



MER COMMUNITY SUMMIT

September 7-11, 2022

CHRONICLE

by

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Eskerrik asko" to all the attendees. Many of you made a great effort to respond to the call of this MER Community Summit. The Organising Committee and the MER Joint Programme Board want to thank the support provided in preparing this summit, as well as the contribution of the sponsors listed on the summit website; and most especially to the Student Help Team members and the Masters' Secretariat at PiE-UPV/EHU.

Many of the participants that had intended to attend were present and the organizers were well prepared to handle the needs of the participants at all times. The travel and accommodation grants went a long way in assisting the student and alumni who were not able to meet the financial obligations of the summit to be able to attend. For that, and on behalf of the scholarship beneficiaries, attendees want to express their heartfelt gratitude.

SUMMARY: Coordinated by the UPV/EHU, the Erasmus Mundus master in Marine Environment (MER) promotes a global community in ocean sciences. The MER COMMUNITY SUMMIT 2022 (MCS2022) was celebrated in the Bizkaia Aretoa of the UPV/EHU on September 7-9th and in the Aquarium of Donostia on September 10th, with over 230 attendees in situ and many on-line. The MER COMMUNITY SUMMIT 2022 aimed at being a landmark for the building of a long lasting global MER Community. It brought together graduates, students, academic and administration/management staff, stakeholders and employers, and consolidated the strong institutional links created among MER partners and associates. Community building sessions were devoted to Alumni and students, Stakeholders, Associates and Marine Scientist Women, and include reports and memories of the MER Community as well as instruments for its visibility. Worldwide-recognised scientists contributed as guest lecturers and keynote speakers, whilst 36 oral contributions, 24 poster corners and 2 workshops complete the science sessions. The topics dealt with priority challenges of the UN Decade of Oceans Science, say: observatories and monitoring systems; environmental protection and management; marine pollution; biodiversity conservation; integrated coastal zone management; global ocean change and climate crisis; sustainable management of biological resources; marine biotechnology; and socio-economic aspects, including ocean literacy, environmental awareness and blue economy. The event was respectful of the principles of sustainable development and of the Agenda 2030.

In the early 2000's, the Doctoral programmes at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) were generic and included, together with the research part, a series of courses that were certainly diverse. PhD candidates followed a combination of courses on fields as disparate as cancer, forest ecology, microscopy and aquatic microbiology, amongst many others. At that time, Adolfo Uriarte, senior researcher at AZTI, claimed that this offer was inadequate for the profile of the marine researchers they were recruiting in AZTI. Upon his claim, the Department of Zoology and Cell Biology planned to launch a specific UPV/EHU postgraduate diploma on Marine Science. Adolfo had strong links with the School of Ocean and Earth Sciences of the U of Southampton, where Prof. Michael Collins had been his PhD supervisor. Thus, in 2003, a postgraduate degree in marine sciences was planned to be offered by the UPV/EHU in collaboration with AZTI and The University of Southampton

Meanwhile, the Bologna Process was implemented in Europe and the Doctoral programmes changed dramatically. By 2003, masters were created in the higher education system linked to PhD programmes and the Department of Zoology and Cell Biology promoted the MER Master on Marine Environment and Resources to give access to the MER PhD programme.

While preparing this master, the Marie Curie programme was launched in the EU to support joint master and doctoral programmes; the condition was that three member states should be involved. Soton, AZTI and our department had long lasting research collaboration with the University of Bordeaux and through these means a joint programme was approved as the MER MSc in 2005 and started the academic year 2006-2007.

Successive Marie Curie applications were non-successful; however, preparing these proposals contributed towards developing a joint programme of excellence. Thus, the MER MSc was every year recognised by the Basque Government as top-1 to top-3 within the total of 70-80 masters offered in the autonomous community. In the period 2006-2012, the MER MSc benefited from the Spanish Education Ministry Excellence label obtained by the linked MER PhD programme. Likewise, the master obtained the quality label awarded by the Mediterranean Office of Youth. All these labels were instrumental to get funding for student and staff mobility.

During these years, the European Commission launched the Erasmus Mundus programme for joint masters. After several failed applications, the Erasmus Mundus Label was awarded to the MER EMMC in the 2012 call, with the first Erasmus Mundus MER cohort starting in 2013. The incorporation to

the MER Consortium the University of Liège, which had been collaborating in teaching since 2009, was pivotal to get this achievement.

Now, the MER Community is here, after 10 years of recognition by the Erasmus Mundus label of quality of joint European Programmes, which means three successive grant agreements with more than 12 M€ of support. The MER Community includes more than 500 people, 50 associates and worldwide known as a master of excellence in the area of ocean sciences.

