eMSP NBSR
Emerging Ecosystem-based Maritime Spatial Planning Topics in the North and Baltic Sea Regions

Co-funded by the European Union

Policy Brief

Towards a sustainable blue economy

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Introduction

This policy brief includes recommendations on how to achieve a sustainable blue economy, in the context of Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), where the EU transitions, as stated in the Green Deal, on energy, food and nature at sea should be balanced. The recommendations in this report are addressed to governments, policymakers, maritime spatial planners and scientists within Europe. The recommendations help make the path towards the development of a sustainable blue economy more concrete and tangible and take into account the EU Green Deal objectives including the impacts of climate change, and where multi-use is an integral part. In this case, multi-use, as defined within the MUSES project, is an intentional sharing of resources in a closed geographical environment.

The recommendations in this policy brief are based on input from the members of the Sustainable Blue

Economy Community of Practice, of the eMSP NBSR project. During online and physical meetings, the topics, of nature, food and energy were addressed successively, with multi(ple)-use as the final and linking topic, within the context of the sustainable blue economy.

Take home message:
We believe that it is important and possible to move towards a considerably more sustainable blue economy than we have today. To the extent that sustainability does not only imply taking into account economic, social or ecological aspects, but all three aspects on an equal bases and with careful consideration. Achieving a sustainable blue economy requires a delicate balance between all the different interests and needs of the various (non-)users of the sea. Equal and balanced development of the marine transitions; energy, food and nature, are also part of a sustainable blue economy. This sustainable balance can only be achieved by working together, collaborating across boundaries and sectoral interests and with contribution from all stakeholders. Hence, a sustainable blue economy is an optimally integrated economy in which a balance between various interests is found for the maximum of joint benefits.

The successful development of a sustainable blue economy calls for an overall vision of the future of our seas accompanied by an implementation plan. How can this be achieved and how does a sustainable blue economy work in 2050 and beyond? Here, MSP plays a crucial role as a tool to manage the use of our seas and has the potential to ensure sustainability where economic activities and the health of marine ecosystems are guaranteed.

Multi-use in the future is part of the development of a sustainable blue economy, in which all transitions are handled on an equal basis. Furthermore, the development of an umbrella entity in the form of Maripark is key to capitalising the much-discussed synergy benefits of offshore activities.

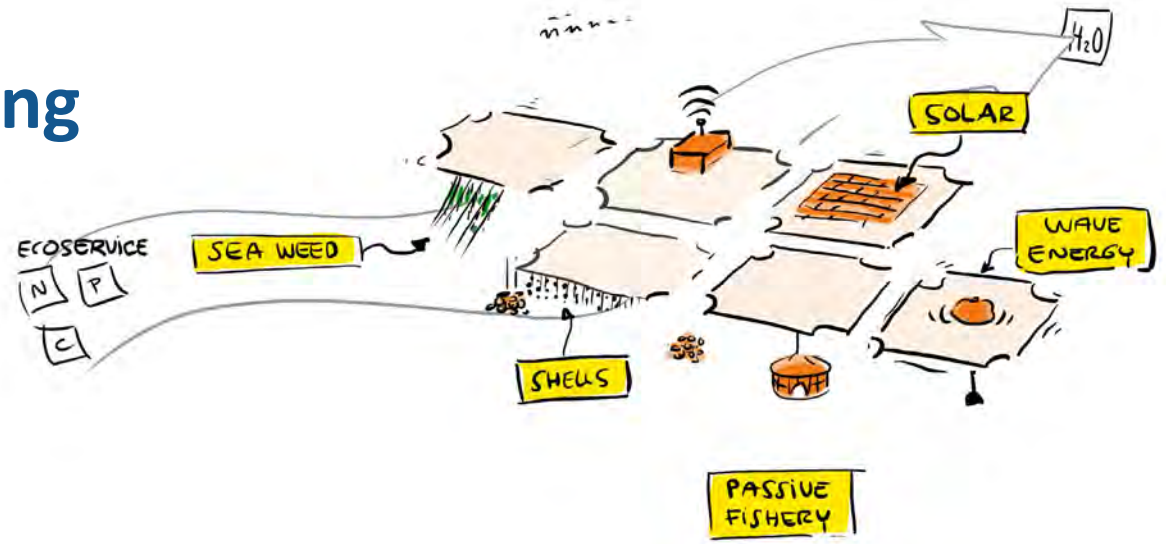
A sustainable blue economy

On May 17, 2021, the European Commission introduced a visionary proposal (a new approach for a sustainable blue economy), heralding a new era for a sustainable blue economy within the European Union, encompassing the diverse industries and sectors closely tied to our oceans, seas and coastal regions. Recognizing the profound significance of a sustainable blue economy, this endeavour also aligns with the overarching goals of the European Green Deal and takes a vital step towards fostering a green, all-encompassing recovery from the challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic.

