowledge Exchange for Blue Growth

13 October 2016

Summary

The objective of the seminar and discussion held at the European Parliament was to explore how methods, processes and engagement in knowledge exchange between different stakeholders concerned with Blue Growth could be improved. Speakers included MEPs and European Commission representatives, those working in marine clusters around Europe, those supporting knowledge transfer initiatives through projects and networks and regional authority representatives. The seminar highlighted good practice and successful efforts in relation to marine knowledge transfer and mutually beneficial collaboration between academia and the private sector. Examples of European and regional supports fostering the enhancement of Blue Growth were described. Yet much remains to be done in supporting, improving and institutionalising marine knowledge transfer, coordinating efforts across Europe and measuring the impact and success of Blue Growth initiatives.

Introduction and Opening from European Parliament and Commission Representatives

On 13 October 2016, the Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas Intergroup and [EurOcean](#) organised a seminar and discussion entitled “*Supporting Marine Research Knowledge Exchange for Blue Growth*” in the presence of Gesine MEISSNER, MEP, President of the Intergroup, who opened the discussions and welcomed attendees.

The objective of the seminar and discussion was to explore how methods, processes and engagement in knowledge exchange between different stakeholders concerned with Blue Growth could be improved. In particular it was an opportunity to develop a dialogue on the specific needs of Europe’s maritime regions and investigate how the activities of organisations such as EurOcean and CPRM and ongoing project initiatives can support their knowledge requirements.

Ricardo SERRÃO SANTOS, MEP, Vice-Chair of the Intergroup, recalled that the European Parliament considered in its report entitled “[Untapping the potential of research and innovation in the blue economy to create jobs and growth](#)” that there is a shortage of personnel in various fields of activities which could compromise the EU’s ambitions in the marine sphere to reach Blue Development. He stressed the need for investment in marine research and education and to widen the scope of Blue Growth to fully integrate sustainability. He added that the workshop was a useful occasion to improve engagement between different stakeholders and between different maritime regions of Europe.

Claus SCHULTZE and Charlotte HERMAN, Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, informed the participants on the on-going work of DG MARE ([ppt](#)). They acknowledged the European Parliament's report that stated the Blue Growth Strategy should look beyond the initial five sectors targeted. They stressed the importance of a cross sectoral approach, the scaling up of local solutions and the connection to the smart specialisation strategy. They drew attention to the recently closed DG MARE Blue Technology call, which saw 13 applications and which are encouraging clusters to highlight viable demonstrators and develop strategic roadmaps for Blue Growth, in order to overcome the start-stop nature associated with projects. Furthermore they drew attention to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region which is looking toward developing a roadmap for joint implementation initiatives in the Sea Basin.

Marco WEYDERT, Directorate General for Research and Innovation, underlined the importance of improving access to existing knowledge and bridging marine data gaps. There is a need to improve communication of scientific results in a better way. He pointed out the role of Horizon 2020 and the improvements in exploiting the results of marine research, although there is still a challenge in moving results up the TRL (Technology Readiness Levels) levels. Tools developed by the European Commission such as the Innovation Radar (focussing on the identification of high potential innovations and innovators in some EC funded projects), Common Exploitation Booster (supports for result exploitation) and the Information Sharing Platform pilot (highlighting research data and key results from marine and maritime EU funded projects) were mentioned. The need to develop supports for small industry in using research results was highlighted. He welcomed the G7 decision to support global ocean observing. He mentioned DG RTD's pilot "Blue Cloud" which will bring new technologies and stressed the efforts of the European Commission to bring in more data from industry.

Panel Discussion: Needs of Europe's maritime regions for knowledge; experience with maritime clusters and smart specialisation groups

Iain SHEPHERD, Marine South East ([ppt](#)), Angela SCHULTZ ZEHDEN, SUBMARINER Network ([ppt](#)), Ann OVERMIERE, Flanders Maritime Cluster ([ppt](#)) and Pieter Jan JORDAENS, OWI_Lab ([ppt](#) [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)) took part in the discussion.

A range of issues were raised by the speakers. These included the difficulty in measuring Blue Growth, which is important for policy making; the need to demonstrate the benefits to individual regions for trans-national collaboration and that smart specialisation is increasingly informing regional strategies, although it is still a new topic for many regions.

