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First steps to countering “ocean blindness” in an alpine region: lessons learned from ocean literacy activities across a wide age group

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Environmental education in schools (from child-care to high-school) mostly focuses on teaching features and processes that characterize the local natural environment, so that the geographical context strongly affects what children and older students (and their families) may learn and know about the surroundings and which actions need be taken to protect and conserve it. As a consequence, the community living in a mountain region is less prone to learning about the sea or the ocean, about its main physical, chemical and biological characteristics, and about the processes that regulate them and how or why day-to-day actions affect the ocean's health and sustainability – the so called “ocean blindness”. Such considerations have led to the organization of a small set of pilot Education and Outreach activities that have been carried out in the schools of the province of Biella, a small-sized city located in the foot-hill of the Alps, 300m above sea-level, and about 200 km away from the nearest coast. These school activities/projects involved a very wide age group, including child care (ages 1-3), kindergarten (ages 3 to 5), elementary (ages 6 to 10) and high-school (ages 14-17) and were aimed at teaching basic marine science concepts learned from more than 10 years of experience as an oceanographer. This contribution presents the results and lessons learned from the first activities carried out in 2021 also providing an example of activities that can be carried out in similar contexts, and of hands-on resources that are available also when operating far away from the coast.