BONUS BRIEFING DOCUMENT: THE ROLE OF TOOLS IN PROMOTING INTEGRATION

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Background

The EU Directive on Maritime Spatial Planning, adopted in July 2014, requires all relevant Member States to prepare maritime spatial plans by 2021. The Directive stipulates that plans should take into account land-sea interactions and consider environmental, economic and social aspects. They should also promote coherence between MSP and other related processes, ensure stakeholder involvement, use the best available data, and involve transboundary cooperation with other Member States.

Fulfilling these minimum requirements demands various forms of integration - between sectors, policies, stakeholders, administrative borders, and forms of knowledge. BONUS BALTSPACE is the first transnational, interdisciplinary MSP research project in the BSR to focus on four key integration challenges in MSP, namely policy and sector integration, multi-level and transboundary integration, stakeholder integration and knowledge integration.

This briefing document

What can tools contribute to addressing these four integration challenges? BALTSPACE assessed the capacity of a range of problem- and process-specific techniques and approaches (subsequently termed tools) in different case study settings. This brief sets out central learnings with respect to the BALTSPACE tools and some general conclusions for using tools to promote integration in MSP.

> **Tools assessed as part of the BALTSPACE case studies:**
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> - Bowtie
> - Culturally Significant Areas (CSA)
> - Governance Baselines
> - Integrated Indicator System for monitoring the spatial, economic and environmental effects of MSP solutions
> - Marxan
> - Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation
> - Spatial Economic Benefit Analysis (SEBA)

The BALTSPACE assessment of tools and approaches

The BALTSPACE tool assessment is best understood as case study applications, where each tool was applied once in a particular country context in a format determined by the tool user. Some applications were desktop exercises, others were more participative, although most had some form of verification by stakeholders. The seven tools and approaches chosen for the assessment reflected both the variety of available methods and the diverse range of tasks in MSP. Some tools have mapping functions, some a dedicated data focus. Some are computer-based, and some related to forecasting (e.g. scenarios derived from applying the tools). Some are more descriptive, others more analytical; and some deliver a particular task in MSP while others support the MSP process as such. The BALTSPACE tools and approaches also accompany varying stages of the MSP cycle, as shown in the diagram below. Most tools have existed for some time and have had some prior application in MSP or environmental contexts; one tool (SEBA)

was specifically developed for MSP as part of BALTSPACE. The assessment is based on the retrospective evaluation of the BALTSPACE researchers.
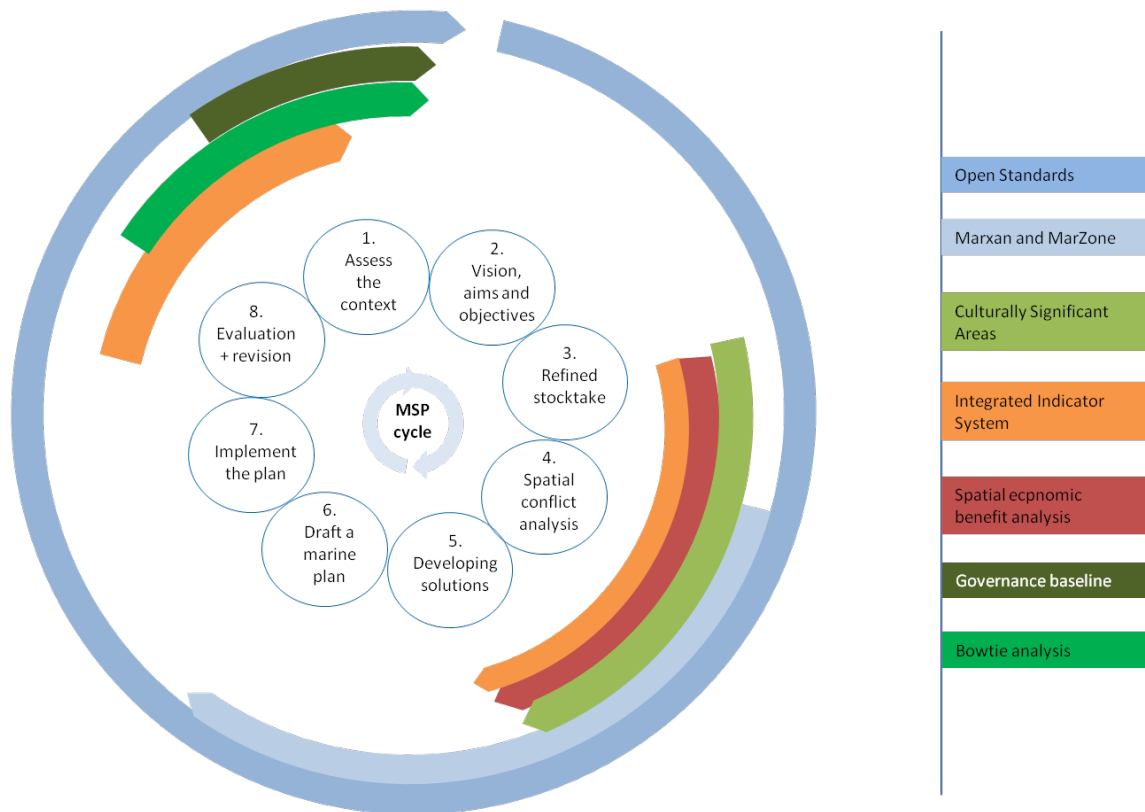
Selected BALTSPACE approaches and tools and their fit in the MSP planning cycle

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

1. The right tool for the right task

Tools can play many different roles in MSP, ranging from the delivery of expert information and data to interpretations of data, from accompanying a particular process step to accompanying the entire MSP cycle. Good prior knowledge of the tools and their capacity is therefore needed, as well as clarity of purpose, to ensure the right tool is chosen for the right task. This must include understanding of the capacity of the tool (what it is designed to do), application requirements (what resources and skills are needed to apply it) and the limitations of the tool (what outcomes can be realistically expected within a certain timeframe).

