



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Knowledge Co-Creation and Blue Equity: Reimagining Ocean Futures in Hamilton, Canada

Exploring Storytelling, Puppetry, and
Participatory Knowledge Creation

Hamilton Conference 2026
10–12 June 2026

A deliverable of the UN Ocean Decade Commitment: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/ocean-all-reimagining-justice-love-and-law#deliverables>

Endorsed by the UN Ocean Decade

Authors

Margherita Paola Poto, Faculty of Law, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, ECO_CARE, OIN and BLYSS P.I.

Dana Ahmed, University of Glasgow, The Asfour Initiative, OIN and bLYSs project member

Jessica Liebmann, McMaster University, Ontario, Canada and bLYSs practicum student

Amna Usmani, McMaster University, Ontario, Canada and bLYSs practicum student

Pictures: Emily Murray, Amna Usmani, Anna Zucchini

Illustrations: Sarah Mohamed, Yokoi Sanpo

Booklet: Amna Usmani, Jessica Liebmann, Anna Zucchini

Septentrio Reports 2, 2026

DOI <https://doi.org/10.7557/7.8887>



Summary

The workshop “Knowledge Co-Creation and Blue Equity: Reimagining Ocean Futures” was held on 10–12 June 2026 at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, as a deliverable of the UN Ocean Decade Blue Catalyst (bLYSs) project and an endorsed Activity of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. Organized through the ongoing collaboration between UiT The Arctic University of Norway and McMaster University’s Mary Heersink School of Global Health and Social Medicine, the three-day event brought together children, families, researchers, artists, and community partners to explore a guiding question: Can someone love the ocean if they have never seen it?

The first day opened with a puppet show featuring hand-crocheted puppets and interweaving stories from Gaza, Sinai, and Songea, followed by four co-creation stations where children illustrated the story, continued it with their own local waters, wrote letters to the children whose stories inspired the performance, and explored connections between food, water, and memory. On the second day, guided by the principles of Equity-Based Co-Creation (EqCC), adult participants engaged in multi-step collaborative storytelling that culminated in one collective narrative, further developed through storyboarding, script writing, and letter writing. The third day concluded the workshop with a Forest Therapy walk to Cootes Paradise, inviting participants to slow down, reflect, and reconnect the themes of storytelling and co-creation with the local land and water.

This report documents the background, methodology, and outcomes of the workshop, illustrating how storytelling, puppetry, and participatory knowledge creation can advance ocean literacy and blue equity, and how stories — like water — travel across borders, languages, and generations, connecting communities in a shared love and responsibility for the ocean and more just and hopeful ocean futures.



Figure 1. Back row: Anna Zucchini, Amna Usmani, Emily Murray, Youna McGowan, Margherita Paola Poto, Deborah DiLiberto, and Laura Vita. Front row: Jessica Liebmann, Mana Elise Hera Tugend, and Adam Zvric; in front of the puppet show fabric with the puppets featured in the show. Credits: Faye Alisisto

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank: Faye Alsisto and Jessica Leite from the Mary Heersink School of Global Health and Social Medicine for coordinating the logistics of this conference including purchasing of supplies and all printing, Janette Cridland from Forest Floor for leading the Forest Therapy walk on the third day of the conference, Kelly Gordon from the Indigenous Health Learning Lodge for sharing videos and stories of Indigenous teachings on both the first and third day of the conference, the Equity-Based Co-Creation (EqCC) team for introducing the tenets of equitable co-creation on the second day of the conference, the children participants as well as their parents for all their incredible work during the co-creation process, the 150 other children who participated prior and created the stories that inspired this work, and Mama Everlight from Tanzania who provided the sheet that formed the central curtain of the puppet show. Margherita would also like to thank the wonderful former practicum students (Laura, Emily, Sareen, and Youna) now established professionals, researchers, and practitioners, for their warm welcome to Canada. Being surrounded by you all felt surreal.

Background

The Ocean Decade Blue Catalyst (bLYSs) is an international participatory art and ocean justice project, bringing together coastal and landlocked communities across the Global North and South. Through co-creation, it bridges the Arctic, Mediterranean, and Red Sea, building a shared sense of responsibility for our ocean and for each other. The project is globally endorsed by the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (UN Ocean Decade) and anchored in their mission of “Achieving the Ocean We Want by 2030.” It is headquartered at UiT, The Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø.

The project works to create a wave of Ocean Literacy and empower communities to take informed action toward a healthier planet by 2030. bLYSs focuses mainly on advancing Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), and 14 (Life Below Water); and extends the reach of the UN Ocean Decade into the Circumpolar North. Building on the foundation of the Ocean Incubator Network Project, bLYSs generates inclusive and transformative change, through holistic and integrated approaches to Planetary and Circumpolar Health and bridging vital knowledge gaps in Ocean Literacy. bLYSs works to promote a more resilient, educated, and sustainable future for all, while strengthening collaborations within the University of the Arctic (UArctic) network and beyond.

