EU programmes workshop
21-22 November 2018, Novotel Brussels City Centre

Event report

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Introduction

The EU programmes workshop held in Brussels on 21 and 22 November 2018 was an event bringing together 70 representatives from 18 overseas countries and territories (OCTs). The workshop offered the participants the opportunity to:

- Learn about the opportunities provided by EU programmes;
- Share their views and present their experiences, lessons learned and success stories;
- Meet their counterparts and identify new opportunities for cooperation.

The workshop was organised around the following topics:

- Research and innovation;
- Support to SMEs;
- Mobility: education and training; sport, youth and volunteering; young entrepreneurs;
- Oceans and blue growth.

The event agenda, the presentations and the pictures of the event are available at: http://www.octassociation.org/eu-programmes-workshop
Day 1 – Wednesday 21 November

1. Welcome and opening remarks

Ms Carol Voges, President of the Executive Committee of OCTA, welcomed the participants and reminded that the aim of the workshop was to reinforce capacity of OCT based public authorities and relevant organisations to access the EU horizontal programmes and increase their visibility on the European scene. She also thanked the European Commission for continuous support as well as all speakers and participants who accepted OCTA’s invitation.

Ms Janice Panton, Chair of OCTA’s working group on research, education and innovation (REI), gave some background information on the first actions taken by OCTA to enhance the participation of OCT based stakeholders in EU horizontal programmes. She expressed her great satisfaction with the OCTA report and the organisation of the workshop. Finally, she highlighted that although EU programmes offered opportunities to all territories, the OCTs faced the following challenges:

- Lack of knowledge of the EU programmes;
- Lack of visibility to potential collaborators;
- Lack of capacity – human and financial resources.

Ms Sylvie Millot, Head of Unit DEVCO 05, European Commission (EC), thanked OCTA for organising the event and for producing a report which is very useful for OCTA and its members, the OCTs and the EC services. Better information is a first step to better access to EU horizontal programmes which are complementary but also very different from the specific allocations granted under the 11th EDF and the Greenland Decision. The first figures are encouraging and OCTs should continue their efforts. She also mentioned that the EC clarified the eligibility of OCTs to EU programmes in the draft regulations for the 2021-2027 programming period. Finally, she encouraged OCTA to carry out a qualitative analysis of the reported findings and update it regularly for the benefit of its members.

2. History of OCT eligibility to EU programmes

Ms Perrine Orosco, Head of office of Mr Maurice Ponga (Member of the European Parliament), went through the history of OCT eligibility to EU programmes. Under the 2001 overseas association decision (OAD), the OCTs were eligible to 18 Community programmes which were listed in Annex II F of the decision. In 2013, the EC proposed to clarify the situation and the OCTs were granted the eligibility ‘by principle’ to EU programmes.

In the context of the negotiation of the new overseas association decision for 2021-2027, Mr Maurice Ponga (MEP), rapporteur on the text, made two concrete proposals to further facilitate OCT access to EU programmes. First, when necessary the EC should provide for specific measures to ensure actual OCT participation in EU programmes. Second, the EC should support OCT access to those programmes through the establishment of a dedicated web portal.

3. State of play of OCT participation in EU programmes

Mr Benoit Dalbert, EU Programmes Officer, OCTA secretariat, introduced the report and clarified how it could be approached. He further explained that, for the first time, the report provided a stocktake of actual OCT participation in EU programmes. A major finding was that Erasmus+ is the most popular EU horizontal programme, not only in terms of number of projects and beneficiaries but also with regards to the amount of funding directly allocated to OCT based stakeholders. He also invited the participants to take a careful look at the online annexes which comprise all identified projects (incl. hyperlinks to those projects) which could facilitate partner search and indicate to others areas of potential interest. In addition, he pointed out the difficulty in accessing and
collecting data on OCT involvement in EU programmes, not least Erasmus+. Finally, he agreed on the added-value of a qualitative analysis of the reported findings to extract some success stories and benchmark OCT situation with other regions in Europe.

Extract from the question and answer session:

- **Q (from audience):** Where do I see information on project partnerships?
  **A (from Benoît):** If you look for further information on the project consortia, you should look at the online annexes and click on the relevant hyperlink(s).

- **Q (from Benoît):** What do you want to see in the qualitative analysis?
  **A (from audience):** There should be good practices/tips to access EU programmes and some success stories, gathered through a questionnaire, interviews and/or bilateral meetings.

