

## PRESS RELEASE

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### UCY OCEANOGRAPHY CENTRE ACQUIRES NEW RESEARCH PROJECT

*Participation in BLUEMED will assist in the valorisation of underwater natural and cultural heritage of coastal regions in the Mediterranean Sea*



The Oceanography Centre of the University of Cyprus (UCY) has secured its participation, as one out of the 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 has obtained a €224.000 funding 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. 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.”

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 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. Eventually, the project will raise more 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”.

With a €2.797.549 total funding and a 3-year duration, the project starts November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 and ends October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019.



The Centre will actively contribute in actions related to the development of methods, means of assessments, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), questionnaires, as well as in actions for the dissemination of the project's results. One of the most important activities it 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 UCY Oceanography Centre will have a unique opportunity to collaborate with partners, who are experts in the 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, the Center will be able to contribute substantially to their future implementation in Cyprus.



University of Cyprus  
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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).

Dr. Yianna Samuel, is a former Fulbright scholar and graduate of Cornell University (MSc, PhD) and the University of Miami (BSc) in Marine Biology. She is involved in research topics related to marine biodiversity, coastal ecology, climate change and satellite remote sensing data. She is also the national contact point and coordinator of the research projects Tropical Signals and CIESM Jellywatch, of the Mediterranean Science Commission (CIESM) and of the research project LIFE EUROTURTLES of the Oceanography Centre.

**END OF ANNOUNCEMENT**