The aim is clear: to tackle the intertwined crises of climate change and biodiversity loss by nurturing the well-being of our seas and harnessing their resources in a responsible way.

Achieving a sustainable blue economy requires a delicate balance between all the different interests and needs of the various users of the sea. At the same time, the precautionary principle must be applied. The precautionary principle is a politically accepted risk management strategy that suggests taking preventive action in the face of uncertainty or potential risks to protect human and environmental health. While implementing proper evidence-based analysis, such as impact assessments and cost-benefits analyses, also recognising the value of ecosystem services, can then enhance this delicate balance to manage all dimensions in a sustainable way.

Maritime Spatial Planning



The expanding/growing importance of MSP can be attributed to increasing human activities in marine environments. Activities, such as fishing, shipping, tourism and energy production, are putting increasing pressure on marine ecosystems. As a result, overfishing, pollution and habitat degradation have become more pressing issues.

MSP also has a role to play in the need to resolve conflicts between different stakeholders competing for access to maritime areas. MSP helps to coordinate interests and find compromises that enable sustainable use of marine resources. Finally, the concept of the ecosystem-based approach has gained importance. This approach emphasises the interconnectedness of marine ecosystems and stresses that human activities must take into account the wider ecological context (eMSP NBSR Policy Brief "Strengthening Data sharing for informed decision-making in MSP").

Technological advances, also play an important role in the development of MSP. Advanced tools such as geographic information systems (GIS) and satellite imagery enable better data collection, analysis and visualisation. This, in turn, makes it possible to make decisions based on unbiased data which, in turn, also helps to implement the precautionary principle (eMSP NBSR Policy Brief "Strengthening Data sharing for informed decision-making in MSP").

MSP is crucial for the sustainability, efficiency and resilience of the blue economy. Hence, it helps balancing economic growth and marine ecosystem conservation, which in turn benefits societies, economies and the environment.

Multi-use, the next step

The efforts to develop multi-use provide a useful insight into better understanding drivers and barriers of multi-use possibilities. Drivers include e.g. the synergies and economies of scale, while the barriers are considerable and diverse (see also conclusions from the MUSES project). The ROAS2SID project came with a similar conclusion: “While possible synergies between different uses promise a great future, there are a few technological, economic, ecological, and regulatory challenges that need to be overcome before a seamless symbiosis is achieved”. Viewed from a distance, the barriers are actually risks that need to be overcome. This calls for a targeted approach in five fields in order to reduce risks to an acceptable level, namely:

- Collaborative Governance: close cooperation and coordination with relevant stakeholders to align policies with the needs private parties;
- Regulatory Support: clear adaptive regulatory frameworks on liability, permitting and environmental impact assessments;
- Technology development: developing robust, efficient and safe technologies;
- Innovative business models: designing commercially viable business models;
- Financing and investment: setting up financial incentive instruments, especially for the start-up phase towards scale-up.