- **Q (from Benoît):** What is missing in your territory?
  **A (from audience):** There is lack of institutional capacity. There is also no official contact point recognised by the EU. It is difficult to apply to calls for proposals and interact with National Agencies (Dutch case).

**4. Results of needs assessment questionnaire**

Mr Benoît Dalbert presented the outcomes of an online consultation that was launched prior to the workshop.

The following conclusions can be drawn:

- Education and training is ranked as the top priority for the OCTs;
- Erasmus+ is the EU programme that OCT based stakeholders know best;
- Although Creative Europe (culture and audiovisual) and Interreg (cooperation across borders) are relevant to the OCTs, these programmes are not well known;
- Besides access to funding, the needs expressed by the OCTs are related to access to basic/specific knowledge and building institutional capacity.

Extract from the question and answer session:

- **Q (from audience):** Do you keep track of the failed proposals and the reasons why they failed during the application process?
  **A (from Benoît):** No. Only the programme authorities have access to such data. One of the aims of the workshop is to reflect on the facilitating factors and obstacles related to access to EU programmes.

- **Q (from audience):** Does the EC organise specific trainings for grant writing?
  **A (from EC):** No. The way to write and submit a proposal depends on the specificities and specific criteria set by each programme. But the technical assistance envelope (i.e. TCF under the EDF) that is not totally used yet could be used for that (to be seen on a case-by-case basis).

- **Q (from audience):** What about web trainings that could be recorded and made available to all?
  **A (from Benoît):** The possibility for such webinars should be investigated for the future. At the same time, there are lots of materials already available online, so duplication of efforts should be avoided.
5. Thematic session 1: Research and innovation

5.1. **Ms Alison Imrie, Senior Expert, DG RTD, European Commission**

Ms Alison Imrie gave an overview of the programme [Horizon 2020](#) which supports research and innovation in Europe. She stressed the importance of the policy context and the EU’s research and innovation priorities and explained that OCTs had full access to the programme. She advised the OCTs to take a focused approach and to look up the topics on the portal (by using the search function), find those for which they could use their expertise and ask themselves what they could bring to the projects: e.g. islands as living labs for circular economy, research relating to tropical zones, etc.

In addition, Ms Alison Imrie drew the participants’ attention to specific bottom-up actions which do not require to set up large project consortia, for instance:

- **ERC starting grants** for talented early-career scientists; **ERC consolidator grants** for excellent researchers with 7 to 12 years’ experience after PhD; **ERC advanced grants** for established research leaders with a recognised track record of research achievements;
- **Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions** for experienced researchers at all stages of their careers, regardless of age, nationality or discipline, willing to work abroad;
- **SME instrument** for innovative SMEs.

**Extract from the question and answer session:**

- **Q** (from audience): Can OCTs get training from the EC (like those granted to National Agencies nominated as National Contact Points)?
  **A** (from EC): Not directly. The National Contact Points are nominated by the Member States’ national authorities and it is up to them to further promote the programme and inform or train potential applicants from their territory.

- **Q** (from audience): Are there any topics specifically focusing on the OCTs?
  **A** (from EC): No, however all topics are open to the OCTs (with the exception of topics in the work programme part ‘Spreading excellence and widening participation’). Apart from topics dedicated to international cooperation with specific third-country partners, topics do not generally have a geographic focus and reflect the priorities of the European Union as a whole.

5.2. **Dr Helle Siegstad, Head of Department, Greenland Institute of Natural Resources**

Dr Helle Siegstad shared the success stories of [Greenland Institute of Natural Resources](#) with access to EU programmes. The facilitating factors were the various collaborative invitations, the good Arctic logistic platforms and the results affecting the global, regional and local levels. The main obstacles were the lack of knowledge capacity and manpower in the administration as coordination is a huge workload. In addition, some invitations were sent too late. Finally, she pointed out the lack of capacity building and missing link to the society and education. Therefore, there is a genuine need to anchor knowledge in Greenland and better focus research efforts on Greenlandic needs.

**Extract from the question and answer session:**

- **Q** (from Helle): Is there any pre-funding available for OCTs to create the necessary capacity to develop and participate in a [large research] project?
  **A** (from EC): No. The EU needs to stay impartial, so funding for potential applicants will not be possible. However, the EU also welcomes small-scale projects. The minimum number of partners for a collaborative project is 5 from 3 Member States or associated countries.
5.3. Mr Hervé Teivitau Varet, Managing Director, Institut Louis Malardé

Mr Hervé Varet shared the success story of the participation of the Institut Louis Malardé in the project ZIKAlliance, a global alliance for Zika virus control and prevention involving 52 partners from 18 countries. Despite a very small budget share, the feedback was very positive as they brought in their expertise and experience, learned a lot about open data and developed close working relationships with other research institutes. From now on the Institute tries to better position themselves on smaller-scale projects with hope for better financial return, although they are often approached by large research consortia. Finally, he underlined that lobbyism and opportunism should be used to set in motion the mechanisms towards future collaborations and successful projects.

