



Sustainable Blue  
Economy Partnership

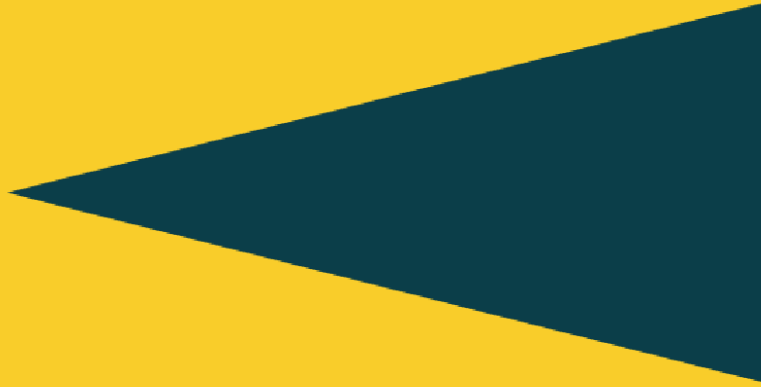
# Workshop Report: Blue Economy – The key towards Mediterranean Regional Sustainability

Sustainable Blue Economy  
Partnership



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EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP



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# 1.0 WORKSHOP OUTLINE

## 1.1 Summary

The Athens workshop was the first in a series of five regional workshops aimed at outlining the political priorities for the Blue Economy at the dimension of each of the five sea basins surrounding the continent, with in mind the European scope of the Partnership. A desired outcome of the workshop is the creation of mutual meeting, dialogue and knowledge between stakeholders, all of whom share the common mission of "caregivers" of the sustainability of the Mediterranean Sea. The workshop **Blue Economy – The key towards Mediterranean Regional Sustainability** was held in Athens, Greece, **on 7th June 2024 at Posidonia 2024 International Shipping Exhibition.**

Eighteen high-level speakers and the Partnership staff, all with different backgrounds, contributed to the debate. Most of the speakers came from academy and research centers, often also involved in business solutions of applied research. Others represented a few supranational organizations, such as the European Union (DG RTD and DG MARE), the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the United Nations Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) and the national governments of Italy, Greece and Slovenia. Some of the initiatives funded under the first call were also presented as good practices of the Partnership to be followed in the future.

The workshop was articulated in two parts: first, discussions were held in three different thematic panels, each of them related to a topic of the blue sector areas, with questions and answers from the public:

- *Marine energy and multiuse offshore platforms*
- *Coastal and maritime tourism*
- *Spatial planning and MED ports*

The second part of the agenda featured two panel discussions focusing on the enablers and facilitators essential for turning policies into reality: the first focused on synergies between sectoral actors (BlueMissionMed, Prima, Westmed, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region, Interreg, UNEP/Map and UfM), while the second related to business and funding opportunities, market uptake and finance infrastructure. The latter lies at the core of the Partnership, whose annual Calls strongly encourage the participation of the private sector. In the last hour of workshop, the "World Café" style discussion allowed to share good practices, innovative technologies, running projects and fundings.













The vision behind both the Partnership and the workshops is to **foster a participatory and democratic process**, where key policy areas and activities converge toward a shared goal: **building the Community of the Blue Economy**. Beginning in the Mediterranean, this initiative aims to extend to all seas, which symbolize a collective heritage and a shared responsibility for the peoples of Europe.

























Figure 1 The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership's workshop "The key towards Mediterranean regional Sustainability," was part of the POSIDONIA International Shipping Exhibition in Athens in June 2024.

## 1.2 Agenda

The workshop agenda is showed below:

