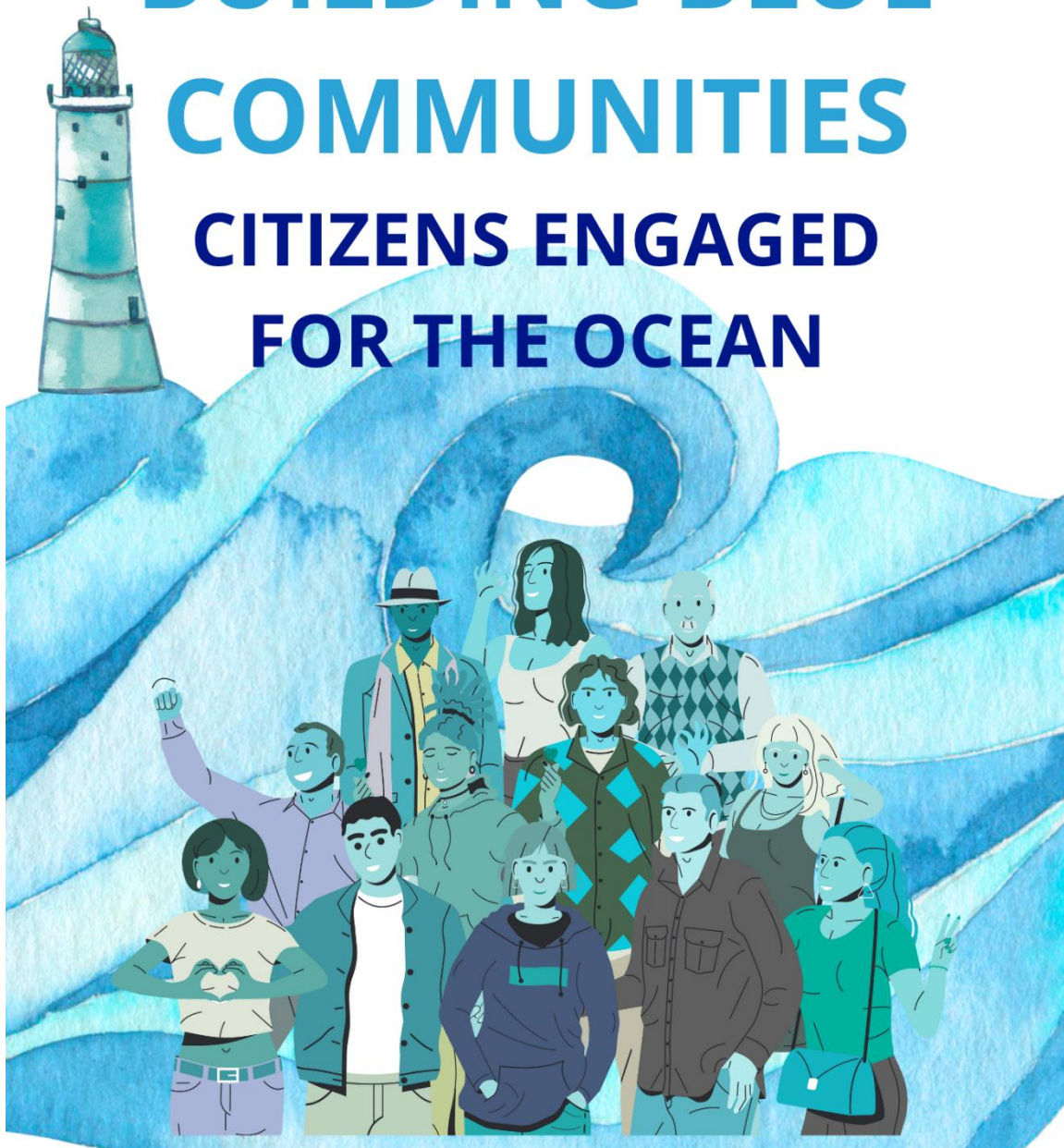


BUILDING BLUE COMMUNITIES CITIZENS ENGAGED FOR THE OCEAN



Capacity building scheme for general public:

