



Advancing transboundary governance: Baltic and North Sea challenges and prospects

Insights from the Northern European Sea Basins Project



Session moderator: Magdalena Matczak

Maritime spatial planning and blue economy
research at the Maritime Institute in Gdańsk



The session

**-> aims to identify pathways
for transboundary and sea-basin-level governance
that are more adaptive,
inclusive, and coherent.**

**-> is offering insights into how cross-basin learning and
dialogue can help future-proof MSP-related governance
structures across European sea regions**

Before we start, we would like to ask you:

**What would you need to do to make
transboundary cooperation fail?**

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Framing the future of the North Sea: why international MSP is essential

Prof. Dr. Christian Zuidema

Department of Spatial Planning & Environment, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen



The North Sea

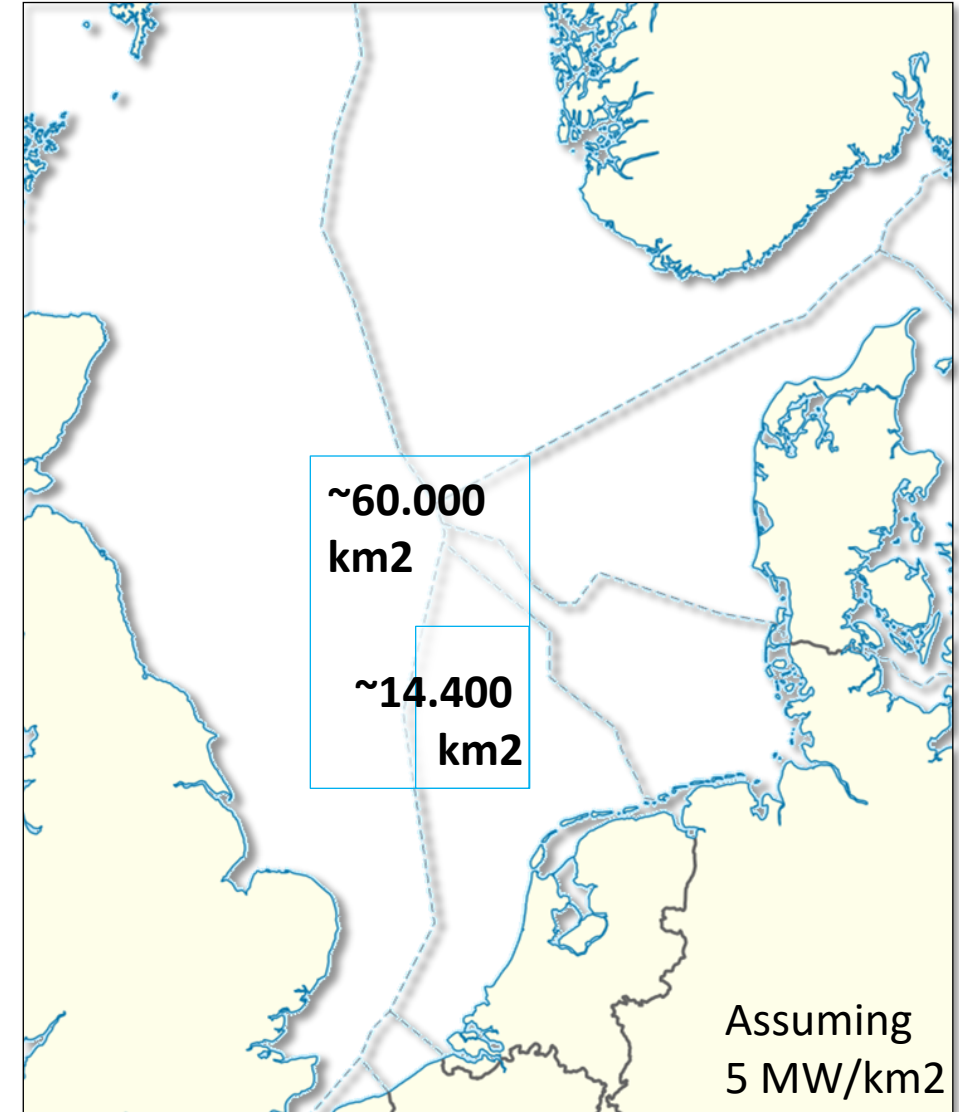
North Sea: 33 GW to 300+ GW

Netherlands: 4,7 GW to 70+ GW

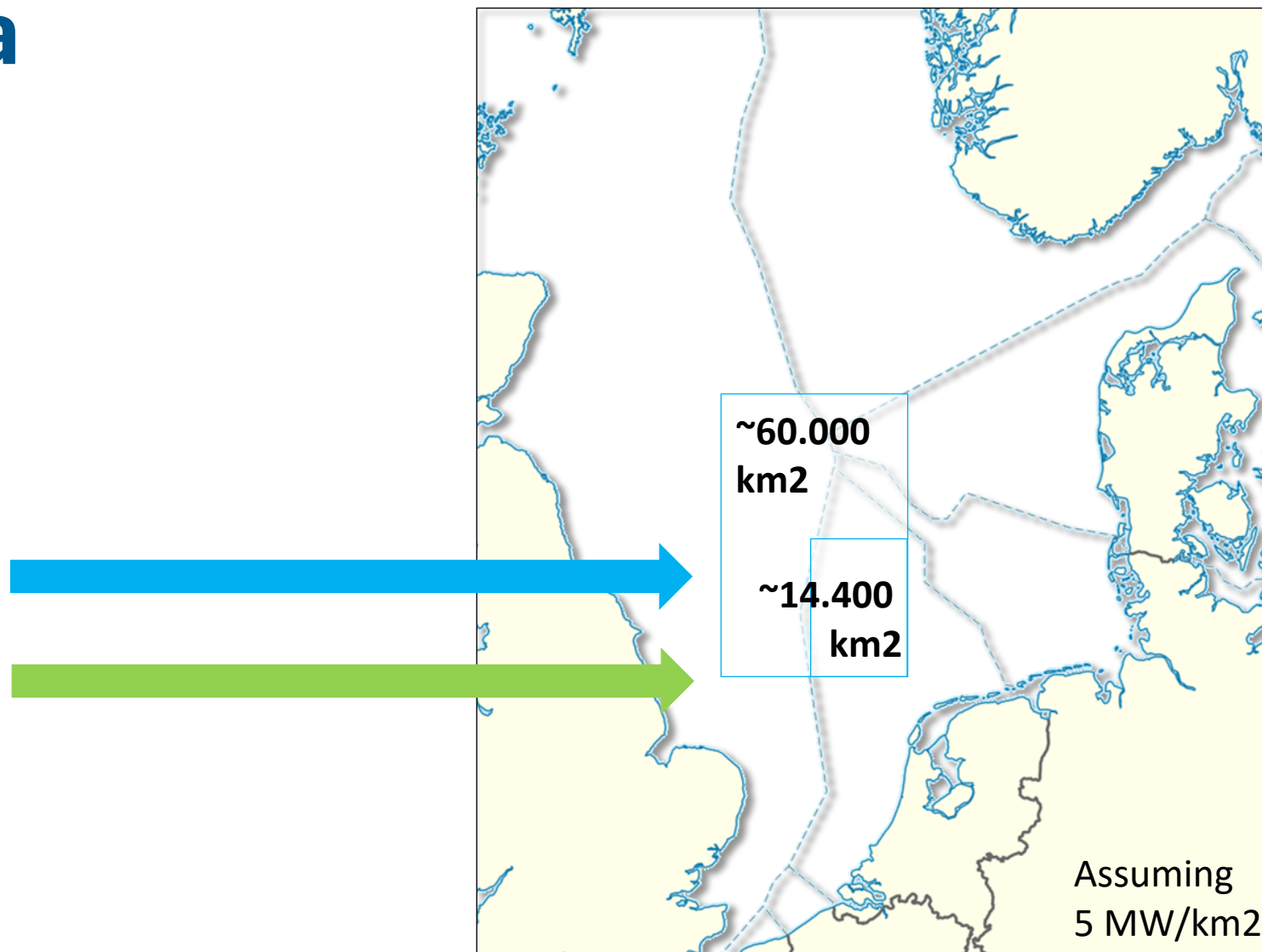
The North Sea

North Sea: 33 GW to 300+ GW

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The North Sea





The North Sea

Do we have enough ecological space?

Do we have enough physical space?

Do we have enough institutional capacity?



Ecological space

Taking an ‘ecosystem-based approach’

Develop ‘within the boundaries of the ecological system’

But what does it mean?