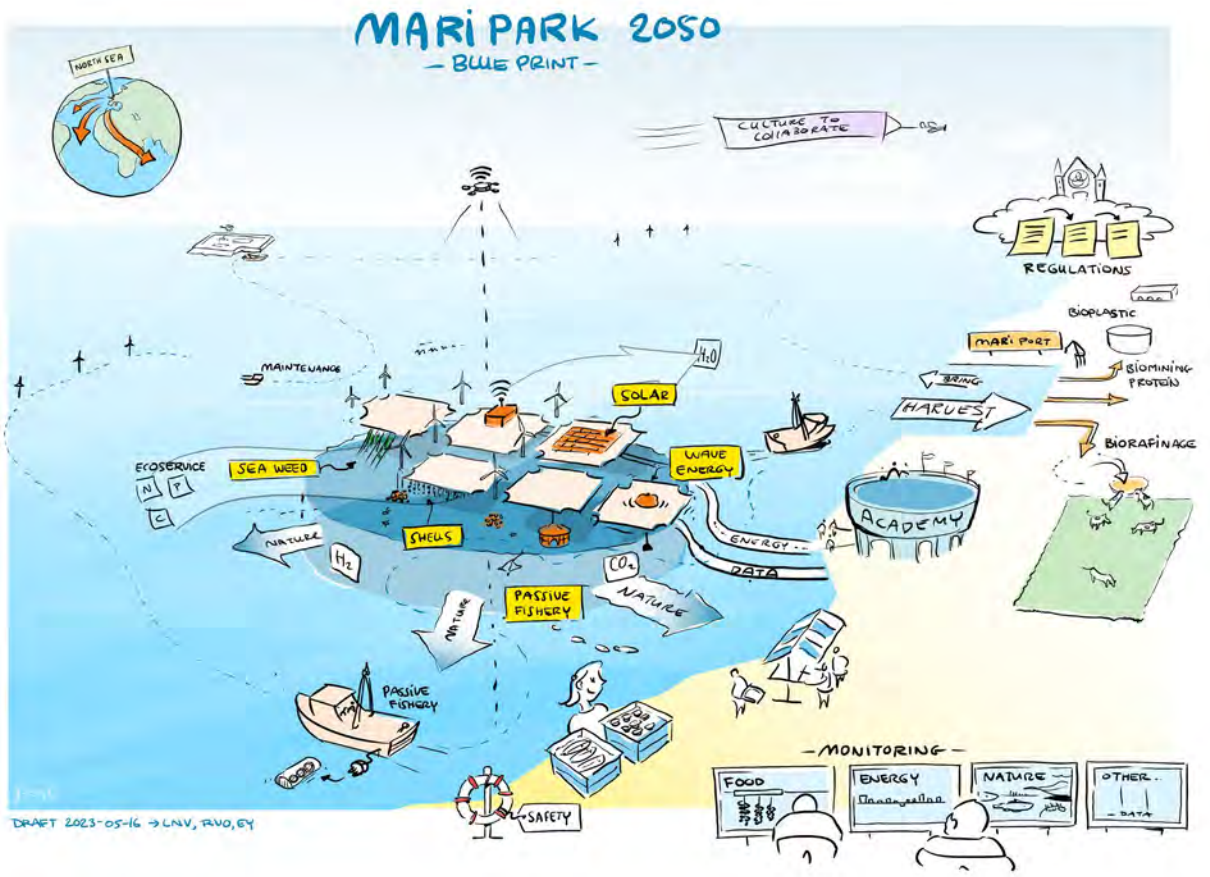
These fields are interdependent, partly because multi-use largely consists of newly established sectors in an environment that requires a totally new approach. Government, research and companies all have important roles to play here. Government stimulates, research supports policy development and the development of new techniques, and companies work on commercially viable business models.

The Maripark concept

As a way to most efficiently cover the above mentioned demands, we introduce the overarching concept of a Maripark. A Maripark is tangible concept for multi-use, as well as nature-inclusive business area, which can facilitate and accelerate the transition from sector-specific, single-use activities to sector-unspecific, multi-use business approaches.

A Maripark provides basic physical infrastructure that facilitates the development of multi-use initiatives. By providing shared physical infrastructure, such as anchors, docking facilities, and sensors, and by leveraging technologies such as drone technology, a Maripark facilitates the development of multi-use initiatives in a cost-effective and sustainable manner.

A Maripark serves as an all-encompassing, versatile department or overarching organizational body dedicated to facilitating and optimizing multi-use initiatives. It operates as a central authority for the efficient management of these initiatives.



Co-visual together with Joost Fluitsma

Recommendations

1

We recommend focusing on broad integrated research on all quantified impacts of climate change on the Blue Economy as a whole. This includes existing blue economies, such as tourism, shipping and fisheries, and emerging economies such as offshore seaweed and shellfish farming and offshore renewable energy. Quantification of these impacts can help including mitigating measures targeting these impacts in the EU member state's maritime spatial plans.

2

We recommend identifying (cumulative) human pressure factors, like for example mentioned in the key messages from the 'QSR2023' and the 'State of the Baltic Sea 2023' report, and making spatial and policy choices based on these factors that will trigger a movement to achieve a sustainable blue economy.

