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Navigating STEM Waters – Education and SDG Implementation Through Community Engagement

Despite the urgent need for green and digital transformation, the European Union (EU) continues to face a persistent skills gap and a lack of human resources trained in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. Low enrolment rates in STEM study programs result in a pressing challenge of the EU's lack of skilled professionals necessary for economic growth, according to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The project “Navigating STEM Waters – a Map for 2030”, funded by the European Social Fund, addresses this challenge by promoting STEM education as a catalyst for achieving multiple SDGs, especially SDG 4 - quality education, SDG 13- climate action, and SDG 14 - life below water. This initiative strengthens the impact and collaboration of the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science of the University of Split (UNIST) with the local community in human resources development, with a focus on STEM fields. The projects build up the capacity of three non-governmental organizations (NGO) and foster collaboration with two faculties of the UNIST and two primary schools in Dalmatia. It aims to transfer the STEM knowledge from academia to society via training of the volunteers of NGO's and educators in the schools, who will educate children in school and raise awareness about the importance of protecting marine and freshwater ecosystems, while simultaneously equipping the next generation of scientists and environmentally aware citizens. This project is offering a model of integrated action in addressing the EU's STEM skills gap by promoting STEM education as a key driver for sustainable development.

Keywords: community engagement, education, ESF, STEM, sustainable development goals (SDGs)