The hands-on approach used by bLYSs builds upon the Co-creation of Knowledge in Ocean Literacy session held at the Tsukuba Conference in 2025. Margherita Paola Poto laid the groundwork for co-creation in ocean and climate justice, alongside contributions from Dana Ahmed, Sarah Mohamed, Deborah DiLiberto, Sujane Kandasamy, Adam Zvrlic, and a wider network of collaborators. The puppet show—featuring Dana Ahmed’s hand-crocheted puppets—was developed for the Hamilton conference and performed by Mana Elise Hera Tugend, Emily Murray, Amna Usmani, and Jessica Liebmann. The co-creation sessions and story development was shaped by the contributions of the children attendees, adult participants, facilitators, and community partners. Everyone’s diverse and unique stories and perspectives came together in evolving the work. The collective

actions of all those involved with the workshop—before, during, and after—was central to the development of the continuing narrative.

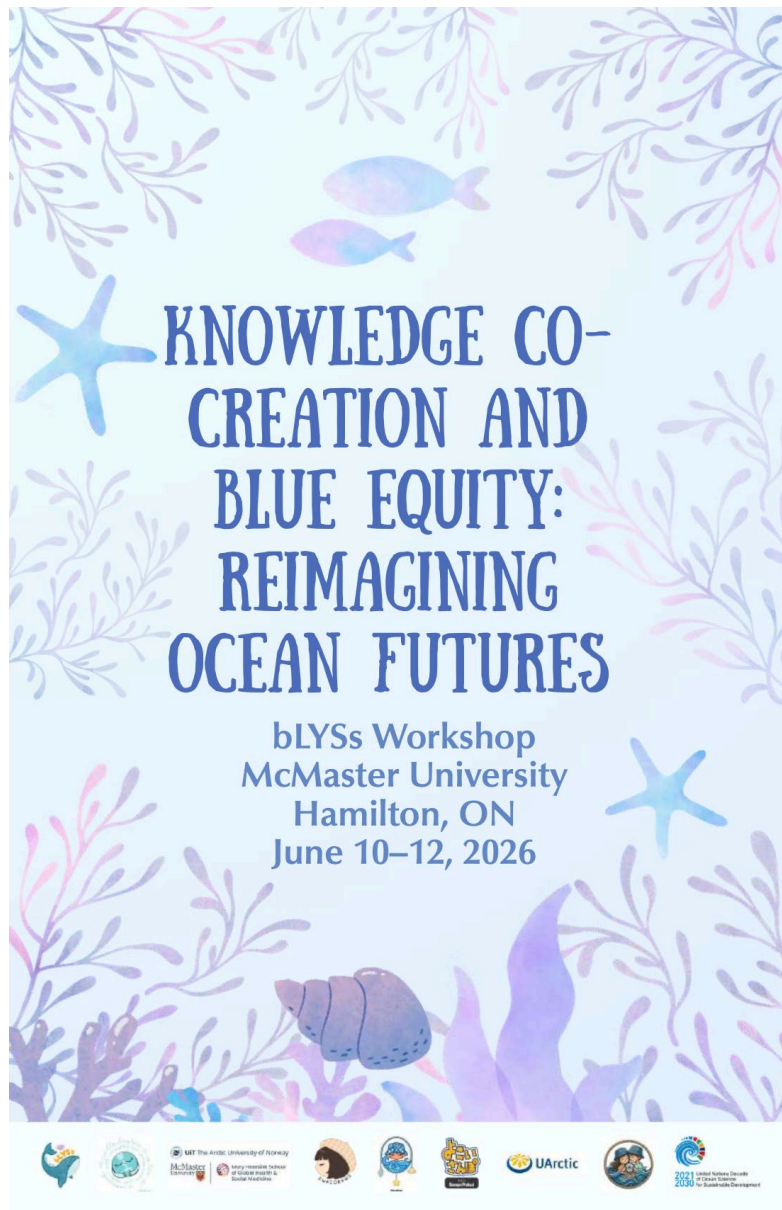


Figure 2. Cover of the booklet developed for the session. Designer: Amna Usmani, Jessica Liebmann, Anna Zucchini; Content creation: the team.

Introduction

The workshop *Knowledge Co-Creation and Blue Equity: Reimagining Ocean Futures* was held across three days, 10–12 June 2026 in Hamilton, ON, on the McMaster University campus. McMaster is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee

nations, and within the lands protected by the “Dish with One Spoon” wampum agreement. Endorsed by the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development as a Decade Activity, this workshop represents another product of the ongoing collaboration between McMaster University and UiT The Arctic University of Norway. Building on stories spanning Gaza, Sinai, and Songea, these three days represented an opportunity for transdisciplinary, transnational co-creation and imagination around ocean justice.