Extract from the question and answer session:

- **Q (from audience):** Why is it important to be the principal investigator (PI) of a research project?
  **A (from Hervé):** If you have great expertise in a research area and you feel you have the potential to be a leader in that field, I think you should have the courage to become a PI.

- **Q (from audience):** Why was your proposal TIME-Z not chosen?
  **A (from Hervé):** We scored too low on the implementation part of the project, because we had too little time to prepare for the call (3 months only). We hope that we will be more successful in the future thanks to our experience in the project ZIKAlliance.
  **A (from Hervé):** We are also about to reinforce our capacity by appointing a dedicated person to better monitor calls for proposals and take care of the administrative paperwork so that researchers can focus on research only.

6. Thematic session 2: Support to SMEs

6.1. Ms Maria Pia Vigliarolo, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission

Ms Maria Pia Vigliarolo presented the COSME programme which is the EU instrument to support the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), not least:

- Access to finance is open to local financial institutions (not directly to SMEs which are the final beneficiaries). To date, no financial institution based in the OCTs has signed an agreement with the European Investment Fund which manages the two financial instruments (Loan Guarantee Facility and Equity Facility for Growth). Yet, many OCT based SMEs have benefitted from funding. Indeed, it is not necessary for the local financial institutions to be established in an OCT to provide financing to businesses located there.
- Access to markets is mostly covered by the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN).
- Entrepreneurship is supported through the programme Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE).

Ms Maria Pia Vigliarolo explained that the call for expression of interest to select financial intermediaries is still open. Finally, she invited the participants to have a careful look at the next annual work programme that will be published in January 2019 and to pay attention to the next call for EEN scheduled for 2020-2021.

Extract from the question and answer session:

- **Q (from Benoît):** Where can we find the list of relevant local financial institutions?
  **A (from EC):** The list of local financial institutions is available on the website access2finance. The issue is then to find if the bank is ready to grant loans or guarantees to SMEs based in the OCTs.

- **Q (from Benoît):** With regards to the EEN network, does the EC organise matchmaking events to facilitate the setting-up of consortia?
  **A (from EC):** A good starting point would be to identify who is already active in the network.
Q (from audience): What about territories where the banking system is not well developed (e.g. Wallis and Futuna)?
A (from EC): It is not necessary a bank in the strict sense. Depending on the country, cooperatives or development agencies may take part in the programme if they can act as financial intermediaries.

6.2. Ms Gonda de Bruin, Manager European and Technological Development, CCI Centre

Ms Gonda de Bruin gave some background on the project EEN TOPIC which is a business support consortium comprising of several regions.

The main aims of the network are to:

- Support innovation management within companies;
- Help companies find the right partners to grow their business (through qualified appointments at trade shows);
- Help businesses expand into international markets (through regulatory and legal advice).

Ms Gonda de Bruin further explained that the network is essentially about B2B (business to business) not B2C (business to consumer). She elaborated on the indicators used to measure the network outcomes. Furthermore, she advised the participants to approach them either at trade fairs or through the main organisations based in the capitals, and to check whether their neighbouring regions are already partners in a consortium. Interested companies should be able to operate in English, have distinctive skills, must have a proven growth potential and a willingness to go to new markets or new technologies.

Extract from the question and answer session:

- Q (from Benoit): What kinds of products did OCT based companies bring into your consortium?
  A (from Gonda): Besides cosmetics, there is also vanilla for instance. Please bear in mind that these companies need a product identification file to get into the European market as they must comply with European rules.

- Q (from Benoit): How can an interested OCT tap into an existing network?
  A (from Gonda): Please contact us right now (in early 2019) if you want to become a full member of the consortium that we are preparing for the years 2020-2021.
Day 2 – Thursday 22 November

1. Thematic session 3.1: Mobility – education and training

1.1. Ms Ute Haller-Block, Head of Unit, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

Ms Ute Haller-Block clarified that Erasmus+ is a programme that is not only about higher education (like the former Erasmus) but also includes a broader understanding of learning mobility and cooperation. It is designed to help reach the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 strategy. It is now more streamlined and simplified (e.g. through the use of unit costs) to reach efficiency gains in the programme management.