10:45		Arrival, registration and welcome coffee	
11:00		Opening remarks  <i>Moderators: Sofia Dimitropoulou, Greek General Secretariat for Research and Innovation (GSRI) and George Petihakis, Hellenic Center for Marine Research (HCMR), SBEP Med nodes</i>	<p>Prof. Athanasios Kyriazis, Greek General Secretary for Research and Innovation (GSRI)</p> <p>Elisabetta Balzi, European Commission (DG R&amp;I), on-line Christos Economou, European Commission (DG MARE)</p> <p><i>Welcome messages</i></p> <p>Kathrine Angell-Hansen, Research Council of Norway (RCN) <i>Setting the scene/1: the EU Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership and the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda</i></p> <p>Angiolo Boncompagni, Italian Ministry of Universities and Research (MUR) <i>Setting the scene/2: Aim of the workshop</i></p>
11:40		Thematic panel discussion 1:  <i>Marine Energy and Multi-Use Offshore Platforms</i>  Moderator: Takvor Soukissian, Hellenic Center for Marine Research (HCMR), SBEP Med node	<p>Luciano Mule-Stagno, University of Malta and formerly Heritage Malta - <i>Offshore platforms, renewable energy: state of play in the Mediterranean</i></p> <p>Katerina Spanoudaki (Forth), <i>Services from the Mediterranean ocean observing system (MONGOOS)</i></p> <p>Lorenzo Cappietti, University of Florence (Italy) <i>SBEP cofunded project on Sustainable, Reliable and Socially Acceptable Modular Floating Islands for Multi-use Offshore Spaces (FAMOS)</i></p> <p>Q&amp;A with the audience</p>
12:15		Comfort break	      
12:20		Thematic panel discussion 2:  <i>Coastal and maritime tourism</i>  Moderator: Maria Azzopardi, Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation of Malta (MEYR), SBEP Med node	<p>Stavros Antoniadis, UN Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) <i>Blue Tourism initiative</i></p> <p>Maria Boile, Zero Emission Waterborne Transport Platform <i>Sustainable cruising</i></p> <p>Q&amp;A with the audience</p>
12:55		Comfort break	      

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13:00		Thematic panel discussion 3:  <i>Spatial planning and Mediterranean Ports</i>  Moderator: Julie Olivier, Project Management Jülich (FZJ)	Christos Economou, European Commission DG MARE <i>Community of Practice on Maritime Spatial Planning for the Mediterranean</i> Mitja Bricelj, Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning (Slovenia) <i>Green transition in the Mediterranean: from decisions to actions</i> Olivier Laroussinie, Centre for Studies and Expertise on Risks, the Environment, Mobility and Urban Planning (CEREMA) <i>Challenges for a 'Particular Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA)'</i>  Q&A with the audience
13:35		Networking lunch	      
14:35		Panel discussion on enablers 1:  <i>Synergies</i>  Moderator: Adriana Salazar, Union for the Mediterannean	Cristina Zeri, Hellenic Centre for Marine Research <i>BlueMissionMed - Supporting the Mediterranean sea basin for the implementation of the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters</i> Angelo Riccaboni, University of Siena (Italy), on-line <i>Partnership for R&amp;I Initiative in the Mediterranean area</i> Thanos Smanis, CLIMAZUL <i>WestMed Initiative</i> Eirini Mantzouni, Hellenic Ministry of Rural Development and Food, Greece, EUSAIR Pillar 1 Blue Growth - Coordinator <i>Blue Economy assets of the Adriatic Ionian Euroregion (EUSAIR)</i> Monica Bellisario, Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers <i>Role of INTERREG in the Mediterranean area, how to strengthen synergies for the integration of funds</i> Tatjana Hema, UN Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) <i>International cooperation as key enabler for a blue green strategy</i>  Q&A with the audience
15:15		Panel discussion on enablers 2:  <i>Business and funding opportunities</i>  Moderator: Kathrine Angell-Hansen, Research Council Norway	Martin Humburg, European Investment Bank (EIB) <i>EIB's support to a sustainable blue economy</i> Mahdi Khomsi, BusinessMed, Tunisia <i>Trends for sustainable business in the Mediterranean area</i> José Delara, Spanish Maritime Cluster <i>Leveraging opportunities for funding maritime sectors</i>  Q&A with the audience
15:50		Comfort break and continuous coffee	      
15:55		World café	<i>Good practices, innovative technologies, funding schemes</i> Facilitators: Julie Olivier, Project Management Jülich (FZJ) and Christy Baldacchino Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation of Malta (MEYR), SBEP Med node
16:55		Wrap up and closing remarks	Coordinator, moderators and facilitators
17:00		End of the workshop	

## 2.0 OUTCOMES

### 2.1 Opening remarks

The opening of the workshop was moderated by **Sofia Dimitropoulou**, (Greek General Secretariat for Research and Innovation - GSRI) and **George Petihakis**, (Hellenic Center for Marine Research - HCMR).