This theme of shared storytelling and creation across multiple countries, languages, and cultures was emphasized throughout the workshop and within workshop materials. One such example included the “Different Words, Interconnected Meanings” section of the workshop booklet, highlighting shared words around water and the earth across different languages.



Figure 3. *Different Words, Interconnected Meanings* booklet page. Designer: Amna Usmani



Figure 4. Placeholder welcome slide for the session Designer: Amna Usmani

The workshop began with a welcome by **Deborah DiLiberto**, the Director of Education with the Mary Heersink School of Global Health and Social Medicine at McMaster University, who welcomed attendees into the space, provided a land acknowledgement, and briefly introduced participants. **Margherita Paola Poto**, a Research Professor at the Faculty of Law, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, then provided opening remarks, introducing the workshop and the three core values of this work: positionality, transdisciplinarity, and co-creation. Positionality refers to how we locate ourselves in the work and the perspectives we have based on our identities and experiences, transdisciplinarity emphasizes learning across different ways of knowing and experiences, and co-creation centers the collaborative development of knowledge through discussion and mutual learning. Afterwards, **Lisa Marie DiLiberto**, the Executive Artistic Director at Theatre Direct, introduced the puppet show by discussing the value of co-creating with children before welcoming them into the performance.



Figure 5. Opening remarks by Margherita Paola Poto. Credit: Emily Murray

After the performance, the children were introduced to the four stations guiding the co-creation process: a “continuing the story” station, an illustration station, a letter writing station, and a “flavours of the sea” station with local snacks. The goal of this format was to foster artistic expression, reflection, and collaboration as children drew on their personal experiences with water and the ocean to collectively imagine the next chapter of the story.

Prior to each station rotation, children were given the opportunity to share the art and stories they had created at the given station. Their work was projected to the group, as the children spoke about the stories they envisioned, the characters they had created, and shared their ideas for how the stories might continue. These moments were significant as they encouraged dialogue and sharing, allowing children to be inspired by and build upon one another’s ideas during the co-creation process.

The first day of the conference ended with adult participants reflecting on the common themes, characters, and ideas that they had observed throughout the children’s co-creation process. Participants were then split off into smaller groups, where they were invited to collaboratively write a potential next chapter to the story, drawing on elements discussed from the children’s co-creation. Stories were then shared in the larger group to allow participants to start thinking about what a collective next chapter may look like, in preparation for the second day’s activities.



Figure 6. The puppets made by Dana Ahmed, featured in the puppet show. Crocheted by Dana Ahmed. Tote bags in recycled cotton created by Eliografia Camandona for the event. Credit: Emily Murray

The second day of the conference began with a presentation by members of the Equity-Based Co-Creation (EqCC) Hub team, including Gillian Mulvale, Tsinat Semagn, Rishita Ranjan, and Ahlam Yassien on equitable co-creation processes. The EqCC team discussed important principles and tenets when engaging in co-creation to ensure equity and inclusivity. Workshop participants were then split off into four smaller groups, where they engaged with specific tenets more closely, reflecting on and brainstorming what that may look like in this specific workshop.

Keeping these tenets and reflections in mind and building on the stories developed during the first day, the participants then began the second day of co-creation by joining with

another group to combine their two narratives into a shared story. After presenting these collaborative stories to the larger group, all participants came together to develop one final collective narrative, drawing upon the ideas and characters contributed by each group. As the stories were combined, participants engaged in discussions and collective decision-making about which characters, themes, and storylines to carry forward into the final narrative. While not every element of the original four stories could be retained, the process emphasized open dialogue, negotiation and collaboration, and ensuring the inclusion of multiple perspectives, directly reflecting the principles of equitable and inclusive co-creation discussed earlier in the day.

Mirroring the structure of the first day, participants were then able to break off into one of three stations to contribute to developing the story further: storyboarding, script writing, and letter writing to children in Gaza, Sinai, and Songea, whose stories formed the foundation of the evolving narrative.



Figure 7. Participants brainstorming the continuation of the story. Credit: Emily Murray

The third day of the conference emphasized slowing down, connecting with nature, and reflecting. Participants were guided on a Forest Therapy walk down to Cootes Paradise by Janette Cridland of Forest Floor. Along the walk, they were encouraged to pause, observe, and reflect on their surroundings. This activity provided an opportunity to conclude the workshop in a way that connected the themes of storytelling, co-creation, and relationships with water and the land — themes that had been central to the whole conference — back to participants' lived experiences with the place and the local environment.

The show

Plot of the Show

The story revolves around the main protagonists, Asfour and Azhar, as they travel around the world, discovering how people love the ocean in different ways. The narrative begins with Azhar posing a question to Asfour: “Can someone love the ocean if they have never seen it?” As a 1000-year-old shapeshifter, Asfour has the wisdom to take Azhar on a global journey, allowing the thoughts of the ocean to reveal the answer.

