BONUS POLICY BRIEF: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR MSP INTEGRATION IN THE BALTIC SEA

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Marine/maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) aims to promote sustainable governance of marine and coastal areas and resources. This is a challenging task that involves problems of integration over various types of jurisdictional and geographical boundaries and between different sectors, policies, stakeholders and forms of knowledge.

This policy brief presents key policy-relevant research findings from BONUS BALTSPACE on challenges and possibilities to address integration in MSP. The brief is intended for authorities responsible for MSP processes and all interested and affected stakeholders and policy makers. The recommendations provided here are based on key findings from in-depth case studies at different scales spanning from VASAB-HELCOM's Baltic-wide efforts, to national and subnational marine areas under the jurisdiction of Sweden and Denmark, Germany, Lithuania and Poland. Although the focus of BONUS BALTSPACE research has been on the Baltic Sea region, it is argued that lessons learned also can be valuable for coping with MSP integration challenges in other marine areas.

Identifying and understanding MSP integration challenges

Research on Baltic Sea MSP performed in BONUS BALTSPACE identifies the following integration dimensions as key MSP challenges: (i) across various types of administrative and geographical borders, (ii) across sector and policy boundaries, (iii) stakeholder integration and (iv) knowledge integration. The main findings on the identified integration challenges are summarised below:

Integration across administrative and geographical borders is pivotal to enhance functional coherence in the planning of marine areas, particularly at the macro-regional, Baltic Sea wide level. A key challenge is to promote effectiveness and synergies between parallel planning efforts in MSP at different administrative levels and in different countries and regions. This is important, since MSP is grounded in many regulations, norms, and practices at each of the planning levels: European, macro-regional (Baltic Sea region) and national (at times including regional and local levels). Moreover, various interrelated MSP objectives, roles and functions are pursued at different jurisdictional levels in MSP processes.

One major challenge of **policy integration** is to increase coherence between relevant global policies, EU Directives, macro-regional commitments, national regulations and strategies, and national implementation. This is especially complex in MSP, as planning is typically embedded in different regulatory and ideological contexts. Also, bringing together **different sectors** and matching their goals, targets and ambitions and expectations towards the marine environment and its resources is important to foster sustainable development of marine areas and to avoid a domination of well organised lobbies.

The ambition with regard to **stakeholder integration** is an early and broad participation of stakeholders. This remains a challenge, since – despite a growing agreement on the need for such social inclusiveness – most stakeholder involvement in Baltic Sea MSP processes have so far been temporary/project-driven and/or restricted to authorities and key sector representatives. The

reasons for broader stakeholder involvement can be both practical (e.g. improved MSP processes and outcomes) and value and rights based (e.g. linked to democratic rights to participate).

One of the key challenges related to **knowledge integration** in MSP centres on how to mix expert and scientific knowledge with other types of stakeholder knowledge to improve the MSP knowledge base. Fair and open communication between scientists/experts and other stakeholders can foster mutual learning across groups over time. However, different deficits and limitations of knowledge, scientific uncertainty and scientific disagreement among different disciplinary perspectives are also important challenges to address.

Importantly, BONUS BALTSPACE results show that, although integration challenges as outlined here show considerable similarities in different situations, they can also vary significantly in various national and subnational MSP settings. This means that a systematic approach to assess and cope with integration challenges is needed and that this approach needs to be sensitive to problems and opportunities in specific national and subnational MSP situations. Below we present overarching and specific recommendations:

Key overarching recommendation on integration in MSP in the Baltic Sea region

The overarching message is that MSP can be a valuable vehicle for addressing crucial integration challenges in marine management, but additional action is needed to optimise these possibilities for the Baltic Sea region (BSR). **MSP authorities should translate and contextualise the integration dimensions into their planning processes and evaluation approaches.**

- Transboundary/multiscale – work across various types of administrative and geographical borders to contribute to cooperation, collaboration and coherent planning and spatial use between governance levels and across jurisdictions (e.g. at the cross-national and regional levels, between various levels of governance);

- Policy/sector – identify and address sector use incompatibilities and simultaneously work for desired interaction and synergies between sector interests;

- Stakeholders – develop processes supporting meaningful engagement of a broad range of stakeholders, redressing uneven power relations, while constructively integrating conflicting views;

- Knowledge – further enhance the evidence-base of MSP by developing ways to combine different forms of (scientific) disciplinary and other types of knowledge to help address uncertainty and to aid stakeholder engagement.

Specific recommendations on how to enhance the capacity of MSP to address MSP integration challenges in the Baltic Sea region

Integration across various types of administrative and geographical borders and boundaries

1. MSP in BSR countries is set up differently in accordance with national planning contexts and administrative cultures. Here, **the HELCOM-VASAB WG on MSP needs to find an agreement on which incompatibilities (e.g. differences in values, goals, priorities, ambitions, administrative routines etc.) between countries are most urgent to address to ensure coherence of the planning efforts at a Baltic-Sea level.**

2. **The HELCOM-VASAB WG on MSP** should try to **enhance interaction among national sectoral and regional/local level administrations** to promote the diffusion of shared knowledge and experiences at all levels. This can contribute to improved coherence, especially if visions and MSP principles agreed at the Baltic-wide level are acknowledged and operationalised**.**

3. To improve cross-border integration, e.g. in areas with potential for transboundary conflict, **national MSP authorities could promote the establishment of bilateral or regional groups to discuss planning issues and share experiences in specific interest areas.** This is particularly relevant for areas, where MSP responsibility is shared across several levels of governance with important cross-border implications.

Policy/sector integration

4. An exclusive focus on binding EU Directives and treaties can result in missed opportunities to **exploit policy and cross-sectoral synergies** that may benefit all parties. It is therefore important, together with neighbouring countries, to systematically search for such synergies while transposing international obligations. Moreover, there should be a mutual awareness between countries of the implications of national MSP strategies in terms of compatibility and coherence.

5. Closer interaction between environmental protection and resource use sectors within countries can lead to improved and shared understanding of how the **environmental protection and development of maritime/Blue Growth sectors together may promote long-term sustainability**. This, in turn, can facilitate regional collaboration. One way to achieve this can be to establish cross-sectoral working groups to identify and address contentious MSP issues.

6. In parallel with overall integration between the Ecosystem Approach and Blue Growth, **regional groups of specialists** can be set up to refine coordination of policies on specific MSP components to address potential trade-offs and seek synergies between policies and sectors.

Stakeholder integration

7. MSP should seek to **engage a broad range of stakeholders**, including authorities and well-organised interests and other interested or affected parties, **early in MSP. Stakeholder participation in MSP needs further development,** built on evaluation and reflection on earlier and ongoing participation processes by authorities in dialogue with society and academia. Also, legal minimum requirements and other incentives affecting stakeholder involvement need to be scrutinised in relation to the mobilisation and balancing of various societal groups.

8. **Stakeholder involvement in MSP may need to become more continuous than the formal process** and **clearer in its aims**. MSP authorities should develop stakeholder analyses that provide a rationale for whom to involve and when to involve them. The development and maintenance of trust and communication channels for exchange and learning takes time and requires continuity. Existing collaboration networks and projects can be used as a base, but should be kept open for new stakeholders. Authorities should also **explore non-statutory forums and methods** beyond formal MSP procedures. In developing such informal participation, it is important to take steps to maintain sufficient transparency.

9. An open, inclusive approach to participation in MSP requires that **stakeholders have the capacity and resources to participate effectively and meaningfully**. Stakeholders' interests, needs, expectations and possibilities to engage in MSP may vary greatly within and among user groups (e.g. fishing and recreation), as well as change over time. In countries starting up their MSP processes, it may be necessary to mobilise, inform and train specific groups as well as the public. **Authorities designing and moderating MSP processes need to have the capacity, time and resources** to provide access, legitimacy and transparency for various groups and remain attentive to complexity and changes in the stakeholder landscape.

Knowledge integration

10. **Strategic Environmental Assessments as foreseen by the EU SEA Directive or sustainability appraisals as performed in the UK may offer potential to integrate ecological and social knowledge**. To realise this, there is a need to map and assess socio-cultural values and knowledge as well as other types of expert and lay knowledge more routinely through MSP processes. Such a SEA will need broad stakeholder engagement and incentives to promote knowledge sharing.

11. **MSP should use social science** to develop approaches to better support stakeholder engagement, as well as open and democratic forms of MSP decision-making, particularly in case of tensions and conflicts in MSP settings. Social science might also help in eliciting values, interests, beliefs, and critically analysing MSP processes. Equally important is advancement of research on MSP governance and to improve public access and Baltic-wide sharing of relevant information from research, sectoral organisations etc.

12. MSP authorities will benefit from development of **robust evaluative criteria to judge the sufficiency and quality of the evidence base**, including consideration of uncertainties and the

limits of science. Where knowledge is lacking or its credibility or saliency is questioned, interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary (involving experts and non-experts in collaboration) knowledge production may usefully supplement MSP decision-making.

Multidimensional integration

Although this policy brief has primarily examined integration challenges in isolation, BONUS BALTSPACE research shows that it is important to pay attention and address their interactions and cumulative impacts when developing and governing specific MSP processes. For example, the way stakeholder integration is addressed will also influence knowledge integration. Recommendations provided below are focused on such broader findings related to multiple integration challenges in MSP:

13. MSP processes have to be considered as equally important as the plan itself. Addressing integration can improve the process. Therefore, **the aims of integration should be clearly defined, and criteria measuring progress towards addressing integration challenges (and real benefits) should be developed when designing the MSP process.**

14. **Integration in MSP should not be a remedy for all types of problems** associated with the use of sea space and marine resources. MSP cannot ensure only win-win solutions by enhanced integration. However, if conducted in an integrated way, MSP **can enable the development of mutual understanding, compromises and collaboration**, as well as the **identification of fundamentally different interests, values and unavoidable trade-offs**.

15. **Temporal aspects of integration are important to conside**r. This includes continual interaction and exchange of viewpoints between MSP actors across borders and levels as differences in timing of MSP processes will be unavoidable. MSP authorities must take account of the different time horizons of various national MSP and other governance processes, such as the EU's MSFD and CFP. Attention to temporal aspects will enhance MSP's ability to adapt to changing environmental and social conditions over time. This will require involvement of key stakeholders, close co-operation among sectoral authorities within countries, as well as among MSP authorities in neighbouring countries already during the MSP design phase.

16. **Integration requires institutional capacity building for MSP.** This will take time and resources as well as political commitment. A qualitative change of governance practices is needed to address the integration challenges outlined here. This would comprise a shift to a less expert driven and **more bottom-up approach involving a broader range of stakeholders and the inclusion of a wider knowledge base** (beyond natural sciences and including experience-based knowledge). Such a shift would need to occur at different planning levels – from the EU Commission and other international institutional fora down to MSP authorities and MSP stakeholders at national and sub-national levels.

Contact details and acknowledgements

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MSP integration challenges

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01 Horizontal & vertical integration

Integration across administrative and geographical borders is pivotal to enhance functional coherence in the planning of marine areas, particularly at the macro-regional, Baltic Sea wide level. A key challenge is to promote effectiveness and synergies between parallel planning efforts in MSP at different administrative levels and in different countries and regions. This is important, since MSP is grounded in many regulations, norms, and practices at each of the planning levels: European, macro-regional (Baltic Sea region) and national (at times including regional and local levels). Moreover, various interrelated MSP objectives, roles and functions are pursued at different jurisdictional levels in MSP processes.

02 Policy and sector integration

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03 Stakeholder integration

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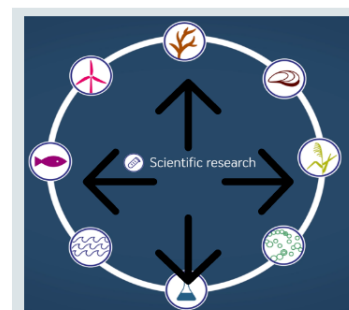
Solutions: Multi-dimensional integration

MSP should not be seen as a remedy to all types of problems. It can enable development and mutual understanding, compromises and collaboration.

Temporal aspects of integration are important to consider. MPS authorities must take into account different time horizons of processes.

The aims of integration should be clearly defined, and criteria measuring progress should be developed.

Integration requires institutional capacity building. A more bottom-up approach involving stakeholders and a wider knowledge base is required.

Recommendations / solutions for specific challenges

Hor. & Vertical

The HELCOM-VASAB WG on MSP needs to find an agreement on which incompatibilities (e.g. differences in values, goals, priorities, ambitions, administrative routines etc.) between countries are most urgent to address to ensure coherence of the planning efforts at a Baltic-Sea level.

The HELCOM-VASAB WG on MSP should try to enhance interaction among national sectoral and regional/local level administrations

National MSP authorities could promote the establishment of bilateral or regional groups to discuss planning issues and share experiences in specific interest areas.

Policy & sector

Systematically search to eploit policy and cross-sectoral synergies while transposing international obligations.

Closer interaction between environmental protection and resource use (Blue growth) sectors to promote long-term sustainability

Regional groups of specialists can be set up to refine coordination of policies on specific MSP components to address potential trade-offs and seek synergies between policies and sectors.

Stakeholder

Engagement of stakeholders at relatively early stages of the MSP process should be enhanced

Stakeholder involvement in MSP may need to become more continuous than the formal process and clearer in its aims. Authorities should also explore non-statutory forums and methods

Improve the capacity and resources of stakeholders to participate effectively and meaningfully. Also authorities designing and moderating MSP processes need to have the capacity, time and resources
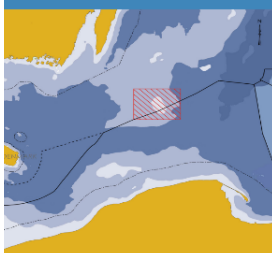
Knowledge

Strategic Environmenta Assessments as foreseen by the EU SEA Directive or sustainability appraisals as performed in the UK may offer potential to integrate ecological and socia knowledge.

MSP should use socia science to develop approaches to better support stakeholder engagement, as well as open and democratic forms of MSP decision-making

Develop robust evaluative criteria to judge the sufficiency and quality of the evidence base, including consideration of uncertainties and the limits of science.

The BaltSPACE project

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SCIENCE FOR A BETTER FUTURE OF THE BALTIC SEA REGION

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