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TITLE "Scientific diving training in Greece. Before and after the ScienceDIVER project".

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ABSTRACT

The ScienceDIVER project promotes the development of official national frameworks for scientific diving, in countries that currently do not have one in place. Such is the case of Greece, both in terms of legislation and education. Generally, the need for personnel being able to perform activities underwater by means of diving is covered by training schemes that provide the required competencies and are dedicated to any specific kind of operations.

The Greek territory, although small in extend (130647 sq.km), includes one of the longest coastlines globally (13676 km), while the surrounding maritime territorial area (108335 sq.km) accommodates a wealthy Mediterranean ecosystem, grafted with the roots of Western civilization. The same features of this unique natural and cultural niche are perceived as economic assets in the context of the so-called Blue Growth. Regarding the role of the state for a comprehensive, yet sustainable, stewardship of those assets, the absence of an official framework on scientific diving is translated into lack of knowledge, which in turn means an inability to adequately manage them. Nevertheless, scientists in Greece, having the ethical responsibility to develop the underwater knowledge and transfer it to the society, have been either (re-)inventing or replicating (already established to other countries) ways to practice diving as a means for accessing their field of study. So far, improvision and self-regulation of operational matters for scientific diving projects, appears to have produced some remarkable results from archaeological, biological, or ecological research at the Greek seas. Many of those project-oriented practices became trends among the Greek scientific diving communities and formed diverse "schools" for the way of diving. Nowadays, the most common prerequisite for a scientist willing to work underwater is to have been certified as a recreational diver. Another approach, deriving from a requirement for commercial diving, is asking the scientists to have a contract with (or own) a company for underwater technical works. Worth mentioning that till some years ago, it was asked from the navy (or the coast guard) to provide the diving personnel for the performance of scientific diving research. As a consequence of the absence of a legal framework for scientific diving in Greece, which has been leading to the above-mentioned variations, the educational approaches have been oriented either on recreational dive training (e.g. through touristic diving providers and certifications), or on commercial diving traineeships (without any other prerequisite than the basic recreational or military dive training). Moreover, the role (and purpose) of the higher education institutions to provide specialized training on a topic, such is diving, highly associated with a

wide range of scientific disciplines, is hindered. Worth also mentioning the lack of graduate or post-graduate courses that incorporate dive training. The recent years, some initiatives from Greek universities, started flirting with diving in the context of training activities. Among those cases, the best achievement in terms of combining the theory with practical application underwater, was the development of a hybrid training course (featuring academic lessons and scuba diving in parallel) for surveys performed by divers. A major success last summer, was the implementation of the ScienceDIVER pilot training, as a complete course for the training for this particular purpose of diving.

The scope of this work is to present what preceded of and what is expected to follow this first Scientific Diving Training course in Greece. Additionally, through the case described here, it is provided an insight of the factors having fragmented the "landscape" of scientific diving globally.