



Regions to Boost
National Maritime
Spatial Planning



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REGINA-MSP

Communication brief

Activities and outcomes from REGINA-MSP

Policy recommendations for the national level of Greece and the study region of Central Macedonia



REGINA-MSP communication brief series

The REGINA-MSP project is a two-year project (2023-2024) that aims to greater integrate the regional and sub-regional needs, perspectives and stakeholders into the development and implementation of national Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP). The project highlights potential challenges to this integration and opportunities to reduce them, building on a general analysis at the European level and an in-depth analysis in eight case study regions in five European countries, i.e., France, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Spain.

Based on various activities carried out within REGINA-MSP and further described in this communication brief (e.g., workshops, bibliographical analyses), a set of policy needs and recommendations has been identified at different levels (European, national, regional). This communication brief summarises the **main policy recommendations for the national level in the case of Greece and for the study region of Central Macedonia**. This brief is part of a series of communication briefs produced as part of REGINA-MSP, focusing on various topics related to MSP (such as ocean literacy or communities of practice) and on each case study region and country of the project.

Characteristics of Greece

Greece is the 2nd most insular country in Europe with **3.500 islands, islets and outcrops** and approximately **15,000 km of coastline** (in the continental and insular parts). The insular parts amount to 19.1% of the total surface area of the country with **four out of its thirteen Regions being totally insular**.

The marine space of Greece is home to more than **120 inhabited islands spreading in three seas** of the Eastern Mediterranean (the Ionian, the Aegean and the Levantine Sea). The country fully complies with the UNCLOS and in 2020 following bilateral agreements (Laws 4716,4717 and 4767), Greece-proclaimed the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) between Italy and Egypt and expanded its territorial water limit in the Ionian Sea from 6 to 12 n.m. In the Aegean and the Levantine Seas the territorial water limit of the country extends up to 6 n.m.

Greece has a long and rich nautical and maritime tradition and strong established economic activities, such as fisheries and navigation, aquaculture and sea farming, marine tourism as well as upcoming ones that include off-shore energy farming and fossil extraction.

Alongside the numerous maritime activities, the Greek marine space is full of rich biodiversity and sensitive ecosystems. As of now **22% of the Greek territorial waters are under protection status** (designated as MPAs - Marine Protected Areas). Additionally, there are **two national marine parks** with one of them being the largest in Europe.

As far as **underwater cultural and archaeological heritage**, there are approximately **100 sites designated** in the country's marine space.

According to the national legislation (Law 4546 of 2018 as amended in 2020 by Law 4759), MSP in Greece is performed at two levels:

- **the national level** - National Spatial Strategy for the Marine Space (NSSMS-ΕΧΣΟΧ)
- **the regional level** - Maritime Spatial Plans/Frameworks (MSF-ΘΧΠ)

The National Spatial Strategy for the Marine Space (NSSMS) constitutes a policy document, setting the framework and the strategic guidelines at the national level, for the marine parts of the country. The NSSMS of Greece has been recently completed and is pending approval. According to the draft NSSMS, four (4) maritime spatial plans must be adopted in Greece, for each of the marine spatial units (ΘΧΕ 1 - 4) (see map below). So far, out of the four Maritime Spatial Plans/Frameworks, only one has been drafted and it is pending approval. This is the Plan for the North Aegean Sea (ΘΧΕ1), where Central Macedonia Region (CMR) is located.

The Greek Marine Spatial Units



Policy recommendations for Greece to integrate regional and sub-regional needs, perspectives and stakeholders

Legal aspects

- The Greek Law referring to MSP (Law 4759/2020 amending Law 4546/2018) should be revised to address the following issues: i. the **non-egalitarian relationship between MSP and terrestrial spatial planning** and ii. the **single-scalar approach** currently used, in favor of a more multi-scalar approach (also including the local scale, as in land-based spatial planning).
- Given the extended coastline of Greece and the intense geomorphology (forming many shallow and semi-enclosed bays), the existing legal framework should be reviewed to **include of the ICZM approach** and the **LSI analysis** in the drafting of maritime spatial plans.
- Planning legislation should also encourage the **decentralisation of licensing** in the marine space that is currently a central government affair.
- Another aspect that needs to be considered, is how to **reverse the currently prevailing sectoral approach** of planning in the sea, in favor of a place-based approach that is promoted by the 2014/89 MSP Directive.

Governance

- **MSP and marine governance in Greece must become more inclusive.** Regions should play a more essential role in the drafting, implementation and consultation processes of MSP. Through inclusive participatory processes, Greek regions and local communities can be involved in the MSP process in a more meaningful way.
- The concept of **Communities of Practice should be further explored.** Greek MSP experts, authorities and stakeholders can be part of existing (or establish new) CoPs related to MSP issues that are relevant to the Greek specificities.

Resources and Capacity Building

- **Training initiatives** should be organised at the national level, targeting central government staff, with jurisdiction in the marine space and responsibilities on MSP.