Building Blue Communities - *Citizens Engaged for the Ocean*

Final Version 21/07/2025

Deliverable Number D.2.2.1



Building Blue Communities

Citizens Engaged for the Ocean

OBJECTIVE



Strengthen social
license toward
MPAs

CAPACITY BUILDING



A programme for
awareness and
empowerment

MODULES

Ecosystem Services and
Natural Capital

Threats to Marine
Biodiversity

Marine Protected Areas

Active Engagement



OUTCOMES

- Knowledge
- Behavioural and attitudinal change
- Civic engagement
- Social license



TARGET

- Citizens & Community Actors
- Professionals & Economic Operators



Italy – Croatia



Project Acronym:	MAPA
Project ID Number	ITHR0200462
Project Title	Marine Adriatic PARks
Specific objective	2.2
Work Package Number	2
Work Package Title	Engaging the Public in MAPAs management
Activity Number	2.2.
Activity Title	Elaboration of capacity building programmes and awareness activities for target groups
Partner in Charge	PP4
Partners involved	PP3, PP4, PP5
Status	Final
Distribution	Public
Title	Building Blue Communities
Subtitle	Citizens Engaged for the Ocean
Authors	Riccardi Agnese, Čolić Barbara, Pulido Mantas Torcuato, Roveta Camilla, Cerrano Carlo





Table of contents

<i>ABOUT THE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>PROGRAMME CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>WORKSHOP SESSIONS.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>ASSESSMENT & REFLECTION.....</i>	<i>19</i>



ABOUT THE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME

INTRO to Building Blue Communities

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are vital tools for conserving biodiversity, ensuring ecosystem resilience, and supporting sustainable development. Yet the success of MPAs relies not only on scientific design or legal enforcement, but above all on the support and involvement of people. The general public plays a fundamental role in shaping the future of marine conservation through everyday choices, community participation, and active citizenship.

Building Blue Communities is a capacity-building programme designed specifically for the general public. Its purpose is to raise awareness about marine environments and to empower individuals to become informed and engaged stewards of the sea. By strengthening understanding and fostering agency, the programme supports the development of inclusive marine governance and contributes to building the social license for MPAs, strengthening their public acceptance and long-term legitimacy.

The concept of *social license* refers to the informal but essential support of communities and stakeholders for marine management decisions. When an MPA enjoys social license, it means that its goals and regulations are broadly understood, accepted, and supported by local actors. This community endorsement fosters greater trust, cooperation, and long-term compliance, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and resilience of marine conservation efforts (Kelly et al., 2019; Kelly et al., 2020).



AIM OF PROGRAMME

The programme's main goal is to empower citizens with knowledge, tools, and motivation to support the goals of MPAs. It seeks to foster responsible behaviour, participation in decision-making processes, and the ability to engage in conservation-oriented initiatives.

KEY ISSUES TO TACKLE

Despite the crucial role of MPAs, several challenges continue to hinder their effective implementation and societal acceptance. Many citizens are still unaware of what MPAs are, where they are located, or what objectives they serve. Misconceptions about MPAs being areas of exclusion or restriction rather than protection and shared benefit remain widespread. In many cases, there is a limited understanding of the ecological functions and economic services provided by marine ecosystems, which leads to a general detachment from marine governance issues.

Participation in environmental or community-led activities tends to be low, especially when MPAs are perceived as externally imposed rather than locally supported. Furthermore, there is often a disconnect between MPAs and cultural identity, meaning people do not always see them as places of shared heritage and values. One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of awareness around the public's role in granting and maintaining the social license that legitimizes MPA operations. Without public trust and approval, even well-designed MPAs may fail to achieve their goals due to insufficient compliance, support, and ownership.

BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPANTS



Italy – Croatia



This programme offers multiple benefits to those who take part. Participants will gain a better understanding of MPAs, their functions, and their relevance to local communities. They will develop a broader appreciation of how marine environments support both ecological balance and economic opportunity, from fisheries to tourism and beyond. Engaging with the programme will offer the chance to participate in real conservation initiatives and community dialogue, reinforcing participants' sense of agency and environmental responsibility.