The journey begins at the shores of the Mediterranean Sea of Gaza, where gentle waves meet silent sand. The bright light and warm salty sea air create a peaceful atmosphere that evokes memories of happier days. Yet, a heavy melancholy engulfs the shores. The beach is unusually still, with the weight of loss and interrupted livelihoods. Rather than playing in the ocean, the children sit with fishing nets that appear to be broken, as though they are listening to them.

This is where Asfour and Azhar meet the dream fisher — Jellyfish — an ancient and gentle being with no beginning and no end. Jellyfish explains that the nets are not broken, but rather, transformed into dreamcatchers to catch bad dreams and allow good dreams to travel. Asfour learns that every object has a story worth telling. The ocean does not only carry waves, but also memories and dreams that foster resilience. By taking discarded fishing nets to create dreamcatchers, the children of Gaza create hope from hardship.

Continuing onwards, Asfour and Azhar arrive in Sinai. Here, they are greeted by a Sea Turtle, who explains that the ocean carried the dreams from Gaza to the shores of Sinai. Just like water, dreams change and take shape as puppets made of plastic and yarn. This transformation gives purpose to forgotten materials, making them part of something meaningful and allowing dreams to be carried forward through collective care and storytelling. Asfour learns that what may appear as tangled and broken, can actually be more alive if only you give it a chance.

Departing from Sinai, Asfour and Azhar come to Songea, where there is no ocean, yet the love for the ocean is palpable. It is here that Asfour and Azhar realize that as long as there is water, that is enough. Distance does not break connections. The ocean never truly leaves; it only changes forms. Its voice travels beyond borders, speaking through dreamcatchers, puppets, and peoples’ hearts. The heart itself and the movement of stories carry the shared love for the ocean.

As the story comes to a close, Azhar reflects that their journey has left them with more questions than when they started. Jellyfish and Sea Turtle explain that this is exactly how it should be; stories grow through one question being answered and another arising. Just

like water, they flow from place to place, evolving over time. From Gaza, to Sinai, to Songea, children connect to the ocean in many different ways. Asfour concludes that loving the ocean is less about proximity and more about listening to the stories the ocean can tell, regardless of where you are.



Figure 8. Emily Murray, Amna Usmani, Jessica Liebmann, and Mana Elise Hera Tugend with the puppets they played during the puppet show. Crocheted by Dana Ahmed. Credits: Anna Zucchini

Methodology

The show utilized a combination of puppetry, storytelling, symbolic objects, and multiple geographic locations and perspectives to create a moving and deeply compelling experience that ultimately invited its audience into a process of collective reflection and imagining around ocean futures. Puppet theatre and storytelling allowed complex concepts such as eco-grief, repurposing and transformation, and inland connections to water to be communicated in ways that were emotionally engaging and accessible. Children were invited, through reflection and dialogue, to learn about others' experiences of the ocean and to explore their own.

Interweaving stories from Gaza, Sinai, and Songea, the show served as a reminder that there is no single right way of knowing and loving the ocean. At its heart, the show invited the audience to consider a central question: Can someone love the ocean if they have

never seen it? The three interconnected stories demonstrated that the answer is yes. From keeping and transforming what the sea leaves behind, to finding opportunities for ocean stories in forgotten things, to ultimately knowing the ocean through its travels in rivers and wells, children and communities find different but connected ways of forming meaningful relationships with the ocean.

Recurring elements, including dreams, repurposed materials, and different forms of water, connected the stories while also taking on different meanings in each community. As these elements travelled across locations and stories, they became symbols of connection and transformation. Together, these stories showed that proximity to the ocean is far from the only way to know, care about, and protect it. Meaningful relationships with the ocean may be shaped by memories, creativity, stories, and interconnected water systems.

The three core values of bLYSs — positionality, transdisciplinarity, and co-creation — formed the foundation of these stories, reflecting the understanding that although where we are shapes the kind of stories we tell, they are not told in isolation. Instead, like the ocean, they travel across borders, languages, cultures, and lived experiences. They may change form, be built upon in different ways, and feature new characters and journeys, but they are ultimately connected in the shared love and hope for the ocean and its future. These stories fostered connection not only to the ocean, but to each other — across generations, languages, and experiences.

This invitation to connect and learn together is reflected through the show's characters. Throughout the stories, as Azhar and Asfour travel across Gaza, Sinai, and Songea, they learn alongside the audience watching the show. Despite being 1000 years old, Asfour is still learning and understanding how the communities they travel to are connected to the ocean. This is critical as it recognizes the importance of slowing down and listening, of allowing communities to share their stories, and of allowing the ocean itself to speak and teach. The ocean has its own voice that shows up in different ways, through dreams, through puppets and stories, and through rivers and wells. In this way, the ocean is so much more than simply a setting. It is a teacher and a storyteller, very much a character in its own right.