Data

- In Greece an open-access **national geospatial database** is available. This database should be continuously updated and enriched with missing data, **referring to the sea.**
- Spatial, economic, social and environmental analyses are very important in planing. These **data are not organised in a way that makes them useful for MSP.** It is important to acquire appropriate data to perform analyses, such as, land-sea interactions, marine risk and hazards economic valuations of marine sectors, etc.

Characteristics of Central Macedonia Region

The **Region of Central Macedonia (CMR)** is the second most populous region in Greece after Attica (Athens), with a population of almost **1.8 million inhabitants**. It is located in northern Greece and has an extensive **coastline of more than 700 km**. Thessaloniki, its capital and the second largest city in Greece, is a fast-growing international transport hub with a seafront spreading across more than 40 km. The Region of Central Macedonia is characterised by a unique and sensitive marine ecosystem due to geomorphological peculiarities (**many shallow and semi-enclosed bays**) and other coastal formations (**deltas, estuaries, etc.**) that host rich biodiversity. In the marine parts of Central Macedonia **several marine protected areas** and **underwater antiquities** can be found.

This fragile **marine ecosystem is under constant pressure** due to the intensity of certain uses (mainly aquaculture and maritime transport), as well as the **strong land-sea interactions (LSIs)**. **Tourism** and **aquaculture** are among the most important economic sectors, not only for the Thessaloniki metropolitan area but also for the entire Region. Around 80% of the national mussels production takes place very close to Thessaloniki.

Along the coastline of CMR, **coastal urbanization** is rather intense, due to the uncontrolled expansion of the metropolis of Thessaloniki and the development of coastal tourism, especially in the Halkidiki peninsulas.

Central Macedonia Region is part of the Marine Spatial Unit of the North Aegean Sea (ΘXE1), where the first (out of 4) Greek Marine Spatial Plan has already been drafted (pending approval). Within this area, integrated and sustainable maritime spatial planning needs to be achieved, considering blue growth trends, ecosystem services flow and climate change.



Activities conducted in Greece and Central Macedonia Region within REGINA-MSP

International activities

A total of three (3) international workshops were organized in **Greece (Thessaloniki)**, Spain (Vigo) and France (Nantes). The aim of the workshops was to promote interaction among regions, as well as to explore the possibility of the emergence of a Community of Practice on MSP issues at cross-regional level, i.e. with the participation of regions within and beyond the EU.

The international workshop of Thessaloniki took place between 18 and 20 of October 2023. It was organized by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (School of Spatial Planning and Development), in a **hybrid mode**. The workshop was attended by approx. **70 participants**. A **fieldtrip** was also organised at the **National Park of Axios river Delta**.

National activities

Last, apart from the regional activities, in each country participating in the REGINA-MSP project, a **national training on MSP** issues was held for the staff of regional and local authorities. In **Greece**, the seminar took place in **Athens** and was organised by the Panteion University

Regional activities

Two local workshops organized in Thessaloniki used a "bottom-up" approach to engage regional stakeholders in building a common vision for the marine space of CMR. The ultimate goal of these workshops was to help regional stakeholders of CMR strengthen their voice in the nationally driven MSP process that regards their local seas.

The first workshop was attended by 55 representatives deriving from the regional and local authorities (coastal municipalities and Central Macedonia Region).

The second workshop was attended by 70 participants on the first day and by 31 on the second. This WS was more inclusive with participants from all categories of regional stakeholders in MSP.

Both workshops were organized by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (School of Spatial Planning and Development), with the support of Central Macedonia Region.



18 - 20 October 2023
1st REGINA-MSP cross-regional workshop (Thessaloniki)



22 - 23 May 2024
2nd local workshop in CMR (Thessaloniki)



30 May 2023

1st local workshop in CMR (Thessaloniki)



23 - 25 April 2024

National training in MSP (Athens)



Policy recommendations for advancing regional MSP

Legal aspects

- Legislation needs to be reformed in order to **pass licensing power and responsibilities** related to the marine parts of the country **to regional authorities**.
- **Regional authorities should be formally involved in the MSP consultations**, currently taking place with stakeholders of a national range. Their involvement can be similar (or even more advanced) to the one applied in terrestrial spatial planning.