Moreover, the programme aims to create a deeper connection between citizens and their surrounding marine spaces. By clearing the cultural and social significance of MPAs, participants can rediscover a sense of belonging, identity, and interdependence. Ultimately, those who join the programme will not only expand their knowledge but also strengthen their capacity to support and uphold the social license toward the MPAs that ensures they are legitimate, respected, and successful.

PROGRAMME CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE

PROGRAMME CONTEXT

This programme is part of the Interreg Italy–Croatia project MAPA – Marine Adriatic PARks. It supports Work Package 2, Activity A.2.2, and aligns with broader EU strategies related to biodiversity protection, sustainability, and Ocean Literacy. Drawing on tools and experiences developed in Mediterranean and Adriatic MPAs, the programme is designed to be inclusive, participatory, and adaptable to diverse local contexts across the Programme Area.



PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

The programme consists of four independent but complementary modules, which can be delivered individually or in sequence. Each module is approximately 2 hours long and includes specific learning objectives, teaching tools, and interactive components.

- **Module 1:** Benefits of a Healthy Marine Environment, Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital
- **Module 2:** Threats to Marine Biodiversity
- **Module 3:** Introduction to MPAs
- **Module 4:** Active Engagement

The modular format allows for flexible use, depending on the setting, audience, and available time. Modules can be integrated into existing educational or community initiatives or used as standalone workshops during awareness events, festivals, or stakeholder meetings. This flexibility makes the programme especially suitable for informal and non-formal learning environments and encourages repeat or follow-up engagement across different user groups.

PARTICIPANTS

This programme is intended for a wide and diverse segment of the general public, primarily addressed to those living within Marine Protected Areas. Still, it can also involve individuals and groups whose daily choices and behaviours influence the health of marine ecosystems, whether they live along the coast or inland.

It targets:

- Residents of coastal areas, regardless of whether a formal MPA exists
- Tourists and recreational visitors, whose activities shape perceptions and practices in marine environments



Italy – Croatia



- Inland communities, whose consumption patterns, waste production, and policy preferences can significantly affect marine health.

By broadening participation beyond proximity to the sea, the programme promotes a more inclusive and interconnected understanding of marine stewardship, reinforcing the idea that everyone has a role to play in ocean protection, regardless of whether they live near the coast.

The programme is also relevant for non-governmental organisations, grassroots community groups, and educational actors engaged in informal or non-formal learning. Special attention is given to individuals who act as connectors between communities and institutions, supporting knowledge transfer and encouraging broader civic participation.

In addition to supporting existing MPAs, this programme can play a strategic role in areas not yet under formal protection but identified as conservation priorities. In such contexts, it can help lay the social foundations for future conservation success through information sharing, community dialogue, and inclusive planning.

Each country (Italy and Croatia) will implement the programme at the national level, forming groups of at least five participants representing a range of perspectives.

Possible stakeholders to involve:

- **Citizens & Community Actors**
 - Coastal and inland residents
 - Tourists and recreational users
 - Grassroots groups and informal networks
- **Professionals & Economic Operators**
 - Small-scale fishing communities
 - Tourism associations and eco-tour guides
 - Diving centres and tour operators



Italy – Croatia



- Local businesses connected to marine or coastal resources
- Local enterprises and cooperatives committed to genuine sustainability improvements

Participation by businesses and enterprises is welcomed only where there is a sincere interest in aligning with community-led marine protection efforts. The programme does not serve promotional purposes and explicitly avoids contributing to “green” or “blue washing.” Instead, it fosters transparent, inclusive, and accountable engagement in support of long-term conservation goals.

- **Institutions & Knowledge Holders**

- Coastal municipalities and local administrators
- Conservation managers (marine or terrestrial, if relevant)
- Marine biologists, researchers, and scientific advisors
- Research institutes and university departments
- Environmental or conservation NGOs
- Local and regional policy-makers

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE

This programme seeks to achieve a set of interconnected objectives that support the long-term success of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

First, it aims to strengthen public knowledge of the ecological importance of MPAs and their essential role in preserving biodiversity and sustaining ecosystem services. It also raises awareness of the multiple threats facing marine environments, from pollution and habitat degradation to climate change, and explores how these challenges can be addressed through collective action.