The MER Community and the guiding MER Consortium keep on adapting. In order to respond to the challenges of the UN Decade of Ocean Science 2021-2030 the MER Consortium has a new partner delivering the joint programme, the University of Azores.

The MER Community Summit represents all this community. Originally, it was conceived to celebrate the starting of the 15th intake in 2020 but it was postponed to 2022 due to the covid-19 pandemics. Now, 2 years later, we celebrated the graduation of the 15th intake, whilst the 17th is starting and the history goes on. MER Community Summit 2022 was celebrated in Bilbao (Bizkaia Aretoa, UPV/EHU) and Donostia-SS (Aquarium SS, GOE/SOG) on September 7-11, 2022; having been organised by the MER Consortium within the framework of the Erasmus Mundus MER+ EMJMD and MER2030 EMJMD joint activities.



Reception desk at the Main Entrance of the Bizkaia Aretoa, the Congress Building of the UPV/EHU at Bilbao city center, by the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum.

Eighty alumni registered. Fifty-one travel grants were awarded and the majority of the attendees were accommodated in Youth Hostels in Bilbao or Camping at Gorniz. Ninety-five students currently following the programme and 57 staff (academic, administration and management) also attended. Thus, over 220 people (55% female) participated in the MER Community Summit 2022. They came from 12 European countries and from other 28 countries from the five continents.



Global map with the countries of provenance of the attendees in turquoise color.

1. OPENING SESSION

Having been planned meticulously, the summit started on the 7th of September 2022 at 11:05 a.m. by welcoming all attendees present by Prof. Ionan Marigomez, the JPB chair of the MER consortium. Prof. Marigómez went ahead to giving a brief introduction of the history of the MER master programme



Opening ceremony of the Summit at the Bizkaia Aretoa: Vice-President for International Networking of U Bordeaux, Dean of Fac. of Sci & Technol UPV/EHU, Rector of the UPV/EHU, Vice-Minister for Universities and Research of the Basque Government, MER JPB Chair

and acknowledging the invaluable support of contributor to the MER MSc, the MER Community and the Summit.

The Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology joined in in telling the history and strong links of the Basque people and the marine environment. He traced the history of the Basque sailors around the earth, and the whale hunting expeditions that spanned around 500 years. There was in attendance the Vice-Minister for Universities and Research of the Basque Government and the Vice-President for International Networking of the University of Bordeaux. The Opening Session was chaired by Honourable Rector of the UPV/EHU. Having done the introductory speeches, the Summit was officially started.

2. HISTORY AND TESTIMONIALS

Prof. Manu Soto took to the stage on the first session of the summit on the first day to present a video of the past experiences of the MER Joint Programme Board members. Prof. Michael Collins, notable professor who has since passed on, was given a special mention for his role in the development of the MER MSc and Community since its infancy stage. In his honour, his wife who was in attendance was given an opportunity to give a word on her late husband's behalf. She stood to give her remarks and attested that her husband would be proud of the progress made since.

Prof. Marigómez then made a presentation of the evolution of the MER people, from the first cohort, first Joint Programme Board, and first professors of the programme to the present day. The student's distribution was also shown with respect to gender as well as their home countries. It was evident from his presentation that the MER programme is global in its populations while at the same time striking a balance in the enrolment of both genders.

3. SCIENCE SESSIONS

Prof Luis Valdes was the Guest Lecturer in charge of the Opening Lecture. He presented the Global Ocean Science Report and the International framework of governance of Ocean Science. A main take-home message was that "according to Rio+ 20, there is no sustainability without science and therefore there should be the use of science in



Attendees following a Science Session

sustainable development". Science should be employed at the governance and policy level by policy makers.

There were two avenues for the science session presentations. One was through oral presentations and the other was through poster presentations. The oral contributions were having a maximum of 20 min time slot including 5-7 min discussion, and therefore, a maximum of 10-12 min was recommended for the presentation part. Six science sessions dealt with a broad diversity themes spanning from physical, biological and chemical marine sciences, and a few on policy and social sciences relating to the marine environment.

Each session was open by an outstanding invited keynote speaker who presented innovative aspects of research in marine environment and resources and acted as co-chairs of the respective session. The profile of the keynote speakers is detailed in the programme. They included five women and one man leading research in diverse fields



Keynote on the fate of cancer drugs in the marine environment (Mitxelena Auditorium, Bizkaia Aretoa, UPV/EHU, Bilbao)

including marine pollution, ecotoxicology, sensors, omics, polar biology and marine policy. The abstracts of their contributions are available at the Abstract book accessible through the website.