By centering communities and the ocean as teachers, the show highlights the importance of learning through listening to diverse voices and ways of knowing. In doing so, it underscores the need to center positionality and transdisciplinarity in co-creation work by recognizing the immense power of different stories and lived experiences —

particularly by creating opportunities to share those experiences and stories and to collectively imagine more just and hopeful ocean futures.

The show then invited the children in Hamilton to add to the latest chapter of this evolving story by ending with a reflective question: What story does the ocean tell where you live? In this way, the conclusion of the performance became the beginning of the co-creation process, encouraging the children to reflect on their own experiences with water and the ocean, before exploring these connections creatively through stories, art, letters, and food. This transition from audience members to active participants in the co-creation process demonstrated the principles of positionality, transdisciplinary, and co-creation in practice, as the children's own stories and lived experiences became central to collectively imagining more just and hopeful ocean futures.



Figure 9. A picture of the booklet, containing the script of the puppet show. Script written by Dana Ahmed and formatted in booklet by Jessica Liebmann. Designer: Jessica Liebmann

The co-creation sessions

As part of the workshop, the participants engaged in a series of co-created activities designed to build upon the puppet show and explore the research question: Can someone love the ocean if they have never seen it? To deepen their understanding of the story and its themes, participants rotated between four stations that allowed for collaborative creation and integration of everyone's ideas and perspectives. Each station encouraged a different form of responding — through drawing, storytelling, letter writing, and food — and connecting their own experiences with those of the children from Gaza, Sinai, and Songea.

At Station 1: Illustrate the Story, original artwork connected to the story from the children in Gaza, and the original design for Asfour — depicting her shapeshifting abilities as a reflection of the transformations the ocean undertakes — were showcased. Participants then had a chance to draw a story scene that resonated with them. They were encouraged to not only remember what happened in the show but also interpret the story through their own experiences and memories. By placing the children of Gaza's work alongside the works from the children of Hamilton, the station allowed visual conversations to unfold, showing how children in two different parts of the world draw interconnected stories.

The focus of Station 2: Continue the Story, was on the continuation of the story. Participants were asked to reflect on two questions: Where does water live near you? and What do you hear when you listen closely? Then, they were invited to respond through writing, poetry, or drawings. Participants had the chance to add their own local shores, coastlines, lakes, rivers, and water sources into Asfour's journey. Thereby, the station served as a reminder that the story belongs to everyone, and that it is an ever-changing and evolving story rather than a fixed narrative.

At Station 3: Letters to the Children, participants had the opportunity to broaden their reach beyond the actual workshop. Inspired by the idea that even broken things hold stories that "need to be heard by the whole world," this activity permitted direct communication between the children of Hamilton and the children of Gaza, Sinai, and Songea. Through their letters, participants could connect more closely with the children whose experiences shaped the puppet show performance. Eventually, these letters will be delivered upon the team's next visit to the respective locations.

Meanwhile, Station 4: Flavours of the Sea allowed participants to explore how food connects people to water, culture, community, and memory. The station described how

traditional dishes from Gaza, Sinai, and Songea, connected to the ocean, and prompted participants to reflect on what foods connected them to a place or memory, giving rise to a collective map of belonging through flavour. In addition, traditional foods and dishes from Ontario and the First Nations community were presented, to sit alongside the traditional dishes from the other communities. Therefore, this station showed how peoples' relationships with water are not only ecological or geographical, but is also found in the preparation, gathering, and sharing of meals.

STORY STATIONS
Station 4: Flavours of the Sea
"MUM, AFRICA SMELLS OF STRAWBERRIES."
(CAMILLA, 4 YEARS)

Every coastline has its own taste. Tonight we share flavours from Gaza, Sinai, and Songea — three places the ocean has shaped, three ways people have been nourished by the sea.

GAZA — MEDITERRANEAN SEA

- Sumaghiyya — Slow-cooked lamb, chard, and sumac — the deep purple-red of the spice speaks the Mediterranean. Eaten at gatherings; a dish of belonging.
- Dagga — Crushed tomato and hot pepper relish, eaten with bread by the shore. Simple, alive, and made fresh every time.
- Musakhan — Roasted chicken on flatbread with caramelised onions and sumac — a meal that gathers people, fingers to bread, stories to table.

SINAI — RED SEA

- Sayadieh — Spiced rice and fish with caramelised onions — the fisherman's feast of the Red Sea coast, warm with cumin and coriander.
- Bedouin Bread — Flatbread baked on hot stones in the desert, carried to the shore, eaten with honey or olive oil under open sky.
- Grilled Red Sea Fish — Whole fish marinated in cumin, coriander, and lemon, cooked over open fire at the water's edge — the simplest joy of the sea.

