



Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund

Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

PRE-EVENT BRIEF

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

Virtual

24th of June 2021, 10:20-17:20 (CEST +1)

Introduction



Blue Growth is gaining significant importance in European policy-making since the last 15 years or so. It 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.

Together they directly employ close to 5 million people, and have an annual Gross Value Added (GVA) of nearly €220 billion in the European Union; contributing to approximately 1.5% of its economy. This is a 15% increase compared to 2009, while the total turnover at €750 billion has increased by 12% and the profit (at around €95 billion) has increased by 18%. The EU Blue Economy also includes more and more emerging and innovative sectors, such as the blue bioeconomy, biotechnologies, desalination, maritime defence, tidal and wave energy, floating solar energy and offshore hydrogen, and the like. Of these, the maritime defence sector already accounts for nearly 200 million jobs, while the algae sector already generates an annual turnover of more than €330 million (EU, Blue Economy report 2020).

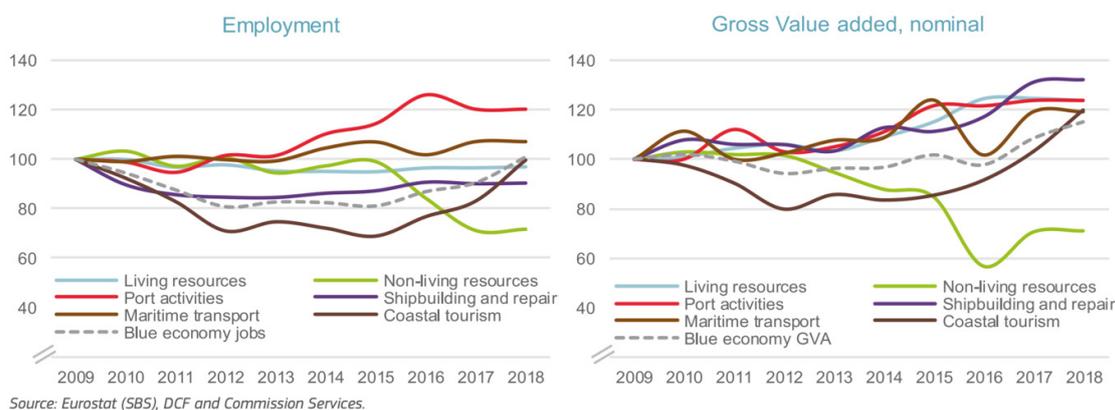


Figure 1: Evolution of the EU Blue Economy by sector (index 2009=100)

The Island-based economy in the Aegean, Ionian, and Eastern Mediterranean seas requires a distinct approach in growth intervention and territorial planning. The discontinuity of space, the fragmentation of the economic and labour markets, the disproportional demand on sea-transport and the extra burdens to reach a minimum of well-being and social services, calls for a specific MSP-LSI approach. There is a need to develop planning strategies and tactics wherein islands, seas, and coastal areas are dealt with as a highly interwoven integrated continuum.

The Greek contribution

As a relatively small country of around 11 million inhabitants, Greece is nevertheless amongst the top 3 in terms of employment in the EU (after Spain and Germany, but before Italy, France, and the other 22 EU countries), and amongst the top 7 in terms of GVA (after Spain, Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark). While nearly 19% of the total land of Greece consists of islands, inhabited by approximately 15% of the total domestic population, more than 25% of the country's produced economic value is earned by economic activities, related to shipping, tourism and their complementary professions. Against this backdrop, the municipality of Piraeus has already become part of the Chinese one-belt-one-road investment strategy and has developed Blue Growth strategies in this respect. Nevertheless, and although the relative size of the Blue Economy in Greece remains strong (with 13-14% in terms of jobs and 5-6% in terms of GVA), its relative position in respect to the EU has declined in the last 10 years. This might have something to do with the fact that the impact of the financial crisis has hit Greece hard, more than elsewhere. Moreover, next to shipping, the Greek Blue economy

is mainly dependant on coastal tourism, where the contribution of low-income jobs is higher than in other sectors. Therefore, it is also expected that the COVID crisis will have a major impact on the Greek Blue Economy. It is not sure if and how long it would take to return to the previous pre-COVID situation. In addition, the EU Green Deal poses new challenges for the Blue Economy. The overall contribution of Greece and its Blue Economy remain a little behind with regard to emergent, innovative sectors (biotechnologies, aquaculture, and blue energy for example) (EU, Blue Economy report 2020). There are, however, some exceptions such as the blue bioeconomic innovative projects (Seagrass for instance) and activities in desalination.

Therefore the question remains of where and how to enhance the emerging, innovative, and smart Blue Economy sectors within this Eastern part of the Mediterranean in general – and the island-based conditions in the Aegean and Ionian seas specifically – in order to maintain and expand the relatively strong position of Greece within Blue Growth?