A second key objective is to promote more responsible environmental behaviour, encouraging individuals to adopt sustainable practices in their daily lives and to actively engage in local conservation efforts.



Italy – Croatia



The programme also provides tools and opportunities for community members to participate in marine governance, including dialogue with MPA managers and decision-makers. This is facilitated through participatory frameworks such as Citizen Science initiatives and Local Cooperation Councils (LCCs).

Ultimately, it aims to strengthen the legitimacy of MPAs by fostering trust, transparency, and a sense of shared responsibility between institutions and citizens. Through this relationship-based approach, the programme contributes to building a resilient foundation for long-term stewardship and compliance, essential conditions for the success and sustainability of marine protected areas.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND ATTAINMENTS

The programme is designed to produce concrete outcomes in terms of knowledge, behaviour, civic participation, and long-term support for Marine Protected Areas. These outcomes are grouped into four main areas:

Knowledge and Awareness

Participants will gain a clearer understanding of what Marine Protected Areas are, why they exist, and how they contribute to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem health. They will also learn about the ecological services that marine environments provide, such as food provision, climate regulation, and cultural value. Additionally, the programme will enhance awareness of the key threats to marine biodiversity, including pollution, overfishing, and habitat loss.

Behavioural Change

Through exposure to real-world examples and participatory learning, participants will develop the capacity to make informed and environmentally responsible decisions in their everyday lives. This



Italy – Croatia



includes adopting more sustainable habits, supporting local conservation efforts, and recognising the impact of individual and collective choices on marine ecosystems.

Civic Engagement and Participation

Participants will be encouraged to engage with ongoing marine conservation efforts by joining community initiatives, participating in awareness campaigns, or contributing to Citizen Science programmes. The programme will also strengthen their ability to communicate with MPA managers and local authorities through participatory mechanisms such as the LCCs, promoting more inclusive governance.

Social License and Stewardship

One of the core long-term outcomes is the reinforcement of the social license towards the MPAs. By fostering trust, transparency, and a sense of shared responsibility, the programme aims to ensure that communities are not only aware of MPAs but feel a sense of ownership and legitimacy toward their existence. This deeper relationship supports higher levels of compliance, collaboration, and resilience.



Italy – Croatia



GENERAL DATA ON PROGRAMME

Keywords

Marine Protected Areas, Participatory governance, social license, Ocean literacy, Active citizenship, Marine ecosystem services, Environmental sustainability, Coastal and inland communities, Empowerment and civic engagement, non-formal and participatory learning

Target Group

- General public with a focus on:
 - Coastal and inland residents
 - Seasonal visitors and tourists
 - Local economic actors (e.g., fisheries, tourism, small businesses)
 - Community groups, educators, and informal learning networks
- Educators – Programme Implementers
 - Scientists and marine biologists
 - Environmental educators and NGO staff
 - Experts in sustainability and interdisciplinary approaches to nature protection
 - Volunteers or external facilitators with relevant experience

Ways of Learning

- Informal and non-formal learning approaches
- Experiential, hands-on, and outdoor-based learning
- Peer-to-peer dialogue and local knowledge sharing
- Participatory, digital and interactive engagement



Italy – Croatia



Methods

- Visual presentation and multimedia materials
- Storytelling and testimony sharing (including visits to well-managed MPAs, where possible)
- Games and simulations (e.g., MPA role-playing)
- Outdoor guided exploration
- Quizzes and facilitate interactive discussions

Description of Work

Each module is delivered in around 2 hours. Supporting materials include videos, posters, worksheets, and facilitator guides. Sessions can be delivered indoors or outdoors, depending on the context and target groups, though direct field experiences are preferred wherever feasible.

Methods of Monitoring and Verifying Outcomes/Achievements

- Pre- and post-assessment questionnaires
- Participant feedback forms
- Collective discussion and reflection sessions built into each module
- Facilitators' final evaluation sheets and reflection exercises.