Ms Ute Haller-Block also stressed the importance of the impact of actions supported at three levels:
- Individuals who need to build up cognitive skills, soft skills, or civic competences;
- Institutions which are involved not only in strategic partnerships but also in mobility projects;
- Education systems through mutual recognition (i.e. open method of coordination) although the ultimate responsibility for education policy lies at national level.

More than 75% of the programme budget goes to education and training, among which over 40% goes to higher education and 22% to vocational education and training (VET). There are three main types of actions, among which learning mobility of individuals is the most important in budget terms (63% of the programme budget) and the closest to the citizens (as this key action is managed by National Agencies). Finally, she elaborated on the programme success by listing a series of key figures. Yet, a lot still has to be done regarding the inclusiveness of the programme in particular in higher education.

Extract from the question and answer session:

- Q (from audience): Can we send our students from Wageningen University (NL) to Bonaire (NL)?
  A (from EC): Not for the time being as mobility entails a transnational dimension. In your situation, it is still from the Netherlands to the Netherlands. But you could imagine a cooperation project with another European partner and part of the research would be carried out there.

- Q (from Benoît): It is fair to advise newcomers to submit their proposals first under key action 1 rather than key action 2 (as the latter may require a lot of thinking)?
  A (from EC): It is fair to say that, but it is also a different item. A mobility is easier to organise for you only need one organisation on the other side where you send your students to. You can get to know others and then you start thinking about a cooperation project (but then with at least three partners from different programme countries).

- Q (from audience): What about an Erasmus for OCTs?
  A (from EC): Erasmus between OCTs from different Member States is already possible but not within the same Member State. This issue needs to be brought up in the framework of the future programme, even though its international dimension remains very vague at that stage.


1.2. Dr Francis de Lanoy, Rector Magnificus of the University of Curacao

Dr Francis de Lanoy described how the University of Curacao achieved success with Erasmus+ even though it was not an easy process. They first had to adapt their curriculum to be in line with the EU quality standards and obtain the Erasmus Charter. The fact that Curacao is not well-known was another challenge and the issue of high travel costs had to be taken into account too. On the other hand, the multilingual context and the opportunities offered by the University, combined with team effort and active use of social media, turned the educational institution into a successful participant to the programme. Some of his recommendations were the possibility to develop a Caribbean Erasmus+ programme to match with the regional scope of the University, send students to other Dutch universities based in the Netherlands or consider short stays for adult students who are already working or having families.

Extract from the question and answer session:

- Q (from audience): How do you promote Erasmus+ and reinforce the visibility of the University?
  A (from Francis): Through active use of social media and testimonies of students.

- Q (from audience): Do students contribute financially to their studies?
  A (from Francis): We advise them to start saving as early as possible because the funds do not cover all their expenditures (for instance, travelling to other places within Europe).

1.3. Dr Glenn Thodé, Rector of the University of Aruba

Dr Glenn Thodé described how the University of Aruba managed to gain access to the programme. Among other things, they had to align their values to European norms, engage the kingdom authorities (i.e. Netherlands) to make them modify national legislation, adapt all the programmes to the needs of foreign students to obtain the Erasmus Charter, and find the right partners to set up cooperation projects. To date, every semester about 10% of students is in-coming exchange students. Even though the ratio of Aruba students going abroad is lower due to high travel costs, 30% of staff members takes part in professional development opportunities such as job shadowing. This scheme is becoming popular and as a result the University is becoming a lot stronger. The University relies on feedback from the students to become more attractive. At the same time, Dr Glenn Thodé recalled that beyond the attractiveness of the location keeping the quality of [educational] services high – comparable with (or higher than) European standards – is a key success factor.

Extract from the question and answer session:

- Q (from Benoit): With students or staff members going abroad, is there a risk of brain drain?
  A (from Glenn): The University acts for the personal and professional development of the students and the staff to make them belong to a global community. Up to this moment, that is a negligible risk: going abroad for an exchange experience for a few months keeps them at home. The risk for us is when students go and study abroad their whole study track.
2. Thematic session 3.2: Mobility – sport, youth and volunteering

2.1. Ms Ute Haller-Block, Head of Unit, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

Ms Ute Haller-Block introduced the European Solidarity Corps which is a new initiative launched by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, during his annual State of the European Union speech in September 2016, and officially launched in December 2016. It offers opportunities for young people aged 18 to 30 to volunteer or work on solidarity projects. She further explained the different activity types supported: volunteering, traineeships and jobs, and solidarity projects. She also reminded the importance of the Quality label which is the entry ticket for an organisation willing to take part in volunteering, traineeships and jobs. It is a prerequisite for applying for grants. The applications for the Quality Label can be submitted to the respective National Agency on a continuous basis (and to EACEA for Europe-wide networks/platforms, public authorities, organisations offering volunteering under other EU programmes).

