

## **Ionian Sea Aquarium-Museum in Kefallinia Island, Greece: A Hub Developing the Underwater Natural and Cultural Resources in the Ionian Sea and Advancing the Ocean Literacy to the Public**

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**Abstract :** The Ionian Sea Aquarium-Museum in Kefallinia Island, Greece and its twinning with that of Santa Maria al Bagno in the Salento peninsula, Italy, are recently established Hubs in the Ionian Sea funded by the European Territorial Cooperation Programme, Greece-Italy 2007-2013. The objectives of the Ionian Sea Aquarium-Museum are: (i) exhibiting to the public the underwater natural and cultural treasures of the seas surrounding the island, (ii) the functioning of a recreational/vocational hub for all educational levels but also for sea users and stakeholders, to raise their awareness of the seas and engage them in the European notion of the Blue Growth of the Seas and (iii) setting up diving parks in sites of natural and cultural importance. The natural heritage in the Aquarium-Museum is exhibited in five tanks displaying the two most important benthic habitats in the Mediterranean Sea, that is, the Posidonia oceanica and the Coralligene assemblages with the associated rich fauna. The cultural heritage is exhibited in: (i) Dioramas displaying scale model replicas of the three best preserved ancient and historic wrecks. -The Fiscardo Roman wreck dating between 1st cent B.C. and 2nd cent. A.D., which is one of the largest and best preserved in the Mediterranean Sea. -The HMS PERSEUS British submarine, which is known for the second deepest submarine escape from all sunken submarines in WW II, and -A wooden wreck, the Italian ship Alma probably, which was requisitioned by the German army and used for transporting supplies and ammunition. (ii) Documentaries: The first two present the complete story from launching to sinking of: the HMS PERSEUS British submarine, the SS Ardena which is associated with the Italian Aquila Division killed by the German forces in Kefallinia and made known from the book and film "Captain Corelli's Mandolin" and the third documentary deals with the birth place of seafaring in the world, which took place in the Greek Archipelago by Neanderthals and modern humans between 115 and 35 thousand years ago. The Aquarium-Museum starts from next year (a) educational programmes for schools and tourists to discover the natural and cultural treasures around Kefallinia island, (b) recreational/vocational holiday activities centered on eco-diving and get involved in mapping and monitoring NATURA 2000 sites around the island and thus actively engaged in the Blue Growth of the seas and (c) summer schools aimed at under/post-graduate students, who are interested in marine archaeology and geo-habitat mapping and are looking for a job in the sustainable management of the seas. The exhibition themes in the Aquarium-Museum as well as the recreational /vocational and educational activities are prepared by the Oceanus Net laboratories of Patras University and were selected after surveying the seafloor using the latest state of art sonar and camera technologies.

**Keywords :** aquarium-museum, cultural and natural treasures, ionian sea, Kefallinia Island

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