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Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

POST-EVENT BRIEF

ESPON Conference on Blue Growth: From Marine & Maritime Services towards new drivers for economic & territorial change

Virtual

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Summary



Blue Growth has been gaining significant importance in European policy-making for more than a decade. Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and Land Sea Interaction (LSI) are playing increasingly large roles in managing the marine space and enhancing Blue Growth. These recent developments in governance have also led to explorations into how Blue Growth can be combined with the Green Deal through, for instance, the development of offshore green energy production and the conservation of natural sea areas. All of these developments imply the active participation of a diverse set of actors. Blue Growth refers not only to established sectors, such as coastal tourism, port activities, maritime transport, and shipbuilding & repair, but also to living marine resources (such as fisheries, biotechnologies, and aquaculture), non-living resources (such as oil, gas, and other minerals), and offshore wind energy.

The ESPON Virtual Conference explored how Blue Growth can be instigated from the different Marine & Maritime Services by focusing on the Greek marine space. The event focused on the challenges that key stakeholders, from the local to European levels, are facing and how they could be solved through lessons learnt and good practices from other European regions.

Journalist Mr. John Papageorgiou moderated the conference.

Objectives and target groups

This ESPON conference was organised by the Greek Authorities of the Ministry of Development & Investments within the ESPON-TNO project. The main focus of this event was the development of a sustainable Blue Growth and its potential role as a driver for change in Greece and the Mediterranean in general. The discussions took into consideration the new policies adopted and promoted by the EU in the 2021-2027 programming period. Various experts exchanged their insights with policymakers, academics and members from the business sector, while case studies from other territories were introduced with the aim of understanding & building integrated development strategies and making policy suggestions for the marine and adjoining territories.

The conference was divided in 4 parts:

- **National Strategies incorporating Blue Growth** – The European Cohesion Policy and how different activities can be combined within the same areas in the form of synergies, the role of Blue Growth for regional government, the challenges for Greece and the Mediterranean Sea, the relationship of coastal regions and islands, and the specific role of offshore wind energy;
- **Territorial knowledge coming from ESPON results and its insights for Blue Growth.** These results come from projects dealing with questions about LSI, governance strategies for combined activities (aka “maritime Eco(nomic)clusters”), territories with particular characteristics, and general concepts of spatial planning systems;
- **Good and innovative practices in the Mediterranean and beyond,** in which case studies illustrated multiple uses in smart seas, smart shipping, cruise/coastal tourism and smart fishery;
- **Blue Growth and Cohesion Policy in 2021-2027,** introducing the consideration of Blue Growth in Greek PA and operational programmes, the importance of maritime regional cooperation, and the envisaged future ESPON knowledge support.

Program and presentations

The conference started with the welcome address video of Mr. Giannis Tsakiris, Greek Deputy Minister of Development and Investments. Blue Growth and MSP have become important assets in the perspective of the EU Green Deal as well as the national operational programming and the national recovery plan in the post-

COVID-19 era, especially in the Mediterranean countries. ESPON can be useful in this by providing quantitative and qualitative information at a European scale.

Mr. Wiktor Szydarowski, ESPON EGTC Director, saw the important role of Blue Growth for prosperity and the importance of Blue Growth sectors for economic activities.

Prof. Dr. Ir. Luuk Boelens, University of Gent and lead partner of the ESPON TNO project, presented ESPON knowledge as an interesting tool in a regional and local dialogue. Following this, he introduced the Conference framework and programme in the light of the main question of the conference, which was *where and how to enhance the emerging innovative and small Blue Economy sectors in Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean area*. The conference dealt with this issue in four parts focusing on the specific situations in Greece and neighbouring countries in relation to Blue Growth, the ESPON evidence in this respect, good practices, and policy-related conclusions.

Part 1: National Strategies incorporating Blue Growth - Interlinkages and synergies in the framework of Cohesion Policy

Mr. Dimitris Skalkos, Secretary General for Public Investments and Partnership Agreements (PA) of the Greek Ministry of Development and Investments, saw Blue Growth as a key subject for the regional government in the new programming period 2021-2027. He promoted a multilevel governance approach to Blue Growth and the implementation of the territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030). In this respect, sea transport is crucial for managing marine space and LSI. Digitalisation and environmental protection are the key drivers in this context.

Dr. Manolis Koutoulakis, Secretary General, Greek Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, dealt with integrated maritime policy and the creation of new paths for 2021-2027.