SONGEA — LAKE NYASA / TANZANIA

- Ugali — Dense maize porridge — the anchor of every meal, eaten with hands, shared from one pot. Simplicity and community in every bite.
- Mchuzi wa Samaki — A coconut-milk fish curry fragrant with ginger, tomato, and coriander, made from the lake fish the water gives each day.
- Mandazi — Lightly sweetened fried bread — soft, pillowy, a companion to tea. Carried to the field, the school, the shore.

What food connects you to a place or a memory?

Figure 10. Table prompt for Station 4: Flavours of the Sea. Designer: Jessica Liebmann

As the children moved among the stations, they were encouraged to share their art, stories, and ideas with the whole group. Although each child's work was unique, reflecting their own interests, memories, and vision for the ocean, several common themes were

shared amongst what was shared. These common elements then became the foundation of all future co-creation throughout the conference.

One such example, interwoven across several of the stories, was the idea of connection and how that fostered belonging and care. Connection came up in several different ways. The children found connections between the ocean and important aspects of their own lives, including their family, friends, and ideas of home, safety, and joy. In this way, representations of the ocean — and protecting and caring for the ocean — were closely linked to understandings of community. Several stories featured different ocean creatures working together to take care of the ocean by solving problems, such as removing a plastic bag that had fallen into the water. This also reflected an understanding of ecological interconnectedness in which different marine creatures and species from around the world are connected by the same water. Emphasizing this theme in particular, was a story featuring a friendship between a whale shark and a great white shark. Such stories also reflected themes of journeys and traveling. Specifically, several stories featured journeys spanning vast distances, building connections between distant locations. Movement and travel were shown across many different elements, including the movement of animals, ships and planes, pollution, and even the movement of stories themselves.

Furthermore, many stories also featured the attribution of agency and relationality to marine animals. Across different stories, this showed up in different feelings, personalities, and knowledge demonstrated and shared by different animals. Instead of defaulting to human-centric narratives that may feature these animals as passive recipients of protection, the characters across different stories often stood up for themselves and for one another, fostering resilient communities. Through these adventures, stories also featured a recurring theme of different emotions. This included a broad spectrum of narratives demonstrating bravery and courage, emphasizing play and joy, and also exploring fear and sadness. In this way, emotional responses were demonstrated across various stories as an important aspect of understanding, caring for, and loving the ocean.

Finally, deeply interwoven with other themes including community, care, and emotion, were stories exploring both threats to, and protection of the ocean. Various threats were explored, including pollution, plastic bags, extinction, noise pollution, and ship and plane traffic. However, across these different challenges to wildlife and the ocean, stories across

the board returned to the responsibility to not only protect but also actively heal the environment.



Figure 11. Children and adult participants co-design in illustration station. Credit: Emily Murray

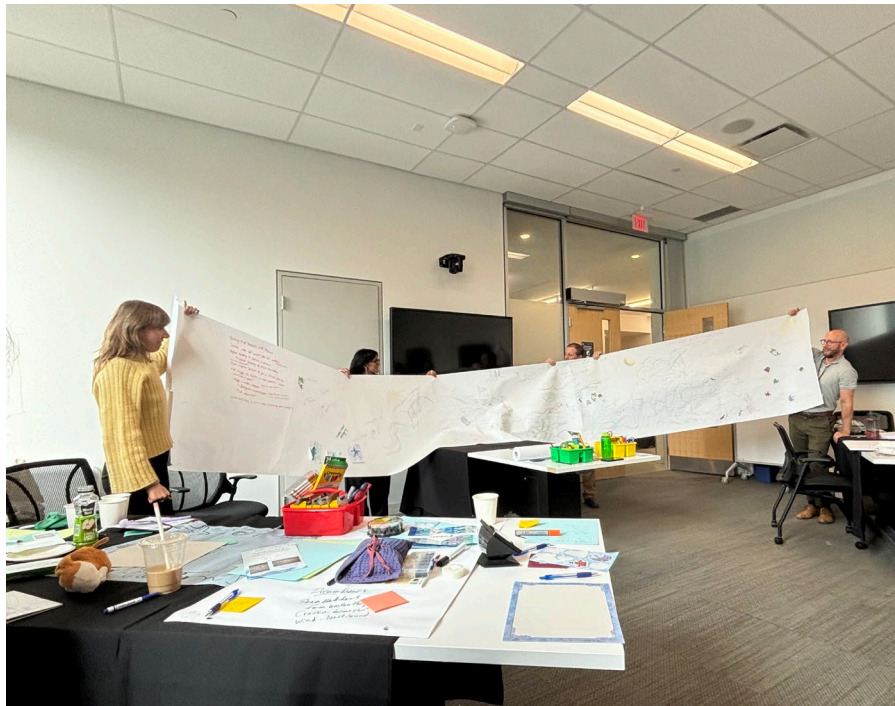


Figure 12. The storyboarding station group presents their work. Credit: Amna Usmani

Continuing the story

The second day of the conference built upon the first day's discussions, stories, and ideas. It focused on creating a space for participants to collaborate and work towards co-creating a local chapter to add to the stories they had heard the day prior, spanning Gaza, Sinai, and Songea — and now, Hamilton.