- Contested interpretations
- Limited legal clarity
- Hard to operationalize



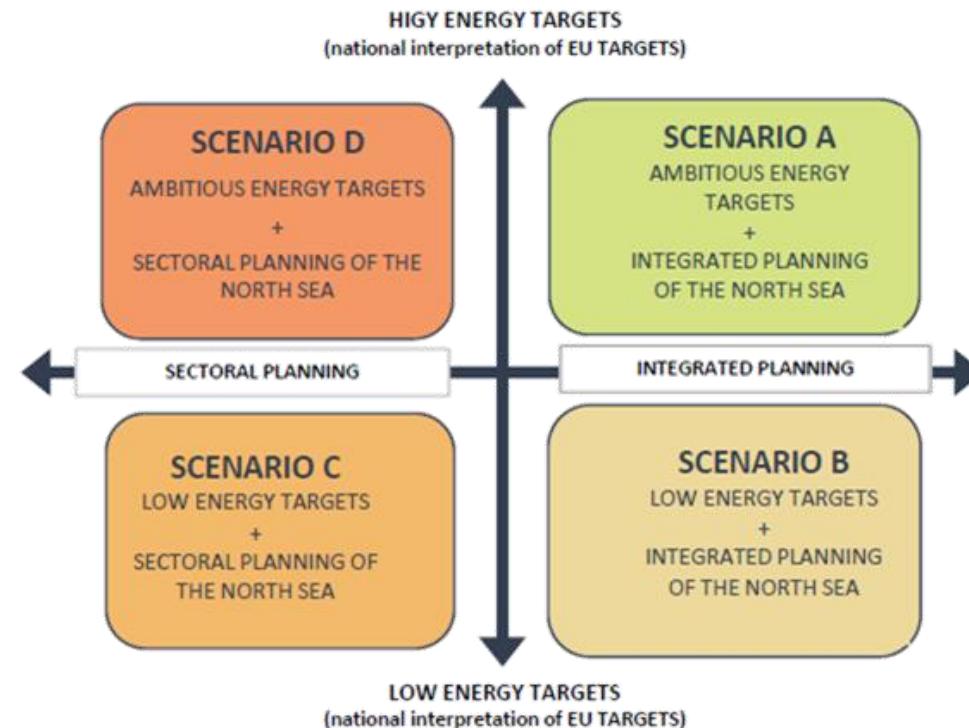
Ecological space

- Still limited ecological knowledge & methods
- Constraints to international data sharing and compatibility
- Strong focus on legally-protected species (Kusters et al., 2024)
