Young explorers grow

Education is at the core of any environmental initiative related to nature at large, and to the sea in particular. If we want to understand issues such as **sustainability**, circular waste or resource management, we need to raise awareness, and this starts with our youth, who in perspective hold the greatest influence on future social, economic, and environmental issues.

So how do we effectively educate **younger generations** to love and respect the sea?

An effective way to do this is presenting environmental engagement as fun, exciting and accessible. **Snorkelling** and **diving** represent stimulating, entertaining activities which, combined with theoretical lessons and workshops, have the power to put complex ideas down to a level that kids can relate to, empowering them to take action, and inspiring them to teach others to do the same.



"People protect what they love" said captain J-Y Cousteau. Today, we desperately need more people advocating for healthier oceans. Those who practice scuba diving and freediving are in the best position to direct witnesses the changes happening in our seas, such as the increase in the presence of pollutants, or the consequences of having so many alien species. Divers have the power to raise awareness about the state of the marine environment that surrounds us, and therefore a greater responsibility in the protection of those habitats that, thanks to dive suits, masks or cylinders, can finally be made accessible to all.

Green Bubbles, a EU-funded project promoting sustainability in diving from different points of view – environmental, economic and social – offered many great opportunities to meet with young students. One of the most successful initiatives it undertook is named **Young Explorers (Scuola d'aMare)**, in collaboration with DAN Europe, Sea Sentinel and Reef Check, involving a number of diving instructors who have been specifically trained to make presentations in public schools. To this purpose, the project was granted a special authorisation by the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR). Every year, these authorised,

highly-trained educators perform lectures before thousands of middle-school and high-school students. Efforts to extend this initiative to other EU countries are underway.



During the time we spent in Istanbul (Turkey) for our secondments with Green Bubbles, we had the great opportunity to be invited to give a lecture at the Özel Evrim Okulları, a private/public institute in the welcoming Bomonti neighbourhood. The school was created back in 1903 by some Italians, Salesian Society members, to cater for the growing Italian population living in the Ottoman capital. Today, the school is a thriving institute hosting 450 students, trying to stay true to its roots (many students choose Italian as a second language), also thanks to the enthusiastic work of its principal, Mrs Polin Ökke, and that

of its teachers. The event, which took place early on 14 Dec 2018, was organised by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Salih Murat Egi, University of Galatasaray, Senior Researcher at DAN Europe.



The lecture included an introduction to diving activities, with projection of quality, award-winning underwater photos and videos featuring all kind of marine life, from the biggest (whale sharks, giant manta rays etc.) to the tiniest (nudibranchs, critters etc.); environmental issues and education, getting to know the underwater world better from a biological point of view; information about best practices, and dive safety tips, with particular regard to young divers; inspiring stories, with the experiences of reputed diving explorers and DAN Europe ambassadors such as Raffaella Schlegel and Jason Decaires Taylor.

All attendants were handed out a copy of *How deep is the sea* (*Com'è profondo il mare*), a booklet of the *Collana del FARO* series, published by ***Istituto per l'Ambiente e l'Educazione Scholè Futuro Onus***, in collaboration with **il Pianeta Azzurro** and DAN Europe, expressely printed for the Young Explorers / Scuola d'aMare project. Straight-forward texts, of easy reference and use on important environmental and social subject matters.

All along the presentation, we were pleased and surprised to see students showing a great level of interest, in spite of the fact that Italian was their second language. Many of them were raising their hands, expressing witty observations and posing thoughtful questions regarding: how dangerous sharks are really, diving at greater depths, the different pieces composing the diver's equipment set, how it is like to explore underwater formations, why wrecks exist and how to explore them, interacting with marine life, and more.

At the end of the lecture, these young students, as well as their teachers, were encouraged to take the plunge, have a free try-dive, and thus experience first-hand what it is like to immerse yourself in the underwater realm.

Once again, the sea "casted its spell", attracting the interest of fresh, young minds, open to new experiences and adventures. We were just happy to witness that, and walked away with the feeling that perhaps not all is lost, as long as the Ocean makes those children's eyes shine.



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