

# BlueNIGHTs PROJECT SUMMARY

## Context and overall objectives

The United Nations has proclaimed the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030). The UN General Assembly provided a fundamental framework about major Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030 to ensure a sustainable development that can benefit all. Among them, SDG 14 is devoted to the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean, seas, and marine resources for the development of a new, inclusive, interconnected, and healthier global (ocean) literate society. To contribute to the achievement of these goals, the DG MARE of the EC launched the EU4Ocean initiative to support the creation of an EU4Ocean Coalition to promote collective actions on Ocean Literacy (OL).



The organizing committee of the EU Researchers' Night in Venice 2022.

Within this context, BlueNIGHTs (BN) aimed to introduce European public to the many facets and faces of people working in ocean science and research by organizing a series of interconnected EU Blue NIGHTs to increase awareness on Research & Innovation, with special attention to kids, pupils, students, and young adults. BN relied on the idea to plant “blue” seeds across Europe to strengthen Ocean Literacy for all and favour the growth of a new EU network of ERNs dedicated to ocean issues and to the achievement of the SDGs, responding to the UN Decades of Ocean Science and to key EU initiatives on Ocean Literacy (e.g., EU4Ocean, EU Blue School Network).

It aimed to strengthen the link between researchers and the territory where they live by preparing and organising events in various cities representing the main EU RSAs as well as to promote join

activities and sharing best practices among consortium partners to demonstrate that the ocean can be a source of inspiration, an object of interest/study, and a shared field of investigation for people with very different backgrounds, hobbies and passions.

Expected impacts were:

- an increased awareness among the general public of the importance of Research & Innovation and more favourable general attitude towards its public funding;
- a better understanding of the key benefits that research brings to society;
- a reduction of stereotypes about researchers and their profession, and an increase of people taking up research careers, particularly young people and among them girls;
- a better understanding of the EU among the general audience through the development of complementary approaches.

### **Work performed and main achievements**

To raise public awareness about the EU Researchers' Night initiative, promote their participation in the main event on last Friday of September 2022 and 2023, and offer them different ways to meet and interact with the researchers, the partners organised several pre-events in different contexts and with different degrees of involvement during the whole duration of the project.

The researchers made available several meetings for the schools mostly based on seminars, workshops, and hands-on activities while indoor, and beach clean-up, guided tour, experiments while outdoor. Several topics were requested by or offered to the schools all dealing with ocean-linked issues. Teachers were trained on OL principles and concepts.



Riding in the Danube Delta with the researchers to talk about transitional areas.

BlueNIGHTs organised EU Researchers' Night events in 17 cities representing the main EU Regional Sea Areas (RSAs): Tulcea and Galati for the Black RSA; Capo Granitola, La Spezia, Naples, Rome, Trieste, Venice and Valletta for the Mediterranean RSA; Torreira, Lisbon, Horta and Cascais for the

Atlantic RSA; Boulogne-sur-Mer for the English Channel/North RSA; Helsinki for the Baltic RSA. Activities were also organised in Strasbourg and Bologna as inland locations.

As for the co-building the virtual Aranda R/V, the virtual experience offered insight into researchers' daily lives, enhancing understanding and engagement.

Moreover, the BlueNIGHTs ERNs and pre-events were widely diffused also thanks to the agreement between BlueNIGHTs and the local ERN EU-funded projects and/or local initiatives.

The Adopt-a-school initiative has allowed for more fruitful interaction between researchers and schools, wider participation of teachers and classes in pre-events and ERNs, greater awareness among pupils on sea issues, the introduction of some OL themes in schools and the diffusion of European initiatives such as EU4Ocean and the European Network of Blue Schools as well as Mission Starfish2030 and UN Decade challenges and actions.

The impact evaluations mainly collected through 4 dedicated questionnaires translated into 6 languages were used both within the BN project and to compare it with projects of a similar nature in order to improve its activities and increase its effectiveness.



Opening ceremony in Torreira with University of Aveiro researchers.

### **Results beyond the state of the arts**

The active participation of partners' staff to BlueNIGHTs at the end of the project is of more than 300 people. More than 100 pre-events were organised, bringing together over 17,150 people, and involving around 300 researchers. Among them, 14 science cafés, 8 guided tours and 25 more complex pre-events (e.g., science fairs/festivals and shows) were organised in the six countries.

About 150 researchers met around 10,000 pupils in more than 150 activities and outdoor events thanks to the Researchers@school programme. More than 500 pupils and 40 teachers from 25 classes of 15 “Adopted” schools, some of them already EU Blue Schools, were involved by 20 researchers in pre-events and the Night. 20 specific training sessions on OL and marine issues involved more than 250 teachers. Dissemination material on how to become an EU Blue Schools, on blue projects/challenges at school, and on contribution to the EU4Ocean Platform, were prepared and showed during pre-events and Night.

18 cities and a several other local/regional areas hosted the local Blue Nights and the pre-events in all EU RSAs. During the two ERNs’ editions, more than 300 researchers, and among them 2 MSCA fellow and around 100 supported researchers non-MSCA, were meeting around 13,000 citizens.

The full virtual experiences on the R/V Aranda at all ERNs locations offered and will offer insight into researchers' daily lives, enhancing understanding and engagement.



Talking and experimenting on the ocean physics with the young researchers for one night.

### **Policy relevant evidence of your project**

Sustainable management of the ocean is a central subject in contemporary research and for this reason, several locals, national and international projects address it from different perspectives. A renewed alliance between all kind of “sciences” and society represents indeed an essential step supporting resilient communities and increasing our capacity to adapt to a fast-changing world and meet the 2030 Agenda goals, and particularly those of the SDG 14.

Thanks to the proposed approach, BlueNIGHTs demonstrated that research can offer something EU citizens may like to do for living, in terms of working environment (in an office, on a boat, under water, in front of a computer, on the beach) or in terms of a thematic focus (as proposed by different

disciplines). Researchers are in fact able to play with innovative technologies and can have fun while been useful for the EU society. They are not working in isolation since everyone may bring his/her own piece of a wider puzzle which makes sense only when all pieces are collectively shared and interconnected. Researchers can help transforming the world, by collaborating with different professionals and developing together new solutions for a sustainable future. By attending the BlueNIGHTs, citizens can also meet people from organisations that are using researchers' work and results to support decisions, to develop advocacy campaigns, to write new rules and laws.



Art and science together for the EU Researchers' Night in Lisbon.