- Science – policy interface is challenging (De Vries et al., 2024)

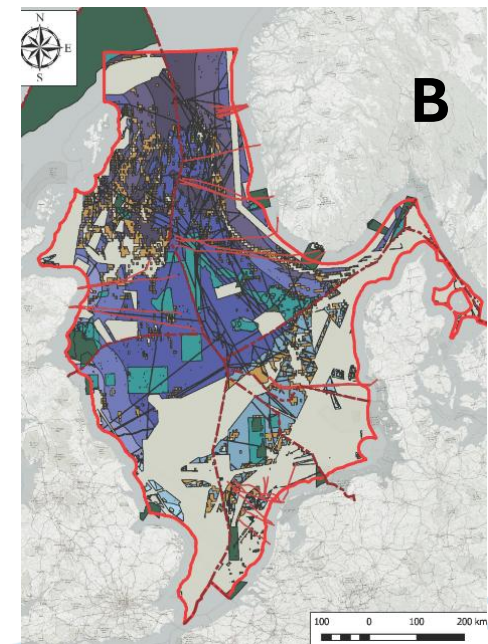
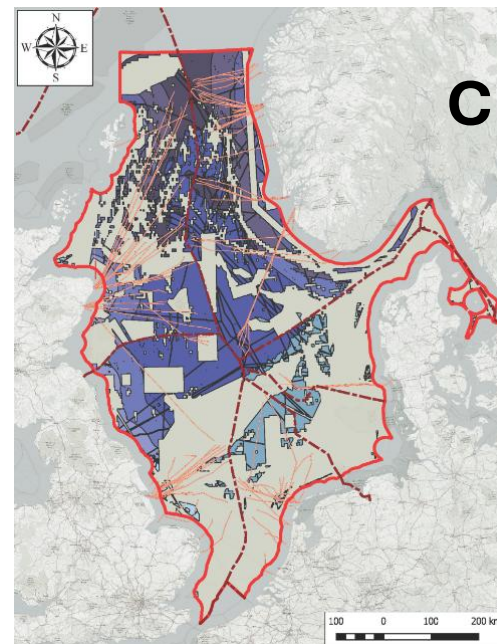
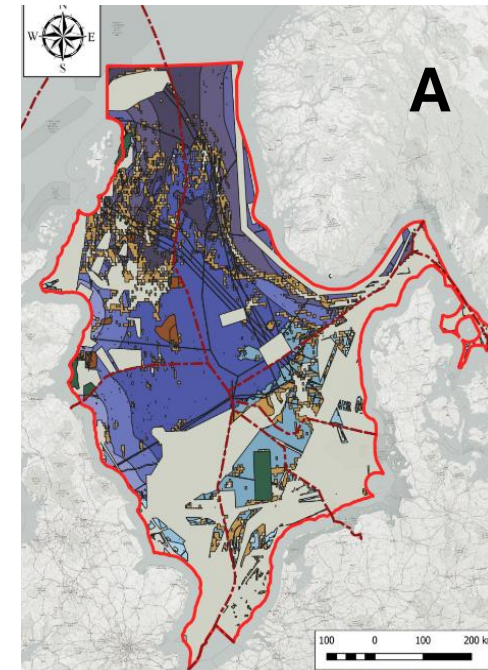
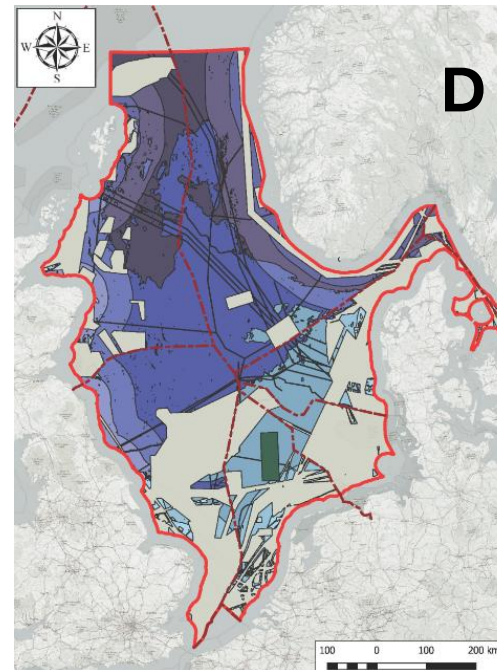
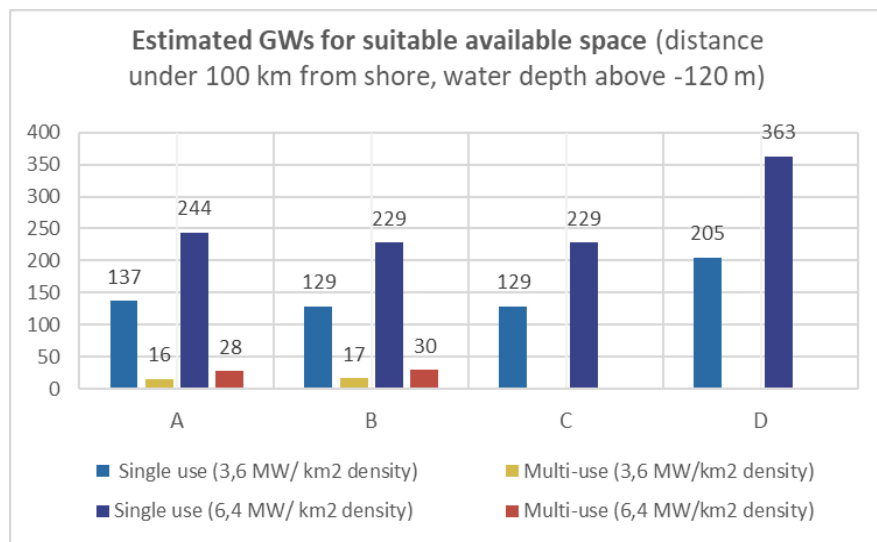
Physical space