Dr. Giorgos Alexakis, Vice-Governor, Region of Crete, explained the link between regional development and interregional cooperation for the Blue Economy sectors. Maritime communities in Greece have always played an important role in public administration. He underlined that regions are crucial to bring policy into practice and that policy strategies are irrelevant without them.

Mr. Antonios Marinos, Head of Office, Secretariat General for Energy and Mineral Resources, Ministry of Environment and Energy, described the current development of a regulatory framework for offshore wind energy in Greece under the aspects of permissions, interconnections, and remunerations.

Part 2: The role of the ESPON programme in Blue Growth – Research backbone

Prof. Dr. Dave Shaw, University of Liverpool, presented the results of the ESPON MSP-LSI project, which dealt with Land-Sea-Interaction. He underlined that the capacity of territorial development to realise the potentials of Blue Growth depends on the degree of integration of LSI and MSP. In other words, land and maritime planning need to be linked together, especially when related to interdependent effects of development e.g. concerning infrastructure.

Mr. Marten van den Bossche, Consultant at ECORYS, presented the results of the ESPON ERMES project on urban-maritime port regions. These regions are seen as maritime eco-clusters, where multiple activities are interwoven. These maritime eco-clusters are considered engines of economic growth of seaport regions. Sustainable development strategies and improvement of transregional cooperation are key steps for urban-maritime futures.

Mr. Clément Corbineau, Spatial Foresight, interpreted the results of the BRIDGES project on territories with geographical specificities that might be useful for Blue Growth. The BRIDGES project studied new opportunities for islands with regard to climate change and the respective specific challenges.

Prof. Vincent Nadin, Technical University of Delft, referred to the ESPON COMPASS project that compared territorial governance and spatial planning systems in Europe. More specifically, the COMPASS project explored policymaking across sectors and “cross-fertilisation” between those policies to support sustainable Blue Growth. Simply put, this implies a more open form of policy-making that collaborates/interacts with other policies. Concretely, with a view on Greece, it was outlined how to improve the relation between spatial planning and other sectoral policies, which could be improved from mainly exchanging information, to a more cooperative level e.g. via language and terminology harmonisation.

Part 3: Good practices in the Mediterranean and beyond

Ms. Ivana Lukic, Senior Marine Policy and Planning Consultant at s.Pro – sustainable projects GmbH, introduced the SUBMARINER Network for Blue Growth European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG), a network that promotes sustainable and innovative uses of marine resources. She presented different concepts for establishing synergies by combining offshore wind infrastructures with tourism activities and fisheries.

Capt. Marc Nuytemans, FNI CEO of Blue Cluster Belgium, explained his network's aim to develop innovative activities and valorise their expertise in the sustainable Blue Economy. He also gave some insights in autonomous and semi-autonomous smart shipping and navigating in the future.

Mr. Đoni Štambuk, Assistant Director of the Port Authority of Zadar, Croatia, presented local good practices to manage mass cruise tourism. He underlined the importance of cruise/coastal tourism for the Zadar region and Zadar's sustainable strategy to improve related harbour infrastructure, also including renewable energy supply.

Prof. Yorgos Stephanedes, University of Patras, introduced the BlueFASMA project, a transnational activity related to smart fisheries evaluation in the Mediterranean. Smart fisheries might increase the innovation capacity of SMEs, promote maritime clusters and networks in Mediterranean islands and coastal areas to support blue Circular Economy growth.

Part 4: Closing panel: Blue Growth and Cohesion Policy in 2021-2027

Mr. Ioannis Firbas, Director General of the National Coordination Authority for PA, Greek Ministry of Development and Investments, explained how the Greek Partnership Agreement (PA) and Operational Programmes (OPs) deal with Blue Growth, and saw Blue Growth as enabler of economic growth, the creation of new jobs, and social prosperity. An eco-systemic approach should be applied, when planning and implementing measures for Blue Growth. This implies the consideration of the limitation of sea ecosystems on which Blue Growth activities depend. The Greece PA and the OPs have the ambition to apply this approach. Blue Growth is a key objective for Mediterranean countries that intend to achieve the blue transition in the frame of EU Green Deal. Notice of Proposed Amendments (NPA) must consider Blue Growth in all policy objectives (5+1) to support EU priorities, especially in the programme related to fisheries and seas. The integration of land, seas, and islands is of special importance to Greece. Transnational cooperation is crucial in this context. The macro regional strategy of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas includes nine countries and one of its four pillars is dedicated to Blue Growth.

