



Regions to Boost
National Maritime
Spatial Planning



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REGINA-MSP

Communication brief

Crete case study



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 regional level for the case study region of Crete (Greece). 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 the case study region

Crete region, the largest Greek island, is known for its rich history, culture, and diverse landscapes, spanning both land and sea. Covering 8,336 square kilometers with a population of 617,360 (2021 census), it remains one of Greece's most populous islands. The island's waters support a wide range of uses, **from traditional activities such as:**

- fishing 
- shipping 
- coastal tourism 

to emerging industries such as:

- aquaculture 
- cultural maritime heritage and diving tourism 
- offshore renewable wind energy or hydrocarbon extraction 

As Cretan economy expands, the marine space faces pressures from either the traditional or the emerging blue economy sectors. For instance, nowadays, concrete proposals for floating wind farms are under consideration and consultation with local stakeholders, as Crete's geographical location and favourable winds make it an ideal candidate for renewable energy projects. At the same time, the island's marine waters have also been explored for potential hydrocarbon extraction (<https://herema.gr/>). Beyond growing conflicts between traditional and emerging maritime activities, overexploitation, pollution, and habitat destruction, compounded by the climate crisis and its impacts, like rising sea levels and ocean acidification, all call for a climate-smart Maritime Spatial Planning.

So far, Crete region lacks an approved Regional Maritime Spatial Plan (MSP) (Image 1), despite its definition as a Maritime Spatial Unit to the National Hellenic Spatial Strategy for the Marine Space and current legislation (L.4546/2018). Instead, spatial planning for marine areas is guided by terrestrial-focused plans (frameworks) like the Regional Spatial Planning Framework for the Crete Region (RSPFCR) or guidance from other regional plans (i.e Regional Strategy for the adaptation to climate Change, PeSPKA) or national sectoral ones (guidelines for tourism, aquaculture, industry, environmental protection, economic development).



Image 1: Four Maritime Spatial Units for the elaboration of Maritime Spatial Plans (Frameworks), as defined in the framework of the THAL-CHOR II project and included in the draft NSS MS (Source: Draft National (Hellenic) Spatial Strategy for the Marine Space).

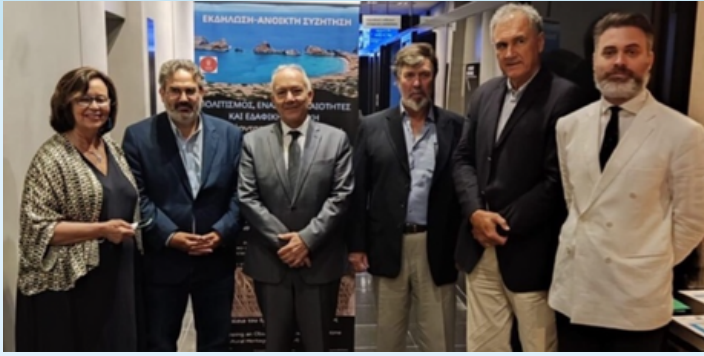
Activities conducted in Crete within REGINA-MSP

More than 20 sectoral and integrated regional plans either on regional or national level related to spatial or sectoral planning were examined during the case-study analysis. Key interviews took place with the Vice Governors of the Regional Authority of Crete (responsible for European and International Affairs, Tourism and also geographical ones), regional councillors, staff from different departments of the Region or the decentralised Administration of Crete, and other stakeholders even the less informed ones (i.e fishing groups).

Three (3) interlinked workshops were held in the Crete Region, specifically in both Lasithi- Aghios Nikolaos and Chania (twice in 2023 and in 2024 accordingly) often in collaboration with the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) authority (Chania) or the Ministry of Shipping and Insular Policy (Lasithi-Aghios Nicolaos) aimed at informing, initiating, stimulating and facilitating a multi-scale and multi-sectoral dialogue on the need of implementing a MSP across scales.

These workshops addressed the key regional priorities of such an MSP, including the necessary energy transition, the optimum allocation of the Offshore Wind Farms (OWFs) in order to enhance the advantages and decrease the disadvantages of this technology, the protection of underwater cultural heritage, and how to employ a multi-use approach in marine space by discussing potential synergies and harmonious co-existence between emerging and traditional sectors of blue economy.





Photos of the workshops held in Crete as part of REGINA-MSP

Proposals of policy recommendations for the regional level

Main recommendations of the case study

The Region needs an integrated approach for tackling the current challenges of the intensified usage of the marine space, based on the dialogue and the integration of intra regional /local/sectoral stakeholders to the MSP process. The participation of stakeholders is still weak due to lack of knowledge, limited data availability and a certain lack of trust. Regional and local representatives in Crete expressed their need for more information and capacity building on MSP issues, including European policies and obligations or even national ones.

Legal aspects

In the Crete region, the foreseen Maritime Spatial Planning Framework should prioritize key challenging pressures of regional and infra-regional level, and focus on decentralization measures that involve regional and local authorities in Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and MSP implementation. Legislative adaptations are recommended, including adjustments to national laws to avoid dichotomization between terrestrial and maritime spatial plans and take into consideration land-sea interactions. Other measures concerned the improvement of coordination between sectoral plans with maritime components, such as those for aquaculture or offshore wind energy.

Governance

Policy recommendations related to governance consist in expanding the participation of sub-regional stakeholders in MSP activities in a more meaningful way. Especially the establishment of local /regional Communities of Practice and Innovation was fully endorsed, on the initiative of the Regional authorities and the Technical Chamber of Greece (Section of Crete). Steering committees dedicated to specific maritime sectors or areas may be envisaged. Other recommendations are the following : a/Improve the procedures of stakeholder's identification and engagement while employing feedback reports on their contribution to the process, b/ Improve the consultation process based on principles of trusted dialogue and information sharing, c/Enhance the understanding of the different MSP steps through specific training measures and awareness raising tasks.

Resources, capacity, skills and networks

While there are specialized roles within technical departments, fostering inter-departmental collaboration on maritime, urban, and environmental issues, and providing financial resources for MSP initiatives is essential. Resources should be directed to actions related to capacity building of staff across scales, and sectors. Finally, securing resources for projects related to fisheries, coastal management, and environmental protection should be prioritised to establish synergies between conflicting uses.

Data

The Crete Region should establish and maintain regional geoportals with MSP data, ensuring interoperability with national and European MSP data platforms such as EMODNET. The existing geoportal of the decentralised Administration of Crete should be enriched with a special section about regional/local MSP data.



Chora Sfakion, Crete, Greece.

Citation

Stella Kyvelou, Nektaria Marava, & Thanos Smanis, et al. Communication brief. Crete case study. REGINA-MSP project, European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency.

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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