

## THE OCEANOGRAPHY CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS ACQUIRED A NEW RESEARCH PROJECT

*Through their participation in the project BLUEMED, the research team of the Oceanography Centre will assist in the valorisation of underwater natural and cultural heritage of coastal regions in the Mediterranean, in accordance to the principles of sustainable and responsible coastal and maritime tourism*



The Oceanography Centre, University of Cyprus secured its participation, as one out of 10 partners from Mediterranean countries involved in an important European research programme for the valorisation of underwater natural and cultural heritage of coastal Mediterranean regions. Specifically, the Oceanography Centre obtained funding of €224.000 from the European Territorial Cooperation programme Interreg MED 2014-2020, for the implementation of a new

research project with the acronym **BLUEMED** (*“Plan/Test/Coordinate Underwater Museums, Diving Parks and Knowledge Awareness Centres, in order to support sustainable and responsible tourism development and promote Blue growth in coastal areas and islands of the Mediterranean”*). Ten active and four associate partners from five different Mediterranean countries (Greece, Italy, Spain, Croatia and Cyprus) are involved in the BLUEMED project.

Dr. Yianna Samuel, a research scientist at the Oceanography Centre, is the coordinator of the project on behalf of the University of Cyprus.

According to Dr. Yianna Samuel, islands and the coastal regions of the Mediterranean are characterised by their rich underwater natural and cultural heritage, which is the basis of their tourism-based economy. At the same time, these areas are faced with a series of challenges, which act as an inhibitor of growth and development in these areas. As Dr. Samuel noted, “the lack of coordinated policies, methodologies and tools, adjusted to the needs of each region, for the enhancement of sustainable development, contributes negatively to the economic growth, in the midst of the economic crisis. Furthermore, the ineffective protection of the natural and cultural heritage, in addition to its inefficient promotion, puts a hold on the sustainable and responsible tourism development. Taking into consideration the inadequate measures for

tackling the effects of climate change, the need to

collectively address all of the above becomes understandable, within in a context of inter-regional and transnational cooperation”.

The research project BLUEMED sets as its primary aim the protection and preservation, in unified way, of the underwater natural and cultural heritage in coastal and island regions of the Mediterranean Sea. Simultaneously, it aims to strengthen the economic development of these regions, through the promotion and adoption of the sustainable and responsible tourism development model. Recognizing the fundamental need to protect the environment, it further aims to align, plan design, and effectively implement relevant policies, such as the UNESCO 2001 Convention, the ICZM protocol for the Integrated Coastal Zone Management etc.



More specifically, the BLUEMED project aims to plan, test and coordinate several Underwater Museums, Diving Parks and Knowledge Awareness Centres, in active cooperation with the local societies and economic operators of the pilot regions. In fact, this is the first time on a global scale, where a study is conducted on the best practices for the protection and promotion of underwater natural and cultural heritage, giving emphasis to the operation of underwater museums in areas with ancient shipwrecks and archaeological artefacts. Also, this project aims to raise awareness on issues related to the protection, promotion, and enhancement of the underwater natural and cultural wealth.

Within the framework of this project, pilot actions will be implemented in the regions of Capo Rizzuto and Baia bay in Italy, in the western Pagasitikos bay and Sporades in Greece, and in Cavtat in Croatia. Specifically, these actions will involve the following:

- a) The design of a system of processes, political practices, management, networking and promotion of Underwater Museums, Diving Parks and Knowledge Awareness Centres which will be given to the local/regional authorities.
- b) The promotion of innovative services and diving technologies for the enrichment of diving tourism.

- c) The increase of tourism attractiveness for people interested in diving activities, in the pilot regions.
- d) The promotion of underwater natural and cultural heritage to the general public, through 3D reconstruction exhibited in museums and Knowledge Awareness Centres
- e) The design and development of a web-based platform for the integrated touristic promotion and networking of underwater natural and cultural heritage, which will be titled as “Underwater Natural and Cultural Routes in the Mediterranean”.

The overall duration of the project is 3 years, starting November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 and ending October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019, with a total funding of €2.797.549.



The Oceanography Centre, University of Cyprus (OC-UCY) will actively contribute in actions related to the development of methods, means of assessments, Key Performance Indicators, questionnaires, as well as in actions for the dissemination of the project’s results. One of the most important activities the OC-UCY is involved in, entails the marine biodiversity assessment and the examination of environmental indicators through field work sampling at the pilot sites.

Moreover, through its participation in the BLUEMED project, the Oceanography Centre will have a unique opportunity to collaborate with partners who are experts in the field of maritime archaeology, obtaining important knowledge in this field. Also, through the acquisition of experiences in subjects related to the development, management and promotion of Underwater Museums, Diving Parks and Knowledge Awareness Centres, OC-UCY will be able to contribute substantially to their future implementation in Cyprus.

For more information on the research project BLUEMED you can contact the project’s Scientific Officer and Coordinator for Cyprus, Dr. Yianna Samuel (email: [rhoads.yianna@ucy.ac.cy](mailto:rhoads.yianna@ucy.ac.cy), tel.: 22893984).



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END OF ANNOUNCEMENT