Physical space is dynamically dependent on policy preferences and conflict resolution potential

Working with scenarios of
'what could happen'
(Gusatu et al., 2020)



Physical space



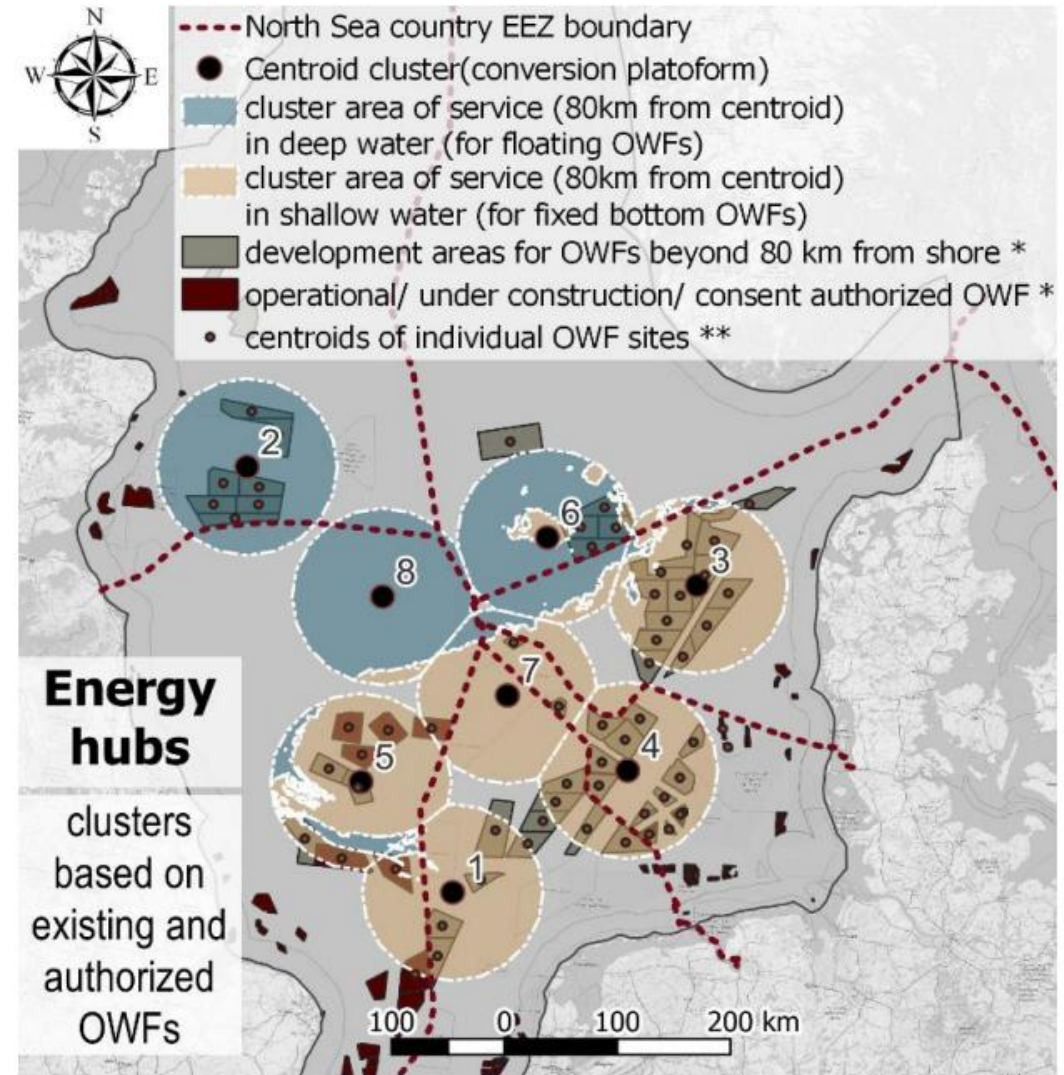
Physical space

More detail:

- Go for an integrated grid?

(Martinez-Gordón et al., 2022)

(Gusatu et al., 2023)



Physical space

A0: Integral planning

A1: 50% co-use between OWF and fisheries

A2: 10% co-use in nature protection areas

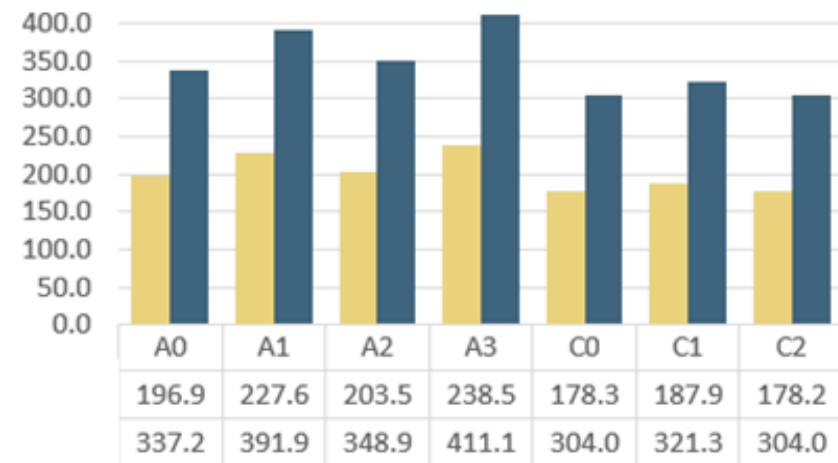
A3: both

C0: Sectoral planning (NO multiuse)