3

Achieving a sustainable blue economy requires a delicate balance between all the different interests and needs of the various users of the sea. At the same time, the precautionary principle must be applied, to ensure the activities do not negatively impact each other and/or the environment. We recommended, identifying mitigating measures, for the benefit of nature or people, in advance. When setting up a mitigating package of measures, it is advisable to investigate synergies and economies of scale that may arise precisely as a result of increased activities at sea.

4

We recommend including and integrating multiple use in the design of new wind farms. The preconditions needed to make multi-use successful can then also be included in the programme of requirements of new wind farms. For existing wind farms, we recommend that policy, laws and regulations provide clarity on multi-use of space and, here too, the preconditions to make multi-use possible.

5

It is clear that for multi-use to grow into a mature sector, it needs an overarching approach in which all stakeholders work intensively together from their own roles and responsibilities. We recommend. Setting up a public-private partnership to help to reduce risks to an acceptable (entrepreneurial) level in a coherent and pragmatic way ensuring the realisation of societal values.

6

We recommend the creation of an entity co-responsible for use of space at sea, the organisation and streamlining of such use, and responsible for the realisation and maintenance of basic infrastructure for multi-use at sea.

7

It is paramount to develop a list of requirements for each individual Maripark. Since each Maripark will provide services to different possible forms of usage. Food production requires a different infrastructure than for example renewable energy of maybe even nature development.

8

Provide a regulatory framework to make the realization of Mariparks possible. Ensure that a solid balance is established between the responsibilities of the government and the private sector, also through property or usage rights, to ensure the viability of Mariparks.

9

Ensure cooperation and collaboration on an equal level between all relevant organizations and individuals to ensure can further enhance knowledge sharing, learning, networking, collaboration, and innovation within their communities, thus fostering a more robust multi-use environment. A Community of Practice way of working proved to be a very relevant and vibrant method to do so.

10

The increasing use of the sea also requires effective coordination at the operational level among various forms of usage. Sharing basic infrastructure in this context can lead to cost reduction for all parties involved. Therefore, we recommend that the scope of Maripark not only provides services for emerging multi-use initiatives but also for the existing blue economy.

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Disclaimer:

This policy brief has been developed within in the eMSP NBSR project. It is based on insights of the persons participating in the project and does not necessarily exactly mirror the views of their organisations and nations.

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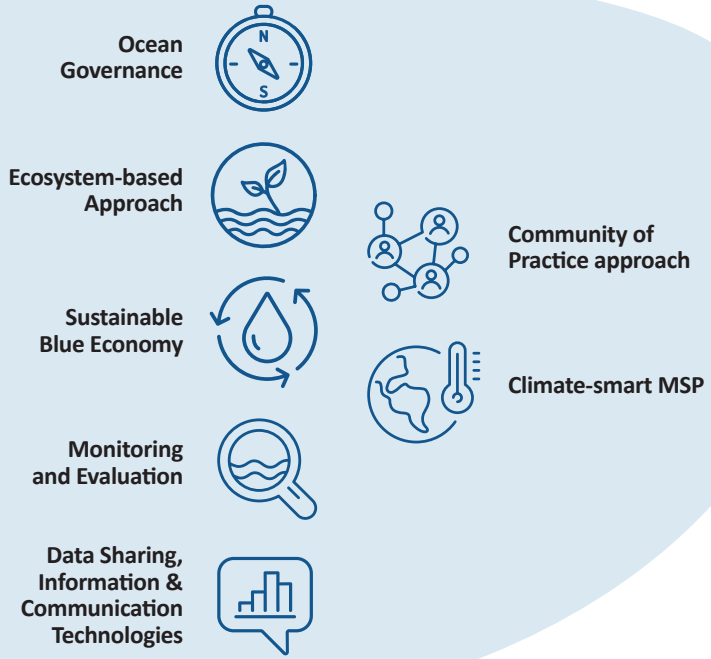

The eMSP NBSR project, implemented from September 2021 to February 2024, provided a platform for marine spatial planners and other experts to collaboratively advance MSP practice. It addressed five urgent emerging MSP topics through a community of practice-based approach that enabled joint learning across professions and across the North Sea and Baltic Sea areas.

Project work took into account the European Green Deal, climate change and how climate-neutrality targets can be addressed in MSP.

The planners and experts were supported by a method mentoring team and a scientific advisory board.

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