



## **The Stone Soup Leadership Institute's Joins the BLUEBIO ALLIANCE & Celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

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Attending the 10th Anniversary of BLUEBIO ALLIANCE was much more than a celebration of a decade of work, it was a powerful reminder of what becomes possible when vision, collaboration, and people are placed at the center of an emerging sector. Representing the Stone Soup Leadership Institute as the newest Associate (#300), I felt both proud and inspired to witness how this ecosystem has grown from a small group of around 20 members into a strong and diverse network of 300 associated entities in just ten years.

Throughout the day, BLUEBIO ALLIANCE shared concrete impacts that illustrate how an ecosystem can actively shape a sector. From the development of the Blue Bioeconomy Roadmap for Portugal, to strengthening collaboration with international partners such as Norway, supporting startups, contributing to aquaculture training programs, and launching initiatives like Blue Bio Value and the Blue Demo Network, the association has played a key role in connecting producers, innovators, researchers, and institutions. More than individual projects, what stood out was the ability to align efforts, strengthen internal cooperation, expand international connections, and accelerate growth and internationalization across the sector.

Listening to the story of how BLUEBIO ALLIANCE turned an ambitious vision into a professional and structured reality felt particularly familiar. Although the blue bioeconomy represents a relatively small segment within the broader blue economy, BBA has positioned itself as a clear example of how an emerging sector should be built. It is ahead of its time, actively working to remove barriers, anticipate challenges, and prepare for sustainable growth.

This journey reflects a broader shift that was repeatedly highlighted during the event: the transition from an extractive paradigm to a productive and regenerative one. Since 2015, marked by the Paris Agreement and the global sustainable development agenda, the ocean has become inseparable from climate action. We now operate in the context of a wounded and pressured ocean, where bioeconomy must move beyond marketing narratives and become grounded in science, innovation, and real added value for ecosystems. Sustainability, as many speakers reinforced, cannot be cosmetic; it must be intrinsic to how businesses and projects are designed.

Looking toward the next decade, the discussions outlined a future shaped by innovation: new onshore and offshore aquaculture systems, functional foods, bio-based materials to replace plastics, new molecules derived from marine organisms, and non-extractive approaches to exploring biodiversity. Yet this future will only be achievable if innovation is supported by appropriate legislation, reduced bureaucracy, European alignment, and critically better communication. Much of what is already happening remains invisible to the public, creating the illusion that the sector is stagnant, when in reality, the train is already moving and gaining speed.

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From my perspective as a Blue Economy Youth Ambassador, the most important and resonant message of the event was the central role of people, education, and talent. Scaling startups and projects does not depend solely on technological maturity or access to capital.

*It depends on having skilled, adaptable, and multidisciplinary professionals who can navigate science, business, and public policy. A recurring concern was the lack of entrepreneurial profiles willing and prepared to take intellectual and financial risks, individuals capable of translating complex innovation into viable products and engaging confidently with investors and funding mechanisms.*

This is where education becomes a strategic solution rather than a supporting element. Examples such as multidisciplinary ocean-focused programs, designed to create professionals who act as bridges between disciplines, illustrate the type of training the sector urgently needs. People who can speak multiple “languages” - scientific, economic, and political are essential to unlock the full potential of the blue bioeconomy.

When speakers were challenged to address future leaders of the sector, their messages converged around a shared vision: be ambitious, communicate better, engage policymakers, and place sustainability at the heart of decision-making, not as branding, but as substance. One statement resonated deeply with me: “*We must not do to the ocean what we did to forests.*” Trust, collaboration, and confidence in our collective ability to build something better were consistently highlighted as the foundation for the future.

In many ways, BLUEBIO ALLIANCE stands today as a project of Portugal for the world, an ecosystem that aggregates, unlocks, and amplifies. It attracts financial and human capital, supports internationalization, and brings the blue bioeconomy into public and political agendas. Joining as Associate #300 felt symbolic: proof that this movement is growing and that there is space and responsibility for new generations to step in.

For the Stone Soup Leadership Institute, this event reinforced a belief that guides our work: talent and youth are not peripheral to the solution, they are the solution. *If Portugal wants to lead in the blue bioeconomy, it must invest intentionally in education, empower young people, and create pathways for them to stay, grow, and lead within the country. The next decade will not be defined only by technology or capital, but by the people we prepare today to carry this vision forward.*



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