The day started with a presentation by the EqCC team focused on inclusive and equitable co-creation. The team introduced the Charter of principles and tenets of EqCC processes, including: (1) honouring worldviews, (2) acknowledging ongoing and historical harms, (3) operationalizing inclusivity, (4) establishing safer and brave processes, (5) valuing lived experiences, (6) 'being with' and fostering trust, and (7) cultivating an EqCC Heartset-Mindset. Workshop participants then split off into smaller groups to discuss specific principles and how they saw them currently included in this workshop, how they may continue to be brought in during the co-creation activities throughout this day, and ideas around how they could be brought in during future workshops. Each group then shared their ideas and reflections with the larger group. Common themes included thinking of which voices were represented in the space and which may not be (and how these voices may be invited into this work), thinking about how to foster inclusive spaces and what that inclusivity looked like not just physically but also in participation and decision-making, embracing discomfort as part of the process, and of showing up with respect and compassion for everyone in the space.

Following this presentation, and with these reflections in mind, participants then engaged in co-creation of the next chapter of the story through multi-step collaborative storytelling sessions. First, the four smaller groups from the first day were asked to join another group, share the stories they had created the previous day with each other, and then find ways that important elements of both stories could be combined into a single narrative. By the end of this stage, there were two stories. The first focused on a shark's journey to make new friends and explore new places. Along the way, he learns important lessons around interconnected water systems and how the ocean changes and transforms. He also learns the importance of slowing down and listening — and what gets misunderstood or unheard when we don't listen — as well as how bravery shows up in many different ways as he works on overcoming his fears, finding the truth, and protecting the environment. The second story focused on Sammy the Salmon's journey from the ocean

back to freshwater where she was born. This mirrors local salmon journeys upstream as they return from the ocean to their birthplaces to reproduce and then die, in a process that then provides nutrients for the new hatchlings. In this arduous journey, Sammy helps other sea creatures along the way, makes new friends who in turn help her find her way home, and ultimately comes to understand that no journey is completed alone.

After sharing these stories, the next step of the process was to come together as one large group to combine these two stories into one final collective narrative. This involved bringing forth many of the principles that had been discussed that morning around equity-based co-creation processes, including fostering an inclusive environment, creating room for open and respectful dialogue, and ensuring all voices were being heard. In practice, this looked like standing in an open circle around the brainstorming chart paper, ensuring everyone had a marker and could step up and add to the paper at any time, discussing every idea or thought that was brought up thoroughly, and encouraging voices that had maybe not been heard as much yet. After more finalized decisions were reached around elements and characters that were important to bring forward into the collective narrative, it was important to check in and ensure that the story resonated with all participants.

The final story followed Sammy the Salmon, as she traveled from the Atlantic Ocean to Lake Ontario. At first, Sammy was nervous about going into an environment that was unfamiliar to her, especially when she noticed how different the freshwater looked, smelled, and felt compared to the salt water she had always known. As she traveled into the lake, she observed the many ways in which people interacted with the water, from lakeside picnics to boat rides. However, she was also confronted with the pollution that threatened the lake. It was at this point that she met Snappy the Turtle, a wise character who possesses Indigenous understandings of water alongside contemporary perspectives. Snappy teaches Sammy that pollution is only one part of the lake's story. Freshwater ecosystems have long supported an abundance of life, even though that life may look different from what she had previously encountered in the ocean. As Sammy discovers the lake's animals and vegetation, her fear gradually gave way to curiosity and happiness. By the time she left Lake Ontario and returned to the ocean, Sammy understood that the freshwater and saltwater were not separate worlds. Rather, everything is part of a larger interconnected system that supports life in diverse ways.

Following finalized decisions around the collective story, participants were then invited to continue developing the story in the way that felt most meaningful to them. Similar to the

structure from the first day, there were three stations that participants could choose between: storyboarding, script writing, and letter writing.

At the storyboarding station, participants brought all their creativity and ideas forth to help bring the story to life. Equipped with large mural paper and many co-creation materials, participants used illustrations, written notes, and verbal storytelling to create an effective visual representation of how the story may flow and how different elements may be brought in.

At the script writing station, participants worked together to transform the collective narrative into a cohesive script. Together, they organized scenes, developed dialogue, and ensured that all co-created themes and elements were impactfully incorporated into the final narrative.