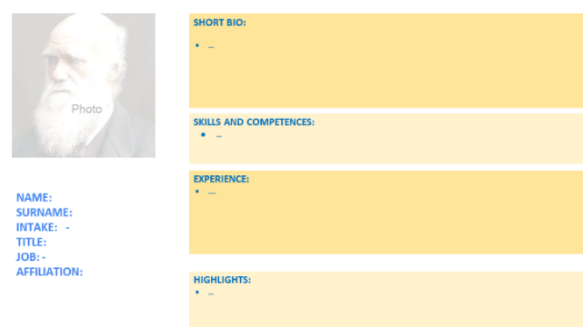
Other than the keynote speakers, a majority of the speakers in the oral and the poster presenters were PhD students or postdocs who had been graduated in the MER master. A few were from the industry and academia. Some observations from the presentations are worth mentioning as MER participates in these endeavours. The full list of the presentations and the Abstract Book are also available at the MER Community Summit 2022 website. Briefly, 33 oral contributions were scheduled; 31 were delivered on the stage. In Session 2, one was withdrawn in the last minute due to force majeure and another one was delivered in a more suitable format as a workshop out of the stage.

Similarly, 24 poster contributions comprised the Science Poster Lunch. These had the format of rotary poster corners located in four screens around the lunch hall, and the attendees following authors' explanations and discussion during the lunch "break".

Last but not least, promoted by alumni and students, two workshops were organised in parallel with the lunch Who-is-Who sessions, with informal sitting and face-to-face close contact to discuss aspects related with communication and societal challenges related to the marine environment and resources. The workshops were highly successful and the dedicated sites were overloaded with enthusiastic people extending debate beyond the end of the sessions.

4. COMMUNITY SESSIONS

Community Sessions were preceded by the Who-is-Who Poster Lunches, where alumni and students had the opportunity to introduce themselves using the record prepared for the Alumni Portfolio available at the MER Consortium website. These records were available in a rotary manner on four screens around the lunch hall, creating the proper atmosphere to stimulate communication during the lunch "break".



Template of the record used for the Who-is-Who Poster Lunch, as well as for the Alumni Portfolio

The Alumni and Students' Community Session consisted of a panel of alumni and current students discussing on the stage on contemporary issues concerning the master programme. The round-table was preceded by short presentations by individual panellists on the topics presented on. Some of the topics covered are commented below:

- ✓ Practical advices were given regarding job seeking within the MER Master context. Students were encouraged to actively prepare themselves for accessing the job market already during the realisation of the programme. Hidden opportunities in terms of visa, partner-universities and networking were also presented.
- ✓ Discussion also dealt with the value of the experience and skills acquired throughout MER for resume building and career trajectory planning. First, how to successfully express the benefit of living and studying in different countries into a tangible skill. This implies the use of key terms, say: *multicultural competence, experience communicating scientific data to international audience, international collaboration*, etc. Second, how to identify parts of MER coursework that directly relates to one's career goals.
- ✓ The experience of working in a job in the private sector in Trinidad and Tobago, and how MER has instilled knowledge and skills to be competent in such a position and provided the graduate with a holistic perspective essential for interdisciplinary work in the private sector (e.g. in physical oceanography).
- ✓ Opportunities provided by alternative entry points into traditional jobs. In Germany (and in a similar program in France) the government funded voluntary service is open to all nationalities and can be a great way of finding an entry point and getting some work experience.
- ✓ Language issues in student integration were presented in an inspirational manner. The challenges that come about with sharing

meaning, especially from students coming from different cultural and social backgrounds, were discussed. Cultural challenges included e.g. sharing inspirations from experiences as a first time traveller to Europe from Kenya.

- ✓ A network for early career ocean scientist recently established by four alumni was presented (EarlyGOOD). It is supported by UNESCO - IOC : GO2NE (The Global Ocean Oxygen Network) under the supervision of ULiège academic staff.

The Associates' Community Session was a round table discussion with panellists engaging on the role of the associates in the master programme. It was organised in a hybrid format, including the participation of "virtual" and "physical" associates. It was noted that the evolution of the associates relationship with the master study was based on personal acquaintances, at least in its dawn. The Associates, while supporting the MER programme, they also compensate for the rigid study plans in the university curricula.



Associates' Community Session round table.

As a part of this session, there was a Marine Quiz that was organized as a 3 rounds session. The first round was a warm up step with 10 questions, the second round with 10 questions was a picture puzzle while the third round was about explorations of the sea with another set of 10 questions. On the third round, the team leaders were swapped for the third round which brought about some confusion in the game. However, other than that, the session went on well and contribute to enhance community building, with great fun; and the winners were given some prizes.

