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Wind and wave-driven capacity building sessions in the Aegadian Islands MPA

The Ocean Literacy is among the main goals of the UN ambitions and the sustainability objectives highlighted in the 2030 agenda. Even though in the majority of the cases the local stakeholders are subject to top-down initiatives driven by intergovernmental policies guidelines, at a local scale, in some specific circumstances, the capacity building initiatives can be easier than usual especially if supported by outstanding bottom-up initiatives. On this perspective even some small islands realities can be cutting-edge contexts to experiment these kinds of social attitude. The hereby presented case study is focused on a local sail school where young islanders and seasonal “little hosts” learn yearly to grow up on the basis of a real sea culture acquired on the field through hands-on engagement initiatives (Fig.1, 2,3).



Figure 1 Ready for the next training session
(Punta Lunga, Favignana- Aegadian Islands MPA; Photo credits: L. Bianco)

This tiny but highly formative “training school to life” is managed by nationally recognized sailing trainers and native islanders, since 1998. Here through a gamification approach, they daily train young boys and girls to learn, both in the windy winter weeks and in the hottest days of the summer seasons, how to improve their motor and social skills. The attainment of nautical abilities in this context is considered a tool in order to acquire a “marine culture” but it can be considered in a very larger perspective.

Through a participative approach during a period spent on the field sharing the daily life with the inhabitants’ team I tried to investigate the local people perception of the “ocean resource” and what emerged from a post hoc analysis is that even though the sea can be thought as a fairly obvious and fascinating resource if observed with a foreigner eye, for the main part of islander inhabitants actually it is not so. Often, they consider the sea as an obstacle rather than a resource or a growth opportunity. Mostly, the true islanders have a very controversial relationship with the sea. Indeed, it represents an obstacle especially during the winter season when frequently the connections with the mainland are interrupted, the water temperature is considered always too low to bathe and due to the taken-for-granted consideration of it they limit this kind of use at a very narrow period of the high season. Another curious consideration heard speaking with some local stakeholders is that “the seagrass meadows are too dark to swim among their leaves” so they prefer to ignore what is hidden below the sea surface and “comfortably” observe the blue blanket from the boat. Fortunately, even if the majority still has to make peace with the sea there is a good hope in the future generations who are working well and hard to translate into concrete actions the desired positive attitude toward the more technically defined *Ocean Literacy*. Additionally, sailing is well-recognized as a team building strategy, adopted even by the greatest company managers, and in this small laughing realm of a minor island of Sicily, seems that they are working hard to translate into concrete actions this positive attitude (Fig.4). Great job!

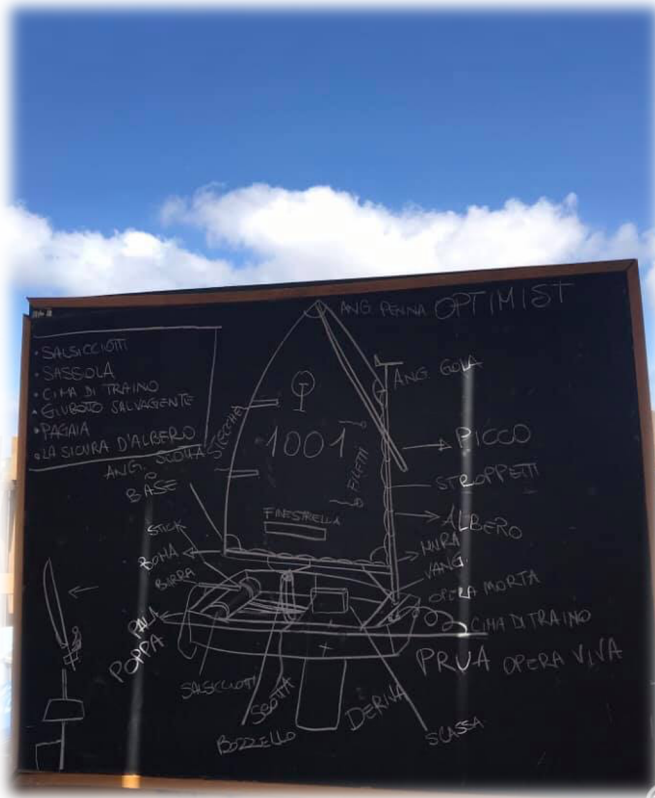


Figure 2 An outdoor dry training session and useful notions to be memorized on the blackboard (Punta Lunga, Favignana-Aegadian Islands MPA; Photo credits: L. Bianco)



Figure 3 Learning to appreciate the sea literally getting hands dirty (Punta Lunga, Favignana-Aegadian Islands MPA; Photo credits: L. Bianco)

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This contribution is based on a fieldwork experience conducted on Favignana Island, in one of the internationally recognized SPAMI areas of Mediterranean Sea, thanks to the kind hospitality of the coauthors of this contribution. A special thought to the evergreen hairy mascotte: Gerry.



Figure 4 Salty days to grow up (Photo credits: Bianco L.)

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