

Challenges, solutions and limitations to effectively communicate science to non-scientific stakeholders

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Currently, there is an increasing demand for research projects to communicate their results beyond the restricted environments of peer-reviewed journals and scientific events. However, this is not a trivial task; bridging the gap between scientific and non-scientific stakeholders is neither easy nor straight forward. The European research project DEVOTES (DEVelopment Of innovative Tools for understanding marine biodiversity and assessing good Environmental Status) was conceived with the goal of creating new tools to assess marine biodiversity, which should be of use to policy makers working in the context of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and also of interest to society at large, who ultimately benefits from healthy oceans.

Transferring knowledge and making this communication fluid and effective requires a well-defined strategy that includes the identification of key audiences (stakeholders), the determination of the best tool and message for each stakeholder category and the development of ad-hoc communication resources. In addition to the regular scientific communication tools (scientific papers, conferences, summer schools, etc.) a large array of dissemination activities were put in place in DEVOTES. Overall, with 4 workshops organized with stakeholders, as well as training courses and webinars on the different tools developed, 8 press releases, several TV interviews and videos, 3 exhibitions, 2 policy briefings, a book, a documentary, artistic illustrations, continuous contributions to Twitter, and two mobile apps, it can be considered that outreach efforts were numerous and diverse. However, challenges to access key stakeholders and difficulties to assess the effectiveness of such production, are some of the limitations we faced in the project. We emphasize that fit-for-purpose communication, in which “who-says what-through which channel” is clearly identified from the start, is a must in effective dissemination but “impact indicators” of communication are still to be developed.