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## **International research and training programme starts virtually Despite pandemic, the GAME network gains a new partner country**

**15 March 2021/Kiel. International exchange, networking and a Master thesis within a global marine ecological experiment—this is what the research and training programme GAME at GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel has been offering young scientists for almost 20 years. Even during the pandemic there will be no interruption. These days, for the first time, a group of GAME students is starting with a purely virtual introductory course. In 2021, GAME will focus on the influence of light pollution on the behaviour of organisms in coastal ecosystems.**

March is traditionally a special month for the research and training programme GAME (Global Approach by Modular Experiments) at GEOMAR. Students from all over the world come to Kiel and get to know their German project partners. Together, they prepare for an experiment on a marine ecological issue of global relevance, which they then carry out in simultaneously at the involved GAME partner institutes during the following six months. But in 2021, everything is different, of course, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was important for us that the GAME network remains intact, that the programme is continued and that young people again get the chance to do research and collect data for their Master theses within an international setting," GAME coordinator Dr. Mark Lenz from GEOMAR pointed out. Indeed, the new GAME introductory course is starting these days as usual—but for the first time in the almost twenty-year history of the programme purely virtually. "We are glad that we were able to organise a full-fledged course again," says Mark Lenz.

This year, students from Germany as well as Cape Verde, Croatia, Japan, Malaysia, Portugal and Spain are taking part in GAME. "With Croatia and a participant from the University of Zagreb, there is even a country in the project that did not belong to the GAME network before. Of course, we are particularly pleased about that," says Dr. Lenz.

The subject of the planned experiment is also new. In 2021, for the first time, the programme is focusing on artificial lighting and its potential influence on the behaviour of organisms in coastal ecosystems. Coasts are being used increasingly worldwide, both for economic purposes and for settlement or recreational activities. "One only has to consider that most megacities are coastal cities to realise that light pollution is a global issue in coastal ecology," says the GAME coordinator. Almost a quarter of all coasts worldwide are affected by the phenomenon. However, there are surprisingly few studies on this topic so far.

This summer, the participants will investigate at the different GAME study sites whether artificial lighting affects the activity patterns of herbivores such as isopods, gammarids, snails and sea urchins. "As these animals graze on large algae or sea grasses, changes in their behaviour could easily have an impact on the whole system," explains Dr Lenz.

Whether the GAME participants from Germany will be able to travel to team up with their project partners at the beginning of April, as it was the case in previous years, is still uncertain. "We have already identified alternative locations for the experiments in case the pandemic will not allow

travelling to or working at the six sites that were initially planned for the project," says Dr. Lenz. "The biggest challenge will be to transfer team building, which is an elementary part of GAME, to the virtual world. We have to be creative in doing so. But the participants are motivated and together we will achieve this."

**Background information:**

GAME is an international research and training programme for young marine scientists. The acronym stands for "Global Approach by Modular Experiments". Within the framework of thematic research projects, identical experiments on an ecological question are carried out simultaneously at different locations around the world. Each year, up to 18 students are supervised by GEOMAR scientists and by scientists from the GAME partner institutes, who carry out experiments in binational teams at up to 9 locations around the world. The preparation and follow-up of each project takes place together with all participants at GEOMAR in Kiel. The programme is partly financed by GEOMAR and partly by donations. This year, donations from the following companies and foundations enable the programme to be carried out: Hydro-Bios, Hydrotechnik Lübeck, Lighthouse Foundation, LimnoMar, Mareverlag, Müllverbrennung Kiel, OFFCON, SubCtech. Without their commitment, GAME would not be possible.

**Links:**

[www.geomar.de](http://www.geomar.de) GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel

<https://www.geomar.de/game> The GAME programme

**Image material**

Picture material is available for download at [www.geomar.de/n7691-e](http://www.geomar.de/n7691-e)

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