

UNDERSTANDING THE SCIENCE-SOCIETY NEXUS THROUGH THE MARINE LITTER CHALLENGE: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE MARLISCO PROJECT

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As scientists call for more research on global environmental changes in an effort to gain a better understanding of the human induced implications for all of life on Earth, it remains an inconvenient truth that if the world had acted upon the knowledge that the scientific community already produced, the state of many ecosystems would be different today. One of the deterrents of action seems to have been the dizzying volume of knowledge that lacks association and interaction with society itself. In our time, it is not the production of more detailed knowledge that is of urgency, but the proper context within which to use knowledge and turn it into sustainable actions [1]. This compelling fact, where society, functioning within a democratic governance context, plays a key role in both setting research agendas and modulating research trajectories towards socially desirable ends, has pointed to an emerging need for effective interaction between science and society [2, 3]. A better understanding of the science-society nexus is what provides the enabling environment and creative power to address the complex challenges that society faces towards sustaining the vitality and integrity of socio-ecological systems, taking into account the way people think, function within their social context and the decisions and actions they take [4].

The FP7 MARLISCO project sought to improve the understanding of the science-society nexus, while setting a precedent for effective use of knowledge towards sustainable and responsible individual and collective actions [5]. The project focused on the development, implementation and evaluation of mechanisms to better understand and communicate the marine litter problem in its environmental and social dimensions, encouraging society to gain a deeper understanding of the issue and actively engaging and empowering stakeholders to act constructively and identify viable solutions, facilitate the definition of a collective vision and eventually trigger concerted actions to address this complex issue. The issue of marine litter and its inherent environmental, economic, social, political and cultural dimensions presents a good example to explore and/or illustrate the complexity and the bottlenecks of interactions on the science-society interplay [4].

References

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