WORKSHOP SESSIONS

MODULE 1: BENEFITS OF A HEALTHY MARINE ENVIRONMENT: ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND NATURAL CAPITAL

Content

This session introduces the ecological, social, and economic value of healthy marine environments. Participants explore the concept of ecosystem services - the benefits that nature provides to people - including food provision, water purification, climate regulation, cultural identity, and recreation. The idea of Natural Capital is also introduced, helping participants understand the sea as a vital, yet often invisible, societal asset. Local examples are used to ground these concepts in participants' everyday experiences.

Method

- Interactive presentation with infographics and videos
- Small-group discussion: "*What does the sea give us?*"
- Visual mapping of local ecosystem services
- Testimonials from local sea users (e.g., fishers, tour operators).

Objective

To build a shared understanding of the everyday benefits marine ecosystems provide, and how they support both community well-being and sustainable development.



MODULE 2: THREATS TO MARINE BIODIVERSITY

Content

Participants learn to identify and analyse key threats to marine ecosystems, especially those linked to human activities. Topics include pollution (plastic, chemical, noise), overfishing and illegal practices, habitat degradation, climate change, coastal development, and maritime traffic. The session also addresses the indirect effects of unsustainable tourism. Participants are encouraged to distinguish between global vs. local threats and reflect on how everyday actions contribute to cumulative pressures.

Method

- Visual storytelling: before/after images of degraded vs. protected sites
- Interactive quiz or myth-busting activity
- Brainstorming and categorisation of threats (e.g., local/global, visible/invisible, direct/indirect)
- Case-based simulation exercise on stakeholder conflict (e.g., anchoring vs. habitat protection).

Objective

To increase awareness of environmental degradation, empower participants to recognise pressures, and promote reflection on shared responsibility and mitigation strategies.

MODULE 3: INTRODUCTION TO MPAs

Content

This session introduces the concept of Marine Protected Areas, including what they are, how they function, and the various forms they can take. It outlines core objectives, including biodiversity protection, fish stock recovery, and the safeguarding of cultural heritage. Common misconceptions



Italy – Croatia



(e.g., MPAs as zones of exclusion) are addressed, along with key governance tools like Local Cooperation Councils (LCCs) and the importance of social license. Where relevant, participants explore existing or proposed MPAs.

Method

- Illustrated talk: *"What is an MPA?"* with visual aids
- Mapping exercise: locating nearby or future MPAs
- Testimony or video from MPA managers or users
- Group work: *"What would a good MPA look like in our area?"*.

Objective

To strengthen public understanding of MPAs, reduce scepticism or misinformation, and foster capacity for constructive engagement in marine planning and protection.

MODULE 4: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Content

This final module focuses on action and empowerment. Participants explore how they can engage in marine protection through individual choices or collective efforts, from Citizen Science and environmental monitoring to community clean-ups and advocacy. The session highlights the role of public participation in building and maintaining social license and encourages a personal sense of ownership and agency.

Method

- Participatory mapping: *"Who's who in our marine territory?"*
- Role-playing game: *"Let's manage our MPA together"*
- Introduction to Citizen Science tools (e.g., Reef Check Med, iNaturalist) and protocols with hands-on experience on marine environment



Italy – Croatia



- Group discussion: “What can I do next?” – personal action planning

Objective

To motivate participants to take real-world action, discover accessible forms of engagement, and recognise themselves as essential allies in marine conservation and governance.

ASSESSMENT & REFLECTION

The programme integrates a facilitator-led evaluation process designed to assess learning progress, motivation, and overall participant experience. Evaluation is not just a tool for measuring outcomes, but also a space for shared reflection and continuous improvement.

Evaluation aims:

- To assess knowledge gained and shifts in awareness
- To gauge motivation to act or change behaviours
- To explore participants’ intentions to stay engaged in future MPA-related initiatives
- To evaluate the clarity, accessibility, and relevance of the content and methods used.

Tools and Methods:

- Pre and post-session questionnaires to track knowledge evolution
- Feedback forms focusing on participant experience and suggestions
- Evaluation sheets for facilitators to note engagement levels and challenges
- Group discussion and reflection moments are embedded in each module, offering space for participants to express doubts, share perspectives, and co-develop ideas for future action.





Italy – Croatia



These collective moments of reflection help ensure the programme remains adaptive, inclusive, and aligned with local realities, strengthening individual understanding and the social bonds that support effective marine conservation.