Extract from the question and answer session:

- Q (from Benoît): Organisations accredited under the programmes the European Voluntary Service (EVS) and Erasmus+ volunteering – do not need to apply for the Quality label. What are the requirements for becoming accredited and how long does the process last?
  A (from EC): The accreditation of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) and Erasmus+ volunteering will be considered equivalent to the Quality label during this programming period. Organisations having been accredited under these programmes do not need to apply for the Quality label. Organisations having been accredited by other EU programmes must apply for the Quality label. However, the existing accreditation will be taken into consideration via a simplified assessment. The new application process is similar to the one before (see EVS under Erasmus+) and the NA and EACEA use the same application form. The accreditation process should take up to 2 months depending on the National Agency. Interested organisations should get in touch with their National Agency or the EACEA regardless of a specific call for proposals.

- Q (from audience): What is the European added-value for local (in-country) solidarity projects?
  A (from EC): It is true that the European added-value is usually measured by its transnational character. But in that specific case the European added-value lies in the fact that you enshrine European values within the communities.

2.2. Ms Ute Haller-Block, Head of Unit, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

Ms Ute Haller-Block elaborated on the sport dimension of the programme Erasmus+ which was allocated a budget of EUR 265 million for 2014-2020. She stressed the importance of the policy context and clarified that the programme focuses on grassroots sport (not professional sport). She also described the types of actions supported by the programme – collaborative partnerships, small collaborative partnerships, and not-for-profit European sport events (NESE) – as well as the funding rules associated with them. She underlined the broad scope of the topics covered as well as the transnational character of all activities supported.

Extract from the question and answer session:

- Q (from Benoît): What would you recommend newcomers to start with?
  A (from EC): It is good to start with a small collaborative partnership: i.e. at least three organisations from three countries.

- Q (from audience): What types of sport are covered by the programme?
  A (from EC): It is about all kind of sports (incl. scuba diving, water ballet, fitness, chess, etc.). The activities should be corresponding to one of the political priorities as described in the programme.
guide, such as enhancing physical activities, inclusion, combating violence, good governance, combating doping, etc. A present discussion at political level is if e-sport (i.e. gaming) can be considered as a sport activity, but for the time being it is not addressing the priorities of the programme.

- Q (from audience): How can you find partners in case you opt for niche sports?
  A (from EC): It is not the usual case, but it is not an obligation for all partners to tackle the same sport. In that case, you can join with partners from different sports and work on a common objective, i.e. the social dimension of sport, e.g. how to get young people into physical activity.

2.3. Ms Louise Andréa Wamejonengo, Policy Officer mobility, CIJNC

Ms Louise Andréa Wamejonengo presented the Centre Information Jeunesse of New Caledonia and its main activities. The Youth Information Centre targets young people that live isolated either because of the area they live in or because they drop out of school (NEETs). It provides information on mobility to and from these regions. She emphasised the difficulties that they encounter not least due to logistics, the high cost of life and the prominence of local communities (tribes). Nevertheless, they managed to succeed by finding great partners, promoting the opportunities offered by the programme and involving the families.

In addition, she highlighted the project Inislas, a youth mobility project bringing together partners from the OCTs and the outermost regions (ORs). Her recommendations were to look for reliable and experienced partners and to use lobbying to succeed. Finally, she emphasised the need for a feeling of belonging to the EU in the Pacific and among youth in difficulty.

Extract from the question and answer session:

- Q (from audience): Can you explain the Youthpass that you mentioned during your presentation?
  A (from Andréa): The Youthpass is a certificate that recognises the personal non-formal learning process and experience gained from youth work.

3. Thematic session 3.3: Mobility – young entrepreneurs

Ms Katerina Nejdlova started her presentation by defining the programme Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs as an EU exchange scheme that allows entrepreneurs to share knowledge and experience in doing business. After playing a promotional video she clarified the target groups:

- New entrepreneurs are not necessarily young people, but are either would-be entrepreneurs or entrepreneurs with less than three years of entrepreneurial experience (new entrepreneurs can only take part in the programme once);
- Host entrepreneurs are successful entrepreneurs with at least 3 years business experience who are willing to share their experience with new entrepreneurs and committed to working with them (they can participate several times).

