

Coastal Zone Community of Practice: Engaging End Users

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The Coastal Zone Community of Practice (CZCP) originated from the IGOS-P Coastal Theme. As a consequence, the CZCP initially was biased towards the producer and researcher side, while end users were largely absent. The CZCP aims to bring together scientific and non-scientific experts in an effort to support coastal zone management through utilization of Earth observations and derived products. The CZCP focuses both on research and practical applications related to coastal zone management. A main activity of the CZCP is the organization of a series of regional workshops addressing the decision support through Earth observations for integrated coastal zone management. A key goal of these workshops is to link to users of Earth observations and derived services, including coastal zone researchers, operators of infrastructure, planners, policy makers and inhabitants.

The first regional workshop, which was held in 2008 in Athens, focused on the Mediterranean. Participants were almost exclusively providers and/or researchers. During the workshop, it became clear that a prerequisite for decision support is the understanding of how decisions are being made, which emphasized the importance of involving decision makers in the CZCP. The second workshop took place in 2010 in Cotonou, Benin, and focused mainly on climate change impacts on coastal resources in West Africa. The workshop emphasized the gap between providers and decision makers, and urged that this gap be bridged. However, decision makers were underrepresented.

Based on the experience of the first two workshops, the third regional workshop took a different approach and focused on the needs concerning Earth observation support of a specific stakeholder group, i.e. the stakeholders in sustainable tourism in small island states, particularly those in the Caribbean. The Workshop Steering Committee made a dedicated effort to bring a broad representation of the stakeholders to the workshop, inviting the main regional organizations involved in sustainable tourism (e.g., regional governmental tourism organizations, tourism ministries, hotel owners organizations, ship lines, insurances, regional researchers, planners, disaster managers, etc.). However, success in bringing these stakeholders to the workshop was limited. Those who came were able to clearly express their needs in terms of data, products and services they would benefit from. There was a clear demand for improved access to information and expertise, when needed. The workshop recommendations address the need for improved communication between providers and users. Among others, the workshop participants recommended that a platform be created for the dialog between stakeholders of sustainable tourism and providers of Earth observations and related services.

The end users represented at the third regional workshop supported the conclusion that outreach to end users and engaging them would work better if the CZCP would participate in the meetings (workshop, conferences) organized by end user groups, instead of organizing independent workshops and attempting to bring the end users to these workshops. This approach would require a linkage between the CZCP and relevant Communities of Practice (CoPs), which could be built on individual dialogs or participation in meetings of these CoPs. For sustainable tourism in the Caribbean, relevant CoPs are the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), and the Association of Caribbean States, to name just a few. For sustainable tourism worldwide, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) would be among the appropriate user CoPs to be targeted.

The CZCP will review its approach to users. It is possible that a modified approach will be more focused on themes than regions. The series of workshops may be complemented by specific outreach activities to stakeholder groups relevant for a given theme on their own fields well ahead of the workshops.