C1: replace 10% fisheries

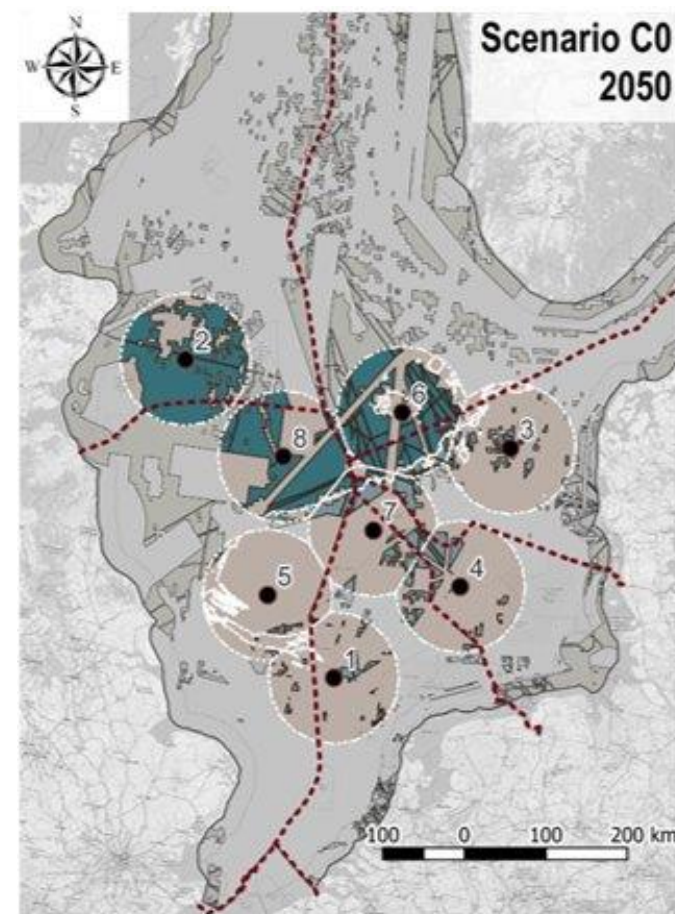
C2: replace 2% nature protection

Potential for 2050



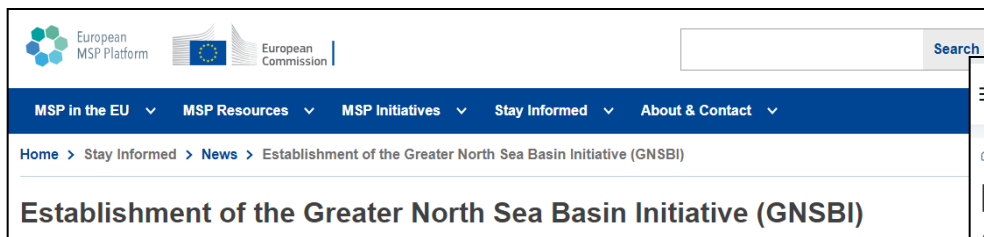
Physical space

- North Sea country EEZ boundary
 - Centroid cluster (conversion station)
 - Cluster area (80 km service area from centroid)
 - Multi-use: fixed bottom OWFs (10%) in research areas
 - available areas outside the defined clusters
- Available space for OWFs (single use)
- Areas for floating OWFs (under 55 m depth)
 - Areas for fixed bottom OWFs (over 55 m depth)
- Predominantly fishig activities (10% OWFs)
- Areas for floating OWFs (under 55 m depth)
 - Areas for fixed bottom OWFs (over 55 m depth)
- Areas reserved for nature protection areas extension
- Areas for floating OWFs (under 55 m depth)
 - Areas for fixed bottom OWFs (over 55 m depth)
- Multi-use: floating OWFs (10%) in general use areas
- Multi-use: fixed bottom OWFs (10%) in general use areas



International MSP?

- 1 International coordination may allow smarter use of space with potentially lower costs and ecological impacts
 - › But considerable differences between national approaches to conflict resolution (Kusters et al. 2025)
 - › Reluctance to stronger or more formalized international forms of MSP (Kusters et al., 2025)





International MSP?

2 Integrated and international coordinated policies and (multi-use) projects may unlock tens of GWs, notably in the southern North Sea

- › Fragmented planning processes (Spijkerboer et al., 2021)
- › Institutional ambiguities, particularly regarding institutional arrangements concerning responsibility and ownership (Kusters et al., 2025; Andreasson, 2024)



International MSP?

3 System integration is per definition also across shores

- › A relative strong focus on technology, but little attention to regulatory and institutional dimensions (Wiegner et al., 2024)
- › While novel technologies, uses and solutions are not easily reaching the process of agenda setting (Kusters et al., 2023)
- › And regulatory space for international projects, transport and cooperation remains constrained (Andreasson, 2024)

Are we moving?



Limited resources (time, staff, knowledge) for strategic planning (Kusters et al., 2025)

A reliance on a sectoral focus on offshore wind energy and a short-term fixation on 2030 targets limit the uptake of energy innovations (Spijkerboer et al., 2021; Kusters et al., 2023)

Strict sectoral choices limit the institutional space that may allow for more strategic choices and, in turn, complicate finding physical space for offshore energy transition (Kusters, 2025)

Thank you!



Gaps and opportunities in transboundary governance: a Baltic and North Sea perspective