Challenges for the Eastern Mediterranean Blue Growth

In respect to this question, several regional seminars have already touched upon new perspectives for Blue Growth in Greece (for instance: **Echopolis International** in November 2018, and the **Hellenic Centre for Maritime Research (HCMR)** online seminar in January of this year). In general, these sessions suggested a need for the design and implementation of integrated plans for the management of coastal areas with a balance between marine environment protection and smart blue economic growth. There is a need for an integrated regional Blue Growth strategy that will enhance the exceptionally insular biodiversity of maritime business clusters in combination with existing tourism activities (Kyvelou/Ierapetritis 2019). More specifically, the HCMR focused on a) the breeding of new species of fish in Mediterranean aquaculture farms, b) the development of renewable marine energy resources, c) the development of marine biotechnology as a source of a sustainable insular economy, and d) new forms of an integrated monitoring and management of the sea and the coastal zones. This would require the coordination of European and national research activities from the perspective of regional opportunities and needs, leading towards the creation of so-called 'Blue Growth Regions' (HCMR 2021).

Against this backdrop, the Greek government has already developed initiatives towards an Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) – as part of the National Greek Reform Plan – for the island-maritime area of the Ionian, Aegean, and Eastern Mediterranean seas. For the moment, the priority objectives of this policy would focus on:

- Port management, including maritime transport and coastal shipping;
- Critical energy and water resources;
- Enhancing island competitiveness & entrepreneurship through the Blue Economy;
- Maritime surveillance and security strategies and
- Digital governance and technical support for the implementation of actions.

Due to the highly unique character of the island-based maritime area there is a need to join forces in this respect, not only on various scales (from the global and European level towards the local scale), but also from multiple areas of expertise, and various sectors and policy domains, while involving various stakeholders and policy implementers. This conference could contribute to that process.

ESPON Evidence

In this respect, ESPON has recently produced data which could help establish sound bases to achieve these goals.

MSP-LSI (ESPON 2020)

The first is the **Maritime Spatial Planning and Land-Sea Interactions** report. Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is becoming an important policy field with the objective to reconcile different demands on the marine space and can thus contribute significantly to enhancing Blue Growth. In order to promote the sustainable use of the maritime space and the adjoining coastal areas, MSP should take into account land-sea interactions (LSI). For that purpose, the MSP-LSI study has developed a specific approach which has been tested in 5 pilot studies. The most comparable to the situation in Greece might be the case study towards the Croatian coast and islands, since this case also focused on coastal tourism and port policies.

BRIDGES (ESPON 2019)

The second is the **Bridges** project, which explored the specific territorial development issues of territories with geographical specificities (TGS), including islands. The project delivers interesting insights that are useful for the promotion of Blue Growth. In respect to the North Aegean Archipelago the study mainly focused on tourism and climate change. With regard to tourism, there is a need to think out of the 'sun-and-beach-box' and create innovative, smart, blue programs. With regard to climate change, there is a need for capacity building and raising awareness of its impact (urban heat island effects, droughts, storms water shortage, and wildfires for example) particularly in islands and coastal areas. However, climate change could also create new opportunities, such as new fish species which have migrated from the Indian Ocean.

ERMES (ESPON 2021)

The third is the targeted **ERMES** project which is focused on the reinforcement of land-sea interactions that allow for the development of Blue Growth and the maximisation of regional benefits of sustainable maritime spatial planning. For our case, the study mainly focused on the maritime cluster around the Port of Heraklion. Although the study still needs to be finalised, preliminary recommendations point towards a scenario that aims to transform the port of Heraklion into an important hub for short sea shipping and tourism.

COMPASS (ESPON 2018)

Last but not least, **COMPASS** focused on a comparative report of the changes in territorial governance and planning systems in Europe from 2000 to 2016. For that purpose, it has compared territorial governance and spatial planning in 32 European countries, not only as a snapshot comparison, but also in respect to identifying trends for EU directives and policies. Here, the study discovered new innovations, especially with regard to their relationship with EU cohesion policies and territorial governance. Against this backdrop, further recommendations will be formulated in respect to this conference's objective towards an integrated multi-level insular land-sea development.

Good practices

In addition, throughout Europe, there are already several good practices, which could help the Eastern Mediterranean areas to develop an integrated maritime policy for their insular purposes. Here we refer to:

Blue Energy Northsea

Innovative experiments using methods and tools to address the issue of marine wind energy and trade-offs with biodiversity protection, maritime spatial planning, and its impact on the mainland.

Smart Shipping Belgium

Experiments with shore-supported navigation, digital twin - full automation of shipping, digitalisation and sea drones as new ways to navigate more efficiently and sustainably in the future.

Land-Sea Interaction Cruise Tourism Croatia

Strategies to diminish the burdens and increase the profits of cruise tourism in ecologically and culturally vulnerable areas, in interaction with new opportunities and a better access for (insular) coastal tourism.

Interreg MED project

Development of a tool for fishermen to categorise them according to the recycling process they follow for fish product residuals. Ways and proposals to further elaborate this tool and expand its scope of actions.

All these pilots and studies could help to enhance a concrete and efficient outline for an innovative Blue Growth Policy Strategy in the Aegean, Ionian, and Eastern Mediterranean seas.



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