Governance

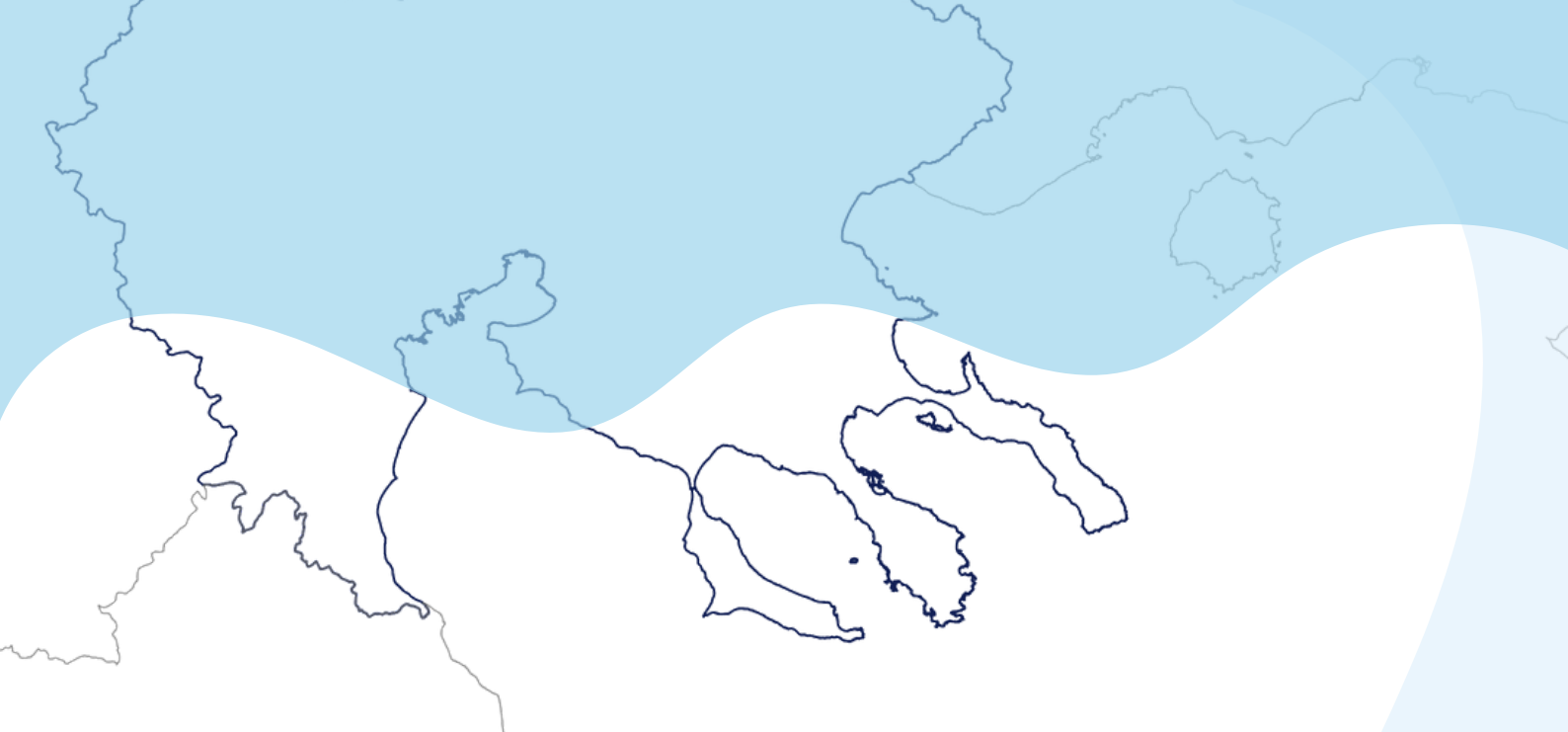
- **Cross-regional governance schemes** should be established among Greek coastal regions sharing the same sea. The Region of Central Macedonia, located in the north Aegean Sea, is affected by the same maritime plan (ΘΧΠ1) as 4 other Greek regions. These regions should join the same cross-regional governance scheme and establish cross-border cooperation.
- **Cross-border cooperation and marine governance schemes** should also be established at the (sub)regional level. There are **17 coastal municipalities in the region of Central Macedonia**, sharing (in groups) the 4 local seas (shaped by the 4 existing gulfs). By forming regional governance schemes, the relevant (regional) **MSP stakeholders will strengthen their voice towards the national MSP decision-making centres**.
- Regions can also explore the possibility of joining existing **MSP Communities of Practice**. They can also take the initiative to build a new MSP CoP that better fits their purposes. A MSP CoP can be either **(sub)regional or cross-regional** (at national or international level).

Resources and capacity building

- Regular **training initiatives** should be designed, targeting **regional and local staff** as well as **regional stakeholders**. This is particularly important in Greece, given the status of implementation of MSP in the country and the involvement of the regions in the MSP process.
- **Locally-based Universities** and research centres can share their **expertise**. In the case of CMR, there is already an established cooperation with the School of Spatial Planning of the **Aristotle University of Thessaloniki**.

Data

- In Greece, **regional geospatial databases** should be built, to include higher resolution data, which are necessary for the drafting of plans at the regional and local scale.
- This database is also critical to “communicate” with the national geospatial database (when built).
- In the region of Central Macedonia, **high fragmentation of data** as well as **data gaps** exist. This is an issue that should be properly addressed.



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Disclaimer

This communication brief has been developed as part of the REGINA-MSP project. Its content is based on the activities carried within the framework of the project and does not necessarily represent the views of the authors' organizations and nations.



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