The Stakeholders' Community Session was also a round table discussion. This included employers, experts in governance, junior entrepreneurs (alumni) and students. Before the round table took place, the students of the Help-Team 2022 presented their contribution to the launching of the MER Graduates Portfolio and the Graduates Booklet, and

explained how alumni can be included and update their records. Likewise, they presented the report on Career-Follow up, with a comparison of 2019 and 2021 results. The debate included worries, expectations and reflections regarding career prospects and jobs and how the master contributed to them (in the case of alumni) or how the master could provide them with the needed professionals (in the case of employers). Discussion was also targeted to define what is the value of a master degree for a professional career, as well as which are the options depending on whether it is a research career or a professional job. Finally, urgencies to find a job, the value of qualifications and competences, disappointment (e.g. by the low impact of the "Decade", and difficulties were discusses, but also that the span of the professional life is changing in the new times.

The Marine Woman Scientist Session consisted of the presentation of a summary report on the state of the art regarding gender issues but not only women issues but any discriminatory unbalance (other genders, racial, cultural, religious, ...) in marine science in particular but also in science and in the society in general. It included the exhibition of a topical video produced by MER alumni and a round table in which mainly women but also men of different age and diverse cultural, geographical, professional status and ethnical condition debated on their own experiences and feelings in an endless session that awoke sensibility in the audience.

5. OPEN SESSION

The Bilbao part of the Summit ended with an open session attended also by public outside the MER Community. Prof Marie-Alexandrine Sicre (IOC. UNESCO) was the Guest Lecturer in charge of the Open Lecture. She offered us a challenging presentation with a global perspective of the recent and prospective trends in ocean science. A main take-home message was that "according to Rio+ 20, there is no sustainability without science and therefore there should be the use of science in sustainable development". Her take-home message was that "the UN Ocean Decade provides a fantastic opportunity to collectively mobilise to make our ocean great again!"

6. CLOSING CEREMONY

The closing ceremony was held in Donostia-San Sebastian at the Aquarium-SS, hosted by the Oceanographic Foundation of Gipuzkoa (OFG), a founding associated member of the MER Consortium in 2005. The Aquarium-SS and its impressive auditorium bring great memories to all the MER alumni and students because all of them followed the first week of the RiMER course in this exceptional venue.



Closing ceremony of the Summit at the Auditorium of the Aquarium-SS: Manager Director of the Aquarium, Environment Deputy of Gipuzkoa, President of the OFG, Minister for Economic Development, Sustainability and Environment of the Basque Government, Majors of Donostia-SS, MER JPB Chair

In the ceremony, the JPB chair gave his remarks and thanked the MER Community for the support and determination towards the success of every cohort. This was followed by an emotional video produced by the alumni with their testimonials, including some of those who first started the master in 2006.

Prof Patricia Miloslavich was the Guest Lecturer in charge of the Closing Lecture. She presented the global observing system for marine biodiversity, and a magnificent perspective of intergovernmental activities and actions plans supporting biodiversity conservation in the oceans and related research initiatives. A main take-home message was “the need for globally sustained and coordinated observations of marine biodiversity and ecosystems to systematically assess their status and to understand how ocean life is responding to increased human use and climate change”.

Then, the MER Community Summit 2022 Prizes were announced by the MER JPB: Lluçia Mascordà (Best Oral Presentation); Josu Melendez (2nd Best Oral Presentation); and Michelia Wibowo and Jordan Gacutan (Best Poster Presentations) The ceremony ended with a traditional Basque dance (Aurresku) performed to honour the MER Community members. The “aurresku” is offered to special and important guests according to the Basque culture; all the attendees were asked to stand as the dance was being performed.

Aimed at promoting the community sense and motivating for future encounters collaborations, the aftermath of the Closing Ceremony included a typical Basque Rowing competition (estropada) based on tam work in ancient whale hunting boats. This kept the celebratory mood going. A total of 6 teams of 13 people were formed to row and timed. As such, there was no way of objectively determining the winner of the race and the judges resorted to chance picking of teams in a basket to determine the winner in the evening dinner. It was good fun and greater team work! Dinner took place in a cider where social interactions are very much promoted, following the traditional Basque custom.

The MER Community Summit 2022 was very successful. We look forward to meeting again in the MER Community Summit in 2026.



Basque traditional rowing race (estropada) organised by the Aquarium-SS at the Kontxa Bay (Donostia-SS), on the last day of the summit.