In his welcome statement, **Prof. Athanasios Kyriazis**, Secretary General, Greek General Secretariat for Research and Innovation (GSRI) highlighted the **role of Blue Economy as a key factor of regional cohesion and local development** of the country. He mentioned that currently shipping, marine industries, fishing, marine tourism, and mariculture, contribute more than 25% in Greece's economy and that Greece is part of Europe's five biggest blue economies countries together with the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and France. Spain accounts for one fifth of total employment in the blue economy, followed by Italy, the United Kingdom and Greece. Together, these four Member States account for more than half of the total blue economy-related jobs in EU. The **Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership objective** to deliver solutions to strengthen EU and international science-policy interfaces in marine- and maritime-related domains of the EU Green Deal and Digital is **fully in-line with Greece's national policy and Research and Innovation Services sectorial priorities**. Moreover, the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership's Greek partners to play the role of contact points for the East-Mediterranean, a region facing major environmental and energy-related challenges. To this end, **close collaboration is foreseen with all relevant regional and national stakeholders** in the region to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and best practices, benefiting all participating countries. Greece has fully supported the concept of European Partnerships by participating in most of them and promoting the opportunities offered to national research, academic and business communities. Emphasis is always put on the expected impact of the co-funded transnational projects at national and EU level.





Figure 2 Prof. Athanasios Kyriazis, Secretary General, Greek General Secretariat for Research and Innovation (GSRI)

Next, Ms **Elisabetta Balzi**, Head of Unit - Healthy Seas and Ocean, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission (connected online) stated that the **Mediterranean's sustainability** and the sustainable future of the Mediterranean Sea for science, prosperity and people, is a very **high strategic priority**, which is at the very core of our EU policymaking and actions. **Collaborative transnational research projects are key to achieving regional connectivity and the integration of the Mediterranean Sea research community** from the east to the west in the European research area. Through this Partnership, combining budgets at central European level, national and regional as well as private levels will result in more collaborative research and will connect the scientific community with its research funding community, ministries and industries, with the aim to achieve a higher societal impact. Collaborative research in the Mediterranean Sea has been already extensively supported by the European Research and Innovation Programme, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, PRIMA, that supports research in relation to food systems and water resources in the Mediterranean basin, the lighthouse for Mediterranean of our EU Mission to restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030 with half a billion euros invested already. The Commission has also just published two new calls for proposals, which include a large topic of more than 50 million euros to support community-led actions in islands, cities, regions, ports, fleets, as well as a topic to create a coalition of coastal and inland waterfront cities, regions and islands for the Mission. **Communities are indeed pivotal in driving the transition at local level and they may be part of the living labs to co-create and design recommendations, solutions and knowledge sharing.** In that view, the

Blue Mission Med has set up different hubs and living labs across Europe, including in Greece. The European Commission also supports the development of **EU Digital Twin of the Ocean** aiming at putting ocean knowledge at the fingertips of citizens, entrepreneurs, scientists, and policymakers through concrete use cases. Overall, this is a big portfolio of actions, and it is of course not only about budgets, number of projects or deliverables, but it is a matter of engagement, trust and connectivity between the scientific community with citizens; on this matter, the Partnership is playing a very important role. It is a vital aspect of **science diplomacy**, serving as a beacon of hope and a catalyst for cooperation, even amidst the challenging geopolitical landscape we face today.



Figure 3 Ms Elisabetta Balzi, Head of Unit - Healthy Seas and Ocean, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission

In his welcoming note **Mr. Christos Economou**, acting director with responsibility for Maritime Policy and Blue Economy and Head of Unit with responsibility for sea-basin strategies at DG MARE, emphasized **that achieving sustainability in the blue economy requires innovation**. We need new approaches to interaction, effective pathways for translating research into tangible market outcomes, and the ability to produce more efficiently and, above all, more sustainably than we do today. The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership is very well placed to support the Commission agenda regarding both the new approach for sustainable blue economy and the **blue dimension of the Green Deal**. Sustainability and cooperation are at the heart of the European Commission sea basin strategies, also thanks to the Mission, that helps in creating a good context for cooperation in the broader Mediterranean. The smart specialization is also a very important

topic for DG MARE. It is important to support the blue entrepreneurs which often have trouble in up taking their results of research and innovation into the market. This is the reason for the development of the **Blue Invest instrument**.