It was suggested to create a new legal entity to formalise and expand existing networks of relationships between maritime actors. Marine South East proposed the setting up of an entity or a framework that would facilitate cross-border networking between marine regional research-driven clusters, provide a framework for EU consortium building, promote the collective strengths of its members via a single entry point to the international market and maintain an on-line database of accessible research facilities.

It was also the opportunity for the participants to showcase some success stories in terms of cooperation between actors in Blue Growth sectors. At this occasion, they stressed the interdependency between maritime stakeholders to develop efficient clustering initiatives in the maritime economy, although there remain difficulties in bridging the gap between academia and industry. Questions of trust also need to be addressed and it is by working together and showing mutual benefits that this can be overcome. They presented practical examples of “win-win” partnerships for the research community and the industry, one such being the opportunity for scientists to collect *in situ* measurements in operational environments and for private companies to benefit from the results in order to improve the efficiency of their installations. Interregional cooperation through supports such as the EU’s Vanguard Initiative were described although there are challenges in accessing funding for pilot activities.

Panel Discussion 2: Supports for improved Knowledge exchange; experiences from EurOcean and relevant European projects and activities

The second discussion panel focussed on supports for improved knowledge exchange by sharing experiences from EurOcean and relevant European projects and activities. Douglas ROBINSON, EMBRIC ([ppt](#)), David MURPHY, AquaTT & COLUMBUS project coordinator ([ppt](#)), Ned DWYER, EurOcean ([ppt](#)) and Annika ANNERBY JANSSON, Vice-President of the Regional Council, Skåne Region, Sweden and Vice-President of the CPMR ([ppt](#)) took part in the discussion.

Issues regarding how to measure socio-economic impact of investments in Blue Growth were discussed and a number of possible metrics were presented, in particular those being developed within the H2002 [EMBRIC](#) project. It was highlighted that bilateral private sector interactions often tend to be at the regional level, whereas science production is a global process. The terminology used around Knowledge Transfer can be quite confusing and the terms can have different interpretations for different actors. Efforts such as those supported by EurOcean through its [Marine Knowledge Gate](#) help in collecting and making knowledge available. Nevertheless validating the readiness of such knowledge for transfer is itself a major challenge.

The importance of the H2020 [COLUMBUS](#) project was highlighted as it tries to ensure that applicable knowledge generated through EC-funded science and technology research can be transferred effectively to advance the governance of the marine and maritime sectors and support Blue Growth. Such initiatives also reveal broader issues such as who is responsible for knowledge transfer, how it is rewarded within academic environments, the need for capacity building in the area and how to ensure and measure knowledge transfer success.

The difficulty in fostering cooperation between research centres and private companies within regions and within and across sectors was also mentioned as it is often at the interface between different value chains and disciplines that new things happen. There is a need for a strong and efficient dialogue process to bridge the marine knowledge gap, and this can be supported by regional authorities offering practical supports such as space for companies and marine knowledge providers to connect and to demonstrate.

Other Issues Raised

During the subsequent discussion the need to ensure public acceptance of policies was raised. There is also a need to use language that is understandable to those outside the specialist areas. It was suggested that maritime clusters could include partners who could act as intermediaries toward the public, including young people. With the European Commission supporting Responsible Research and Innovation there is a framework for stronger societal engagement, including capacity building in marine research and innovation actions.

Conclusions

Although the presentations and discussions were wide ranging a number of conclusions can be identified:

- Marine Knowledge Exchange and Transfer are multi-faceted and they still require specific recognition, supports and coordination at local, regional and European level in order to be effective.
- Marine clusters can be effective in breaking down barriers and encouraging fruitful collaboration between the research community and industry, nevertheless further regional supports are required to support cooperation and collaboration.
- Smart Specialisation Strategies are helping in coordinating activities at the regional level, but there is an ongoing need for improved trans-European coordination of marine regional research-driven clusters.

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- There are initiatives to measure socio-economic impact of investments in Blue Growth, however many are in their infancy.
- There is a need for further capacity building and training in many areas, and particularly in relation to knowledge transfer to support Blue Growth.
- Knowledge transfer is supported through European Commission projects such as COLUMBUS but institutionalising such efforts for the long term remains a challenge.
- There should be stronger and broader societal engagement in activities around Blue Growth.
- Further dialogue between actors in this area is required and there was a proposal from Iain SHEPHERD, Marine South East to organise a follow-on event in association with the European Maritime Day Conference 2017