At the letter writing station, participants had access to illustrations and letters from children in Sinai and Gaza and a list of children from Tanzania. They were encouraged to reflect on and be inspired by these pieces, as well as the stories from each of these locations shared in the show, as they wrote letters to the children of Gaza, Sinai, and Songea. Approximately ten letters were written for each location, with common themes such as gratitude for the children's shared stories, shared hopes for ocean futures and for the dreams shared by the children in their letters, and reflections on our deep-rooted interconnectedness. These letters will be shared upon the team's visit to each of these locations.

Together, through these stations, participants were able to contribute to the co-creation of the story in ways that most resonated with their interests and goals for the day. Whether through visual storytelling, script writing, or letter writing, each station offered participants a different way to contribute to a common vision for more just and hopeful ocean futures.

Ways forward and the next steps

Building on the outcomes of this workshop, the story continues to travel. Part of the team (Farah Sweis and Margherita Paola Poto) is currently working on an art exhibition of Farah's work, connecting Gaza and Bologna. In August, the journey will reach its next stop in Sinai, where children will be engaged in a puppet show series coordinated by Dana Ahmed (Asfour Initiative), Farah Sweis, Margherita Paola Poto, and Camilla Haule.

The autumn will bring further initiatives, including a hands-on workshop in Utrecht with the RICE project and participation in the Polar Law Symposium in New Zealand, with more

adventures to come. Meanwhile, project proposals involving researchers in Gaza have been submitted, and more exciting news is on the horizon.

Reference list

Relevant literature

Ahmed, D., Poto, M.P., Heckman, S. (2025). Ocean Literacy Accessibility. In: The Ocean Incubator Network Learning Toolkit. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78062-2_7

Amin R. (2024), *Oh Hamza?!*, Independently published, available at: <https://diwanegypt.com/product/oh-hamza/>.

Madani, Z., Poto, M.P., McGowan, Y., Ahmed, D. (eds) (2026) From Climate to Ocean Protection for a Just Future. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-24934-0>.

Madani, Z., Natcher D. (2024). Water, Energy, and Food (WEF) Nexus in the Changing Arctic: An International Law Review and Analysis, Water, 16(6), 835; <https://doi.org/10.3390/w16060835>, special issue of "New Approaches in Water-Energy-Food-Environment-Climate (WEFEC) Nexus", (ISSN 2073-4441). Open Access, available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4441/16/6/835>.

Mulvale, G., Moll, S., Phoenix, M., Buettgen, A., Freeman, B., Murray-Leung, L., Micsinszki, S. K., Mulalu, L., Vrzovski, A., Foisy, C. (2024). Co-creating a new Charter for equitable and inclusive co-creation: insights from an international forum of academic and lived experience experts. BMJ Open, 14(3), e078950. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2023-078950>

Murray, E. M., Anta, A. H., Monoga, A. M. M. & Quist, S. E. (2025). Positionality. In: Poto and Vita, The Ocean Incubator Network Learning Toolkit (pp. 60-101). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78062-2>.

Parlato, N., Madani, Z. (2024). Water Justice in the Arctic: Indigenous Rights, Legal Challenges, and the Future of Governance Amidst Climate Change, Current Developments in Arctic Law, Vol. 12, published December 2024, Publisher: University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, ISSN: 2343-3418, available Open Access at: <https://lauda.ulapland.fi/handle/10024/66259>.

Panieri, G., Poto, M. P., Murray E. M. (ed. by) (2024) Emotional and Ecological Literacy for a More Sustainable Society, Palgrave MacMillan, Springer Nature SDGs Series, ISBN: 978-3-031-56771-1.

Poto, M. P., Vita, L. (2025), The Ocean Incubator Network Learning Toolkit, Springer Nature, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78062-2>

Poto, M.P., Vita, L., Peftiyev, I., Madani, Z., Peftieva, O. (2025). Co-creation of Knowledge. In: The Ocean Incubator Network Learning Toolkit. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78062-2_5

Vita, L. et al. (2025). Activities for Ocean Literacy. In: The Ocean Incubator Network Learning Toolkit. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78062-2_8

Poto, M. P. (2024) Gli Stati Sono Responsabili per Inazione Climatica e per la Conseguente Violazione dei Diritti Umani Inter-generazionali, (States are held liable for Climate Inaction and Violation of Intergenerational Human Rights) note to ECHR, Grande Chambre, Verein Klimaseniorinnen v. Schweiz, 9 April 2024, in Resp. Civ. Prev., 2024, f. 6.

Websites

[Tsukuba Conference for Future Shapers 2025](#)

[The ECO CARE Project](#)

[ECO CARE Instagram profile](#)

[Faculty of Law, UiT The Arctic University of Norway](#)

[The Ocean Decade Blue Catalyst \(bLYSs\)](#)

[Ocean Incubator Network](#)

[Follow Your Heart](#)