YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN OCEAN LITERACY: HOW THE BLACK SEA YOUNG AMBASSADORS SUPPORT OCEAN LITERACY IN THE BLACK SEA AND EUROPE

SAHIN YUCEL E*[1]., UYGURER. Z. P. [1], SAYILKAN O. E. [1], YUCEL M. [1], SALIHOGLU B. [1]

[1]MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY, INSTITUTE OF MARINE SCIENCES (METU IMS), TURKIYE

*Correspondence: ezgis@metu.edu.tr

The Black Sea is a distinct sea basin with many distinguishing features. It's rich in biodiversity, natural resources, and cultural heritage. Furthermore, the basin is notable for having the world's largest volume of oxygen-free and hydrogen sulfide-rich marine waters. However, it is under threat from increasing environmental and anthropogenic-induced factors such as climate change, eutrophication, hypoxia, overfishing, and the introduction of alien species, all of which have a significant impact on marine ecosystems and the services we rely on. It is critical to develop ocean-literate societies in order to protect and conserve marine ecosystems while also using and managing their resources sustainably. Youth can help raise awareness, drive policy change, foster innovative solutions, and cultivate a sense of responsibility for the seas and oceans. Their participation is critical in developing ocean-literate societies that prioritize the health and sustainability of our planet's most critical ecosystems. With this in mind, the Black Sea Young Ambassadors program was developed to unite youth for a healthy, resilient, and sustainable Black Sea. Over thirty Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) from various backgrounds in marine and maritime fields have been a voice of the Black Sea since 2020, under the umbrella of the EU H2020 Black Sea CONNECT and BRIDGE Black Sea projects. They have represented the Black Sea on a variety of platforms, including the EU Mission Ocean, European Maritime Day, and the UN Ocean Decade Conference. They conduct numerous local and regional awareness-raising activities, such as social media campaigns, field trips, photography contests, and beach clean-ups, with the goal of reconnecting the missing links between science and society. Furthermore, in order to increase the impact of youth empowerment, they meet with other sea and ocean basin youth ambassadors on a regular basis to exchange experiences. Developing permanent mechanisms for youth to take a more active role in awareness raising activities can enable them to reach societies more easily as a bridge between science and society, and thus enable them to be more active in the formation of ocean literate societies.