Ms Katerina Nejdlova further explained how the programme works and highlighted the vital role played by intermediary organisations (IOs) which promote and manage the programme locally and accompany the new entrepreneurs in the whole process of applying, matching and staying abroad. Participants coming from or going to an OCT receive the highest monthly allowance offered by the programme (EUR 1,100). New entrepreneurs should also be able to raise additional funds to cover their costs as EU support represents roughly 70% of the costs.
Extract from the question and answer session:

- **Q (from Benoît):** What are the requirements to become one of the intermediary organisations?  
  **A (from EC):** There is a call for proposals every year. It is never a single organisation. It is always a consortium of minimum five organisations from four participating countries. Most consortia are made up of organisations that have previous working experience.

- **Q (from audience):** Are you thinking of extending the programme scope to new countries?  
  **A (from EC):** Yes, but we are not that far yet. We are currently piloting the programme outside Europe and need to conduct a proper evaluation first before deciding the extension.

- **Q (from audience):** What are the main economic sectors represented in the programme?  
  **A (from EC):** Advertising and promotion sector, architecture and IT.

- **Q (from audience):** The ability to leave for a month to six months is not an option for public servants who are not fully private yet. How can we work around it?  
  **A (from EC):** For practical reasons, it is possible to fragment the stay (max. six months into shorter slots (minimum slot is a week). But the whole exchange must be completed within twelve months and the subsistence allowance is not disbursed until the whole month is completed.

- **Q (from Benoît):** With whom did those 9 successful people from Anguilla and Curaçao get in touch?  
  **A (from EC):** If there is no intermediary organisation based in an OCT, they can choose any of those active in the programme. In their case, they mainly contacted organisations from countries they have constitutional links with (i.e. NL or UK). Language was also an issue. In total, seven different business support organisations were contacted by new entrepreneurs from the OCTs.
4. Thematic session 3.4: Oceans and blue growth

4.1. Mr Frédéric Maier, Consultant at Technopolis Group

Mr Frédéric Maier reminded that the ‘Blue Bioeconomy Forum’ (BBF) is an initiative from DG MARE and EASME aiming at bringing together a partnership of industry, public authorities, academia, and finance in order to strengthen Europe's competitive position in the emerging blue bioeconomy. He further explained the role of the different working groups within the BBF. The BBF will develop a roadmap for the development of the blue bioeconomy of the EU after taking stock of the situation and discussing the challenges linked to that growing sector. Mr Frédéric Maier invited the OCTs to contact the BBF secretariat and consider contributing to the BBF activities, for instance by submitting examples of viable blue economy projects and/or participating in the stakeholder events to be held in 2018-2019. The whole process would be enriched with the active participation of remote islands surrounded by the sea.

4.2. Dr Iago Dominguez Teles, Researcher at Wageningen University & Research (WUR)

Dr Iago Dominguez Teles presented the ongoing research project AlgaePARC (see video) which can be seen as a good example of what blue economy can mean for the OCTs. This project takes place on Bonaire because of the good weather conditions and the interest of the different stakeholders. He also stressed the fact that this is a work in progress with good development prospects in five years time. The long-term goal is to make microalgae more sustainable and set up a roadmap for economic diversification on the island and to export the research results (i.e. the new technology) to the rest of the world. He concluded by stating that this is a research programme established between WUR and Bonaire which is open to new collaborations and new solutions in water energy and waste recycling.

5. Wrap-up session & conclusions

Mr Benoît Dalbert thanked all participants and speakers, the OCTA secretariat and the European Commission. He wrapped up the event stressing that OCTs have a lot to offer to Europe and should invest time and resources even though return on investment may take some time. Since the EU horizontal programmes will continue during the 2021-2027 programming period, current efforts could pave the way for greater success in the future for instance under the programme Erasmus+.

Ms Carol Voges concluded the workshop by recalling that OCTA’s mission to work collectively through the promotion of common positions and partnerships for the sustainable development of OCTs. The fruitful discussions and the exchanges of experience between the OCTs and the respective EU programmes experts have proven vital to enhancing OCT participation in EU horizontal programmes. However, she stressed that this was only a first step. In the OCTA roadmap for 2019, some follow-up and support measures would be undertaken. But it is also crucial to receive feedback from the participants to design and implement activities that would answer their needs.