CRETE CASE STUDY

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).
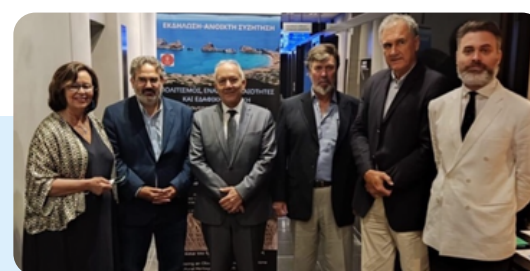
Characteristics of the case study

Crete region, Greece's largest island counts 9 ports (2 of them of international interest). It is a famous touristic place for Europe and the globe, one of the most populous regions (according to the 2021 census) among the insular or coastal regions of the country, with a strong agricultural sector. Crete's waters are pivotal for both traditional blue economy activities (i.e.fishing, shipping, and coastal tourism) as well as emerging ones (i.e. aquaculture, diving tourism, maritime cultural heritage, offshore wind energy, and potential hydrocarbon extraction). Crete's marine space faces challenges in terms of overfishing and intense tourism activities, pollution and habitat destruction and biodiversity threatened alongside climate change impacts, and land-sea interaction conflicts.

What about MSP in Crete ?

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).

Activities conducted

- 20 regional and national sectoral and integrated plans were reviewed;
- Interviews were conducted with Vice Governors, regional/local councilors, stakeholders, including underrepresented groups like fishing communities;
- 3 interlinked workshops held in Crete focused on the necessity of MSP and related key regional priorities (energy transition, offshore wind farm allocation underwater cultural heritage, and application of the multi-use concept in the marine space);
- 1 final workshop in Athens (July 2024), linked with a national conference about the cultural and geopolitical significance of maritime heritage within Greek island territories.

Main recommendations

Legal aspects

- Emphasize decentralization of the MSP process for identifying key national, regional and local challenges;
- Engage local authorities in Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and MSP;
- Improve MSP related legislation and address the disconnection between planning on land and sea accordingly, initiate coordination mechanisms between terrestrial and maritime spatial plans;
- Improve coordination among sectoral plans at regional/local level (e.g., aquaculture, offshore wind energy).

Governance

- Increase capacity building and training within the ecosystem of MSP stakeholders;
- Enhance meaningful stakeholder engagement by feedback reporting and awareness raising;
- Establish regional "Communities of Practice and Innovation" on MSP, with practitioners on related fields;
- Form dedicated steering committees at regional/sub-regional level focused on specific maritime sectors.
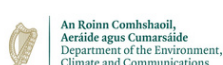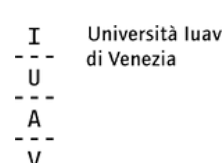
Resources

- Increase the inter-departmental collaboration on maritime, urban, and environmental issues;
- Mobilize financial resources for MSP capacity-building initiatives across scales and sectors even through common events and workshops.

Data Management

- Add a regional/local geoportal unit for MSP data to the existing geoportal of the Decentralized Administration of Crete;
- Enhance accessibility and interoperability of MSP data (between European, national and regional levels);
- Promote training actions about MSP data in the MSP planning and implementation processes.

Image 2 - Photos of the events organised as part of the REGINA-MSP project in Crete