

Title: Ocean Confessional

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Overview: Ocean Confessional is a public ceremony where passersby are invited to reconsider their relationship with the ocean. Participants can express and seek forgiveness of past and present environmental transgressions or share their love by directly confessing to the ocean.

Objectives/Essence: allow people to engage critically and empathically with the sea by creating an intimate moment of reflection, encouraging them to consider the impact of human activities on the sea's health. Evoke a feeling of interconnectedness: no matter how far away we are from the sea or the ocean, we are all part of one water body.

Time: 1-2h

Group size: 1-3 facilitators, 1-1 interaction with passers-by

Materials: a sign/poster to signal the event, seating area (cushions on urban architecture/bench/stools/chairs), chalk, small flat stones, costumes for the facilitators

Location: on a shore by the sea, in a spot where there is access to the water

How to prepare:

Space

Scout for a suitable location in your area. You can think about how to make this space a playful, fantastical environment through the elements you bring in. Since you will be intervening in a social space, it is important to stand out in order to invite people in (without being too aggressive). The main functional elements to be included are a seating area and a poster with information and instructions.

Knowledge and skills

Familiarize yourself with the sea-health issues related to the specific locality you will be intervening in. If possible, collect in advance narratives and stories of the local residents. This will help you to later facilitate larger conversations around these topics, and you will get to practice engaging with people through improvisation and ad-libbing.

Yourself

Choose something to identify yourself as the facilitator of this experience. Costuming helps to signal the nature of this activity, and to designate you as the person of reference. Pick something you feel comfortable with that makes you stand out (a colorful hat? A coat? A sash?).

Step-by-step instructions:

- 1) Set-up the Confessional area close by the shore. Put up the sign to be highly visible. Create seating corners, either using the existing (natural or human) infrastructure or by bringing in stools or chairs. Prepare the writing tools (chalk, stones).
- 2) Engage passers-by as they come. If they approach you, briefly explain what is the idea of this activity, and kindly ask if they are interested in participating. Let people engage in the way they are comfortable with.

- 3) Hand them the writing tools and ask them to write on the stone a word or a symbol that expresses their confession of transgression or love. Explain that chalk is composed of calcium-carbonate, that helps to slow down the acidification of our oceans. A small quantity will be released into the sea with the stone, as a small token. Instruct them to bring the stone to the sea once they are done writing. Leave them space and privacy at this moment. If they have questions, or seem unsure on what to write, try to prompt them with a few questions or examples. You can use this moment to engage in a conversation.
- 4) Keep the Confessional open for as much time as you want, but at least for a couple of hours.

“Ocean,
I am here to confess my worst transgression, or a love I have not expressed to you before today.”

We get it, always doing the right thing can be difficult. Green bin, blue bin, who knows? Plastic straws are just way too convenient.

We’ve all slipped up from time to time, but now we have the opportunity to pause for a moment and acknowledge our mistakes.

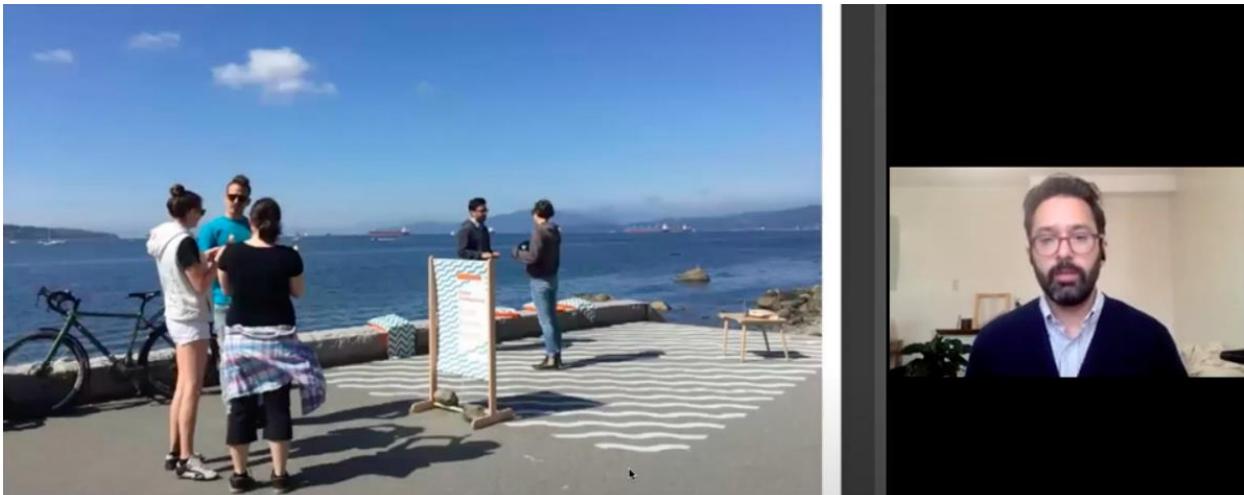


Figure: Ocean Confessional project presented at the Baltic Sea Lab panel (image credit: Sam Shamsher, Pete Fung, and Department of Seaweed).

Tips for facilitators: This is an opportunity to engage in conversations with people about important sustainability topics. Prepare yourself on the topics and be knowledgeable, however make sure to meet people where they are. Starting from your own personal experience can be beneficial, and the Public Narrative approach can help you in this.

Variations: If it’s not possible to conduct the event by the sea, think about how you can connect people with their local body of water. This could be a river or a lake, for example. If it’s not possible to conduct the event outdoors at all, because of weather conditions for example, you could set up the Confessional in an indoor space. Instead of having the participants bring their confession to the sea themselves, you can instead gather them in a box and bring them all to the sea in a later moment. In this scenario, it’s advised to bring something

from the sea to the indoor space, such as rocks or driftwood, as a symbolic token. You can also experiment with the format of the confessional itself, outdoors or not; feel free to adapt it!

More information: see Sam Shamsheer and Pete Fung presenting the Ocean Confessional project at the Baltic Sea Lab panel: How creative practices can support sea health

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y027kvzu4y8>

Links:

<https://www.behance.net/gallery/89759505/Ocean-Confessional>

<https://darkgems.media/ocean-confessional>