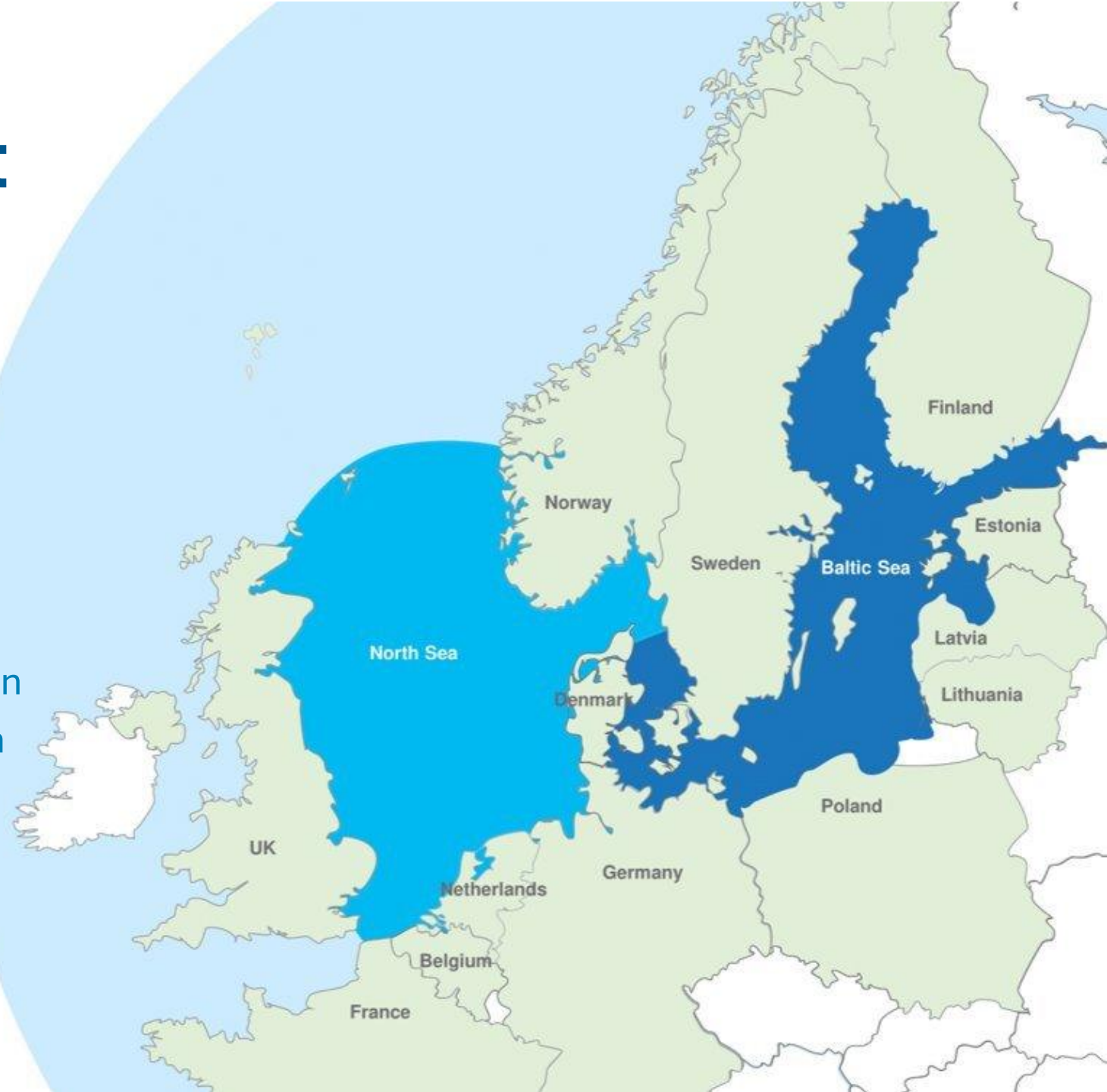
Prof. Dr. Jacek Zaucha & Juul Kusters

Gdynia Maritime University & University of Groningen

The NESB project

WP2 Ocean governance aims to:

- **Review current mechanisms for collaboration** on MSP-related governance and explore their further development
- **Enhance (multi-level) governance** in the Greater North Sea and Baltic Sea regions
- Enable **cross-sea basin learning**



The NESB project

WP2 Ocean governance aims to:

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Initial
scoping

Preliminary
assessment

Further
scoping

Conduct in-
depth
assessment

A wide variety of collaborations

Formal body
fostering
cooperation

Baltic Sea region



Greater North Sea



Strategic-
level collaboration
with political
support



Technical-level,
more informal
collaboration

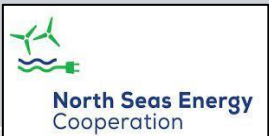
**H-V MSP Working Group
+ BSR DATA SHARING**

**North Sea MSP
Collaboration Group**

Transboundary collaboration in the Baltic Sea region

Organisation	Type	Strength	Decision-makers	Future	Products (except reports)
HELCOM 	Intergovernmental cooperation , focused on the marine environment and sustainable marine activities	Long term cooperation platform with experts , recognizable actor valued by other international organizations	Strategic level steering group (Contracting Parties – HoD) and technical working groups on various topics	Baltic Sea Action Plan	HOLAS,
VASAB 	Intergovernmental cooperation , focused on spatial planning and development	Advanced network implementing spatial vision for the BSR	Strategic level steering group (CSPD/BSR) and technical working groups on various topics	VASAB Vision 2040	Spatial Planning Country Fiches, Young Planners' Summer Schools
CBSS 	Macro-regional strategy for cooperation	A unique multifaceted cooperation platform with committed experts	Strategic level steering group (EU Commission + NCO) and technical working groups on various topics	The Baltic 2030 Action Plan	The Baltic Sea Region Network of Volunteer Organisations and Authorities
EUSBSR 	Intergovernmental political forum for Baltic Sea cooperation	Long-term multifaceted, multi connected strategic cooperation	Strategic level steering group (CSO) and technical working groups on various topics	The EUSBSR Action Plan	EUSBSR Annual Forum 2025
H-V MSP WG + MSP Data sharing sub-group	MSP cooperation among the Baltic Sea Region countries for coherent regional MSP	Forum for experts with broad experience and expertise in MSP + Harmonizing the output data at the Baltic level	Planners from all HELCOM-VASAB affiliated countries	Workplan for the Joint HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG (now – 2025-2027)	(Report) Regional Baltic MSP Roadmap

