

A joint VASAB and Baltic 21 input to the EU Green Paper on Maritime Policy



VASAB (Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010) is a co-operation of the Ministers on spatial planning and development in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) countries, preparing policy options for spatial development of the region and promoting exchange of know-how on spatial planning and development between the Baltic Sea countries, including Norway and Belarus. Currently VASAB is preparing a Long Term Perspective 2030 for the spatial development of the Baltic Sea Region with a vision that is clearly based on the maritime identity.

Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region, Baltic 21, was initiated by the Prime Ministers of the Baltic Sea countries in 1996. Baltic 21 is a regional expression of the global Agenda 21 adopted by the United Nations "Earth Summit." Being an open and transparent network for cooperation, Baltic 21 links together a wide range of stakeholders in a common endeavour for regional sustainable development.

VASAB, except Estonia, and Baltic 21 hereby submits its contribution to the European debate.

Introduction

The Maritime Green Paper paves the way for the development of a European Maritime Policy, which would be of great importance to the Baltic Sea Region in view of the critical environmental state of the Baltic sea and the crucial need for concerted action. The Maritime Green Paper calls upon spatial planning to become involved, in particular when referring to the need of off-shore planning. Both VASAB¹ and Baltic 21² have gained valuable insight in the field of off-shore planning through the initiation and monitoring of policy relevant results from transnational projects, such as e.g. Baltcoast and Plancoast, dealing with combination of terrestrial and maritime integrated (cross-sectoral) planning and management.

The implementation of the maritime policy would require a de-centralised approach. The relevance of learning and exchange of best practise to this end must be stressed. In the Baltic Sea region initiatives such as VASAB, HELCOM and Baltic 21 are well established and constitute a unique asset for the region.

The experience of advanced joint approaches together with the unique geographic conditions of the Baltic Sea gives the Baltic Sea region an opportunity to be transformed into a *maritime best practise region*, as proposed in the Communiqué from the 14 th Session of the Council of the Baltic Sea States on 12- 13 June 2007. These are the reasons why we wish to contribute to the Europe-wide discussion initiated by the Maritime Green Paper.

General comments

The Baltic Sea is a unique water reservoir. It is the largest body of brackish (low-salinity) water in the world. The link with the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean is very narrow and water circulation in the Baltic Sea has a slow renewal rate, and consequent oxygen deficits due to stratification. The salinity of the water varies considerably between the southern and northern parts of the Baltic Sea. Organisms live on the limit of their range and tolerance, and therefore very sensitive to change and recovery times are long.

Although the majority of the BSR metropolises are located on the sea shore, the Baltic coast still remains less affected by human activities than the Mediterranean or the North Sea coasts. According to the findings of the Deduce project, the percentage of built-up coastal strip in the BSR countries hardly exceeds 15% (from 15% in Lithuania down to

¹ www.vasab.org

² www.baltic21.org

4% in Estonia), whereas the same indicators in Italy, France Belgium, Spain are at 20% or more. Another characteristic feature is the large percentage of sea space covered by Natura 2000 designated areas. This coverage exceeds 70% in Poland, 60% in Germany 40% in Estonia, 30% in Denmark and 20% in Finland. Only Latvia and Lithuania, with less than 10%, are below European average. This is an indication of the ecological importance of the Baltic Sea space.

The Baltic Sea has some of the busiest shipping routes in the world. According to Helcom statistics, there are constantly about 1,800 ships in the Baltic marine area. The ferry traffic on the Baltic Sea is one of the most intensive in the world with 35% of the world ferry connections with, for example, 32 crossings a day in each direction between Tallinn and Helsinki (including hydrofoil). The volume of trucks shipped between Gdańsk and Stockholm has increased by 20% only in 2006. An implementation of the concept of the Motorways of the Sea will most likely enhance North-South traffic through the Baltic Sea and, according to the Baltic Master project, a dramatic increase is probable over the next few years.

The intensity of the use of the sea space for other purposes than shipping varies with the population density. Thus, the sea use is intensive in the western part of the BSR, well illustrated by the fact that there is no single "empty sea space" not attributed to a given type of sea use within the planning supervision of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In the Eastern part of the Baltic Sea conflicts between different types of sea use are mainly located around metropolises. Low population density in other parts of the Eastern shores means less pressure on e.g. building wind mill farms on the sea or minerals extraction from the sea bed, but creates more pressure related to agriculture.

Further, the Baltic Sea Region is also characterized by sharp economic discrepancies. Regions located on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea with exception of the metropolitan ones, belong to the relatively less developed in the BSR. Their development is of a seasonal nature and the prevailing feature is out-migration of young educated people. One of the main attractions of these regions is wide, sandy beaches which in fact are less frequent in the southern part of Europe. A balanced rural and urban development is the key in this region.

In all, the sea use (off shore) and coastal planning in the Baltic Sea Region is very specific. Firstly, comparing to the rest of Europe, there are in the BSR very important unspoiled natural assets to be protected. But this should not compromise the standard of living of the coastal population. Local settlements are a vital part of the coastal cultural landscapes and it is of great importance to preserve them.

Secondly, uneven use of the sea space calls for coordination at the Baltic Sea Region level. This should result in easing a developmental pressure in the more intensively used sea areas by channelling development to those parts in which capacity still allows for new users.

Thirdly all socio-economics trends indicate that increased sea use will also considerably increase "space use" conflicts. Along with an estimated doubling of shipping in five years, the probability of sea accidents and oil spills will become considerably higher. Demand for new cables and pipelines will grow as well as the need to create wind mills at sea. Climate change might also increase tourism to the region, which will put further pressure on the Baltic coast. But there is still time for proper preparation for the more intensive use of the coast and the sea space of the Eastern parts of the Baltic Sea Region. Planning can play a proactive role in guiding development by providing potential developers with a proper legal framework instead of being retroactive by responding to the adverse effects of human activities as it is now.

Main messages

With the above described specificities of the Baltic Sea Region as a basis, the following suggestion and observations are emphasised by VASAB and Baltic 21:

1. The holistic approach to maritime policy expressed in the Green Paper is welcome and there is an agreement that we can no longer afford to manage issues related the oceans, seas and the coastal areas purely on a sectoral basis. We support the Commission's opinion that *maritime spatial planning is an important instrument* for a growing and sustainable development of the maritime European regions.
2. Planning of the sea space calls for *equal attention to what is happening on the land as well as on the sea side, especially in view of the grave environmental state of the Baltic Sea*. For all seas the interdependence between sea and land born processes is evident, but for the closed Baltic Sea with its grave problems it must be the basis for all planning processes. Planning and management of both the terrestrial and the sea part of the space would benefit from both integration and implementation in a holistic manner. Thus, a closer link to the implementation of the marine directive and the water framework directive should be established.
3. Well known planning principles that have been successfully transferred to the ICZM framework seem to be important factors for a holistic outlook with its cross sectoral approach, the consensus driven dialogue between stakeholders, the ecosystem approach and the application of area-wide GIS data. This integrated approach is not only applicable in the coastal areas (as Green Paper Chapter 3.4 would suggest) but also a perfect tool for far-sea spatial planning. Integrated Joint Management of the Coastal Zone and Sea Space is not just one of the tasks to be achieved within the structure of the Maritime Policy, but is *the overarching coordination measure in order to make this policy holistic*.
4. This implies also to need of *redefining the term 'Coastal Zone'* which at present is generally identified with the area of coastal land and a narrow strip of coastal waters as defined by the Water Framework Directive. However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that strong economical, social and environmental land-sea interactions extend much further into the sea to the territorial sea border or even to the EEZ border. Therefore, efforts must be made to promote a holistic approach that transcends artificial boundaries in management and policy (e.g. sea shore, 12sm zone, EEZ) and to stimulate thinking beyond present competences.
5. The key task of sea use planning and coastal planning and management (ICZM) is preventing or settling conflicts over the use of space. This can be done through agreeing on main principles of using the sea and terrestrial space. Such principles should be coordinated with other policies and guidelines and *the responsibility for I(CZ)M and sea use planning should therefore be addressed based on subsidiarity by political bodies of all levels: municipalities, regional government, national government and EU level*. These bodies should initiate the transparent process according to the EU recommendations and assign responsibilities for its continuation in the future to relevant actors.
6. The most important condition for a successful integrated management is a *vision* - an overall goal, which unites all stakeholders and guides their activities. VASAB provides such a vision for the Baltic Sea Region and is currently working on a new Long Term Perspective 2030. Visioning is one of the key tools for spatial planning and can be successfully adapted to sea use planning as well.
7. Taking into account the current considerable amount of interventions from public authorities and the limited resources at hand, both in terms of finance and personnel, it is not recommended to create new institutions and organisations specifically for I(CZ)M or sea use planning, but rather to put focus on the *optimisation of existing institutions and improved cooperation*.
8. There is a need to *predefine the content of sea use plans* to ensure their compatibility between countries. This is important for a relatively small see as the Baltic Sea. The

following issues could be considered in maritime spatial plans:

- Environmental protection
- Protection and sustainable management of natural resources
- Industrial uses, e.g. wind energy plants
- Main shipping routes
- Cables and pipelines
- Fishing
- Tourism.

National experts should agree on a certain set of methodological guidelines (e.g. a hand-book) for preparation and implementation of maritime spatial plans.

9. Maritime policy could also play a more prominent role in optimizing the maritime transport with road, railway, and port development with a focus on *multimodal transport centres*. This is important e.g. in the BSR case to avoid a situation where the fast development of sea transport will result in *unsustainable tendencies/processes on land, such as traffic jams, traffic accidents etc.* Upgrading and adaptation of port infrastructure as well as of port hinterland links could receive a higher priority in the EU financed investment programmes. –It could be considered, both at EU and national level, to extend the list of hinterland corridors to be prioritized within the EU programme for international transport corridors.
10. *Maritime policy also might be integrated with tourism development policy, e.g. small marinas hold an economic potential for a considerable number of regions around the Baltic Sea, especially those lagging behind. Sustainable development of boat tourism requires coordination with the corresponding infrastructure developments, with nature protection and with urban and regional development as well as proper zoning for “leisure” purposes at the sea. Voluntary agreements with the nature protection actors might be welcome in order to open habitats which need protection for sailors during parts of the year. The Baltic Sea Region can offer valuable experience to that end.*
11. The very important role of ports should be recognized by the future Maritime Policy of the European Commission. *Ports could be the basis for local and regional development, of tremendous importance to poor areas.* This is not always understood by authorities and the general public.
12. The use of modern Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is a basis for maritime spatial planning. One of the key findings of a VASAB initiated project is that one of the main obstacles is low quality of available data. *Therefore we strongly advocate an EU-wide promotion of GIS.* EU could take the opportunity to develop and enforce a coherent set of GIS standards (such as a coordinate system, symbolic etc.) in order to ensure the cross-border and regional compatibility of spatial data for all EU member states and associated countries.
13. To test and inspire new solutions, *demonstration projects are valuable tool and have already provided the Baltic Sea Region with important notions.* Baltic 21 emphasis this method for a holistic and integrated urban and rural development i.a. in the following areas of relevance for a sustainable marine development:
 - Promoting the ecosystem management of marine resources including sustainable fishing and eco-tourism building on initiatives such as Nature ´s Best.
 - Assisting in setting up sustainable demonstration areas and model landscapes such as model farms to serve as an inspiring tool for local authorities and sub-regions around the Baltic Sea.
 - Promoting the eco-region concept in the Baltic Sea Region, including capacity building and transfer of best practices and lessons learned.
 - supporting sustainable agriculture practices by organising practical workshops and seminars for researchers and practitioners to share experiences and lessons learned drawing on the competence of Mediterranean partners.