Mr. Christos Economou, Directorate General for Maritime Affairs & Fisheries and Head of Unit Sea-basin Strategies, Maritime Regional Cooperation and Maritime Security, reminded the participants of the importance of coastal regions, seas, and the sea economy for European Union. Approaching the seas requires consideration of sustainability with integration of knowledge about sea ecosystems, economy, circularity, and digitisation. Such integration would allow EU maritime spatial planning to provide synergies between the different interests in the coastal areas, especially in those areas with competitions over different demands. Countries, regions and stakeholders, which will invest in the end, are important partners in this respect. The role of the region is of special importance, not only within a country, but also in the cooperation between the countries and the macro-regional programmes and activities.

Mr. Wiktor Szydarowski, ESPON EGTC Director, said that ESPON sees its role in this context firstly as an information provider to support Blue Growth programming and implementation. In addition, this information could support broaden or open new horizons. A sound implementation of political priorities and plans needs good partnership across governance, territories, and their neighbours. ESPON will continue to support spatial policies in the future, in the short and medium term, within the new ESPON program, starting with four thematic packages. These four packages deal with (1) resilience, (2) people and places, (3) circular economy and (4) governance of new geographies. All of the topics are closely related to Blue Growth, the latter (4) in the territorial perspective of LSI, for example.

Delivered input and the efficacy of the proposed structure

The conference took place virtually, within a more or less all-day format. Due to the well-structured agenda, this format was successful and carried the attention and interest over the whole conference.

Virtual conferences can enlarge visibility and territorial outreach. On average, 90 participants joined the presentations and discussion. Considering the increased fluctuation within virtual events, the maximum number of people connected to the event summed up to 151 people, which is (in relation to the 181 people registered

for the conference) a participation rate of 83%. It is of interest that only one third of the people registered had prior experience with an ESPON event (webinar, conference, workshop, etc.)

Interest was European-wide, which is the advantage of virtual events and might be point of consideration in a post-COVID-19 era in respect of hybrid format event to enlarge outreach. Nevertheless, 58% of registrations came from Greece, the country in focus and another 15% of registrations came from the Adriatic and Eastern Mediterranean areas.

The conference showed a suitable policy and research balance amongst its attendees, as both groups formed one third of the registrations. Also, amongst the registered policymakers, 65% came mainly from national level while regional and local intent in participation was about 25%.

The degree of satisfaction with the event was very high. Reactions of the post-event survey indicated that the combination of political context with scientific and implementation methodologies/tools was much appreciated. It is regarded as a good mixture to understand how Blue Growth is being implemented and how it affects coastal landscapes, seascapes, and local communities.

Main conclusions

- Building integrated development strategies is a priority and, in fact, a common goal within Member States (MS). Integrated development strategies tend to tackle economic, environmental, climate, and social challenges. Accordingly, ESPON initiatives towards this direction also contribute to a better understanding of the state-of-play, as they highlight the best practices worldwide.
- In this framework, the case studies presented in the conference especially triggered the participants' interest. Moreover, due to reasons such as the climate change, research on ecosystems is a highly demanded field for which ESPON can deliver useful work and input.
- The EU green policy is stronger than ever when integrating Blue Growth. It is also clear that there are quite different approaches within the Member States. However, what was stressed during the conference is that Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and Land Sea Interactions (LSI) should be somehow "aligned". As an ESPON recent topic paper also stressed, this implies that the management of LSI should take into account the interactions of planning processes and plans for land and sea areas.
- Managing onshore and offshore activities should take into consideration the functional integrity of the land-sea continuum. Also, coastal planning is a Member States' competence. This means that a minimum consensus is needed in order to implement EU policies. MSP is a key tool for Blue Growth, but it can only realise its full potential by being strongly interconnected with the framework of an EU Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP).
- In Greece, the Blue Economy sectors contribute about 5% of the country's GDP and employ 15% of the workforce (the largest percentage in the European Union), mostly due to "traditional" activities (e.g. coastal tourism or shipping). Nevertheless, the country's planned actions in the framework of Blue Growth are following the EU green agenda including the energy transition. There is a clear national need for the implementation of integrated plans for the management of coastal areas with a balance between marine environment protection and smart blue economic growth, securing the energy needs of the islands



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