Figure 4 Mr. Christos Economou acting director with responsibility for Maritime Policy and Blue Economy and Head of Unit with responsibility for sea-basin strategies at DG MARE.

The last two talks, given by two members of the Partnership Cellule in Brussels, set the scene for the workshop. Firstly, **Mrs. Kathrine Angell-Hansen**, from the Research Council of Norway (RCN) introduced to Partnership and its Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) to the audience. The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership is a Partnership under Horizon Europe, and is therefore driven by the European Union in its full sense, with the Commission, the Member States and associate countries in continuous expansion. The Partnership's initial phase focused on establishing a shared perspective, integrating regional agendas, and building on the accomplishments of the previous framework program. Efforts were directed toward consolidating these foundations in ways that add value, while also facilitating the exchange of best practices across regions—a priority that, as Christos noted, holds significant importance for the Partnership. It is important thus to look at the Partnership in a very holistic manner. **The Partnership is responding to the green digital transformation and to the autonomy of the union.** The regional sea basins are an imminent, excellent starting point for the Partnership to undertake cooperation with the member states. The Partnership's **Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda aligns closely with the policies of the EU,**



emphasizing the new dimension introduced by this framework program: **impact**. It goes beyond outcomes and publications, focusing on the Partnership's contributions to the Union's economy, civil society, science, regions, and citizens, driving transformative change. The intervention areas are designed to be impact-oriented, aiming to develop localized solutions tailored to the needs of specific communities. The Partnership prioritizes **co-creation with society and promotes cross-disciplinary actions** that connect directly to the regions. For example, if a region has smart specializations in areas like fisheries, maritime transport, renewable energy, or energy efficiency in fishing fleets, the Partnership can integrate these priorities with excellent projects and activities to accelerate progress and provide clear direction. The Partnership places a strong emphasis on **connectivity**, with a dedicated secretarial function to fostering links at the international, regional, and inter-partnership levels, all within the broader European dimension.



Figure 5 Mrs Kathrine Angell-Hansen, from the Research Council of Norway (RCN) and Mr. Martin Humburg, European Investment Bank (EIB).

Next, **Mr. Angiolo Boncompagni**, from the Italian Ministry of Universities and Research (MUR), presented in detail the aim of the workshop. He introduced the **regional sea basin nodes**, consisting of professionals from several countries across the five European all-ocean sea basins. They play a crucial role in supporting the Partnership by providing strategic advice for the agenda and establishing a clear connection—a "red line"—between the regional and European dimensions, which are often highly complex and fragmented. In doing so, they help foster synergies and enhance connectivity. The **purpose of regional workshops** like this one is to **adapt policy priorities to the local dimension while maintaining a clear focus on the project's all-European scope**. The "The key towards Mediterranean Regional Sustainability" workshop constitutes an opportunity of **mutual dialogue and knowledge exchange between different actors**, all of them aiming at the same

goal, the sustainability of the Mediterranean Sea. The **participatory and democratic approach of the regional workshops is crucial**, providing a platform where key policy areas and activities are analyzed, refined, and harmonized to achieve a shared objective: building the Community of the Blue Economy. Starting from the Mediterranean, this effort aspires to extend to all seas, which symbolize a **collective heritage and a shared responsibility** for the European community.