Transboundary collaboration in the Greater North Sea region

Organisation	Type	Strength	Decision-makers	Future	Products (except reports)
OSPAR 	Intergovernmental cooperation , focused on environmental protection of the Northeast Atlantic	Extensive scientific base for monitoring and assessment with long history of experience and strong network	Strategic level steering group (Contracting Parties – HoD) and technical committees on various topics	North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2030	(report) Annual - Quality Status Reports (QSR)
GNSBI 	Voluntary collaboration with strong political support and cross-sectoral orientation	Integrated approach (sea basin-wide + cross-sectoral), Voluntary nature	<i>In progress</i>	<i>"To build on existing mechanisms to strengthen and renew the cooperation"</i>	<i>In progress</i>
NSEC 	Voluntary collaboration with strong political support focused on offshore renewable energy	Strong network with high political support – voluntary nature "coalition of willing"	Strategic level steering group (Contracting Parties – Ministerial level) and technical support groups	Work programme - reach at least 300 GW of offshore wind energy by 2050	The Odense Recommendation - boosting offshore wind energy in the North Sea region
North Sea MSP Collaboration Group	Informal group to exchange information and align input for international policy developments	Large diversity of attendees, strengthens information sharing	Marine Spatial Planners from all North Sea countries	Fostering cross-border cooperation	Shared information and experiences among national planning authorities

Common gaps and opportunities

					HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working Group				North Seas MSP Collaboration group
Resources	X ✓	X ✓	X ✓	X	X ✓	X ✓	X	X	
Overlap and quantity of work	X		X				X		
Political support	X	X	X	X ✓	X ✓	X	✓	X ✓	
Strength of network	✓	✓	✓	X ✓	✓	✓	✓	X ✓	✓
Accountability and (in)formality	X ✓	X ✓	X ✓	X ✓	X	✓	X ✓	X ✓	✓
National processes					X		X	X	X



Key lessons and takeaways

- There is a **rich network** of transboundary organizational structures
- Yet, **cohesion collapses under boundaries**
- So, there is a need for **flexible** and **agile organizations** that can respond to new developments

Any questions? Do we even need collaboration?



Practitioners' perspectives

HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working Group

Kai Trümpler

Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency, Germany

Greater North Sea Basin Initiative

Nick Boxem

Marine Policy Directorate, Government of the Netherlands , GNSBI Steering Group member

Interreg
Baltic Sea Region



Co-funded by
the European Union



BLUE ECONOMY

Baltic Sea2Land

**5th BALTIC MSP
FORUM**

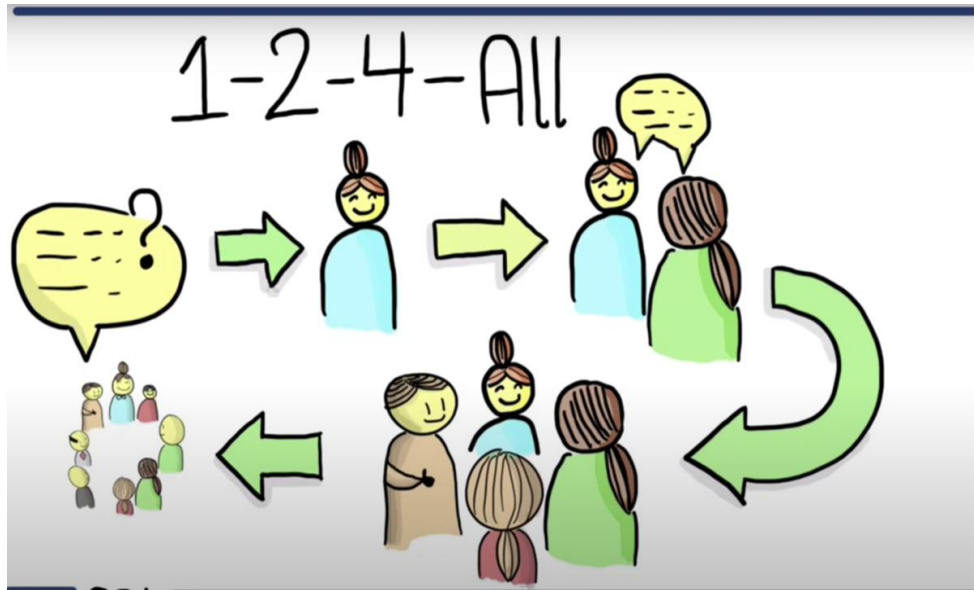


11-12 November 2025 Riga, Latvia

We'd love to hear your thoughts!

www.BalticMSPForum.eu

What we will be doing



Round 1: 1 min individual thinking
→ write your thoughts on the post-its!

Round 2: 2-5 min discussion with your neighbor

Round 3: 10 min discussion at your table

Wrapping up with plenary reflection



We'd love to hear your thoughts!

- Why would we even need transboundary collaboration?
- What does the ideal collaboration look like according to you?
 - Are current collaborations fit-for-purpose?

Now, after our session, we would like to ask you:

**What will be your commitment after this session
to make transboundary cooperation work and
improve?**

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THANK YOU!