It is helpful to differentiate between process- and task-focused tools, in other words those that support or analyse processes and those that deliver a particular output for MSP (e.g. maps, scenarios).

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2. Contributing to integration challenges

Knowledge integration is the challenge tools can most readily help with. This applies to integrating different types of data (e.g. integration of environmental and socio-economic data by the Indicators tool), as well as different forms of knowledge (e.g. bringing together expert and stakeholder knowledge through SEBA and Marxan). Process-supporting tools (such as CSA or Open Standards) may find it easier to integrate different knowledge systems, e.g. combining experiential, local or traditional knowledge with scientific data.

Stakeholder and sector integration is another challenge most tools can easily help with. Even if they are not originally designed for this, they can be consciously applied to involve different stakeholders (e.g. administration and industry), and integrate various levels of knowledge and expertise. With the right facilitation, tools can also contribute to stakeholder integration more indirectly by providing a platform for discussing the outputs of more technical tools such as maps and scenarios. The Open Standards application for example builds on broad stakeholder involvement to achieve best effects in the other integration dimensions.

Policy integration (e.g. sectoral or multi-level policy integration) - is an indirect outcome of tool use. Tools suited to policy analysis (such as Bowties or Governance Baselines) can merely point to policy gaps and action needs, with integration effects then depending on that action being taken. Policy integration is thus a later-stage result of the ongoing MSP process for which the tools are merely facilitators.

Greater land-sea integration is another benefit of applying some of the tools. Some tools, such as the Indicators tool or SEBA, specifically bridge the gap between terrestrial and maritime data, allowing connections to be made between activities in the sea, the spatial footprint of these activities (and changes over time) and the impacts of these activities on land. Others make a more indirect, qualitative contribution in that they promote integrative thinking across the land-sea divide (e.g. via perceptions of space in the CSA or Open Standards approach).

Depending on the scale at which the tool is applied, all of the above can have integration effects at a cross-border or transboundary level.

3. It's not the tool that counts but how it is applied

Tools do not deliver good results automatically, even when the right tool has been selected for the task at hand. Technical understanding of the tool and appropriate application make all the difference. Tool needs in MSP should therefore not only be considered in terms of "hard" requirements, but also in terms of the necessary "soft skills" that are needed for applying a particular tool. This particularly also refers to communication and facilitation skills on top of the necessary technical expertise.

Tool application is only as good as the application context allows it to be. For technical tools, this includes having the necessary resources and capacities at hand. But it also means aspects such as openness to reflection and debate, willingness to engage in an honest discussion of the constraints of tools, and the ability to act on the outcomes provided by them.

4. Benefits of using tools

Most tools can be applied in a participatory setting if so desired; by doing so, their integrative potential can be enhanced (e.g. Open Standards). Participatory process design can deliver additional integration benefits, such as increasing stakeholder representation, enhancing the integration of particular sectors, or facilitating transboundary integration. Seeing "their" data integrated can increase trust and motivate stakeholders to remain involved in the MSP process, e.g. when producing cause-effect chains in Open Standards-supported workshops.

Tools can act as a door opener to MSP, making the process more transparent, tangible and setting achievable tasks. At the same time, more complex tools (such as the Open Standards) can at first seem overwhelming, requiring extra commitment from all those engaging with it and demanding particular skills in communicating the workings and expected outcomes of the tool. Such initial efforts usually pay off in the long run.

Up and beyond the specific outputs a tool can produce (such as maps), MSP can capitalise on the learning process that results during tool application for stakeholders and planners.

Some of these "soft" impacts take time to manifest; they will also depend on other external circumstances unrelated to tool use.

5. Tool constraints

Data constraints and knowledge gaps limit the applicability of data driven or statistical tools. Especially economic data is often missing at the right scale. Social and spatial data are also difficult to obtain and can be difficult to compare across borders.

All tools require dedicated users and facilitators, in most cases with specialist skills or expertise. This not only applies to computer-based tools or models, but also to desktop or process-focused tools. Social science knowledge is essential for working with local communities, for example, and prior experience is required for desktop tools based on a particular way of thinking (such as bowties).

In some cases, the real constraint is not with the tool itself but with feeding its outputs into the MSP process. This can be a question of language, e.g. linking qualitative community values to places and translating this into areas with boundaries that can be depicted on a map. It can also be a question of having the right facilitator who is capable of feeding new information and knowledge generated into the right phase of the MSP process and connecting to other relevant (e.g. sector) processes .

Some tools highlight limits of knowledge integration - for example when non-spatial values cannot be translated into spatially explicit maps. Different worldviews are also difficult to easily integrate within a tool, as every tool is grounded in a particular worldview and therefore constrained to some degree. Such integration would require a deliberative setting, which could be an add-on or follow-up to tool use.

How tools are being applied, and the indirect benefits that can arise from their application, have not been a focus of dedicated MSP tool evaluation so far. The main difficulty with this type of evaluation is the attribution problem: Which integration effects, especially longer-term effects, are down to the use of a tool or the result of other circumstances?

BALTSPACE

For more information on the BALTSPACE assessment of tools and approaches see the following resources:

- Addressing MSP integration challenges: The role of tools and approaches (BALTSPACE report, April 2018). The report contains a detailed assessment of the BALTSPACE tools together with an evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses with respect to the four integration challenges.

- Addressing MSP integration challenges: A handbook of tools and approaches (BALTSPACE handbook, April 2018). The handbook presents six of the tools and sets out why, when and how they could ideally be applied in MSP contexts.

- YouTube tutorials on selected tools

All are available on www.baltspace.eu

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