## 2.2 Session I – Thematic Panels

### 2.2.1 Marine Energy and Multi-Use Offshore Platforms

The thematic panel discussion 1 “Marine Energy and Multi-Use Offshore Platforms” started with an introduction by the panel moderator Dr **Takvor Soukissian**, from the Hellenic Center for Marine Research, who described the various aspects of marine renewable energy and multi-use offshore platforms. Takvor presented the **offshore wind** status in the Mediterranean Sea and the **main obstacles to be overcome, such as the sector’s environmental impacts and social acceptance**. An important step towards the development of marine renewable energies for avoiding potential conflicts between different users of the marine space, is the development of **multi-use offshore platforms** and very large floating structures that **combine several uses and different operations** (such as offshore wind energy, solar energy, wave energy, aqua-culture, tourism activities, etc.), using the same marine space. An example of a sustainable, reliable and socially acceptable modular floating structure being at the conceptual design phase is what is being development in [FAMOS](#), a co-funded project of the Partnership, that is capable to withstand harsh environmental conditions. The **need for high quality ocean data** that are required for the design of these technologically demanding structures, as well as for marine energy assessment has been also emphasized.

Prof. **Luciano Mule’ Stagno**, University of Malta, presented the main aspects of **multi-use floating offshore structures** and described analytically a modular hexagonal floating solar structure “**Solaqua**” that has been successfully tested and experimentally verified at the laboratory. Assoc. Prof. **Lorenzo Cappiotti** described analytically an undergoing project FAMOS aiming to design a sustainable, reliable and socially acceptable modular floating structure for the creation of multifunctional sea areas in deep water and fully exposed conditions, taking into consideration technical, social, environmental, economic and political issues. Dr. **Katerina Spandoudaki** described the services that the Mediterranean Oceanographic Network for the Global Ocean Observing System ‘**MonGOOS**’ provides to the users of metocean data (wind, waves and ocean currents) that are of great value during the design, construction and operation phase of an offshore marine energy farm.



The panel acknowledged that **offshore solar energy** will eventually be developed and that the Mediterranean Sea is a very favorable area for this development. Moreover, **very large modular floating islands** seem to be a very **promising perspective for the Mediterranean basin**, since multi-use platforms enhance synergies and social acceptance, and at the same time minimize environmental impacts. Evidently, the scale and extent of these structures will depend on many factors including cost, policies, particular needs etc., while **reliable ocean data are in any case of utmost importance**.

## 2.2.2 Coastal and maritime tourism

**Maria Azzopardi**, from the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation of Malta highlighted the importance of coastal and maritime tourism for ensuring the long-term resilience of Mediterranean coastal communities. As **tourism is a significant economic driver in the region**, and particularly in Malta, it is essential to address its environmental impacts to preserve the natural resources and biodiversity that underpin both local livelihoods and the tourism industry itself. By bringing together experts, policymakers, and stakeholders, the panel aimed at fostering collaborative strategies that promote sustainable tourism practices, safeguard coastal ecosystems, and enhance the social and economic resilience of Mediterranean communities in the face of environmental challenges.

Sustainable tourism is a vital way forward for the Mediterranean region, where it stands as the leading blue sector due to the heavy reliance of local economies on tourism. The region faces significant pressures and climate change impacts, such as seasonal droughts, which are exacerbated by tourism and other anthropogenic influences. **Embracing sustainable tourism practices is essential to mitigate these environmental pressures, ensuring the long-term health of coastal ecosystems and the resilience of the communities that depend on them.**

In this context, there is an urgent need for resilience, sustainability, and awareness. Policymakers must play a crucial role in regulating and guiding sustainable tourism practices. This involves implementing **robust policies, raising awareness about the environmental impacts of tourism, and fostering resilience in coastal communities to ensure the long-term viability of both the tourism industry and the natural ecosystems** on which it depends. The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership has been designed with the well-being of people as a priority. The Partnership highlights the importance of inclusive and resilient coastal and maritime tourism, ensuring that both the local communities and the environment are protected and thrive together. Through cooperative efforts, it is possible to create a tourism sector that supports economic growth while safeguarding the natural resources and cultural heritage that make the Mediterranean region unique.

**Stavros Antoniadis**, from the UN Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP), presented the **Blue Tourism initiative**, under the framework of

UNEP-MAP, which aims to foster sustainable tourism practices in the Mediterranean region. This initiative is designed to **promote tourism models that are environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, and economically viable**, with a strong focus on preserving the Mediterranean's unique marine and coastal ecosystems. Key aspects of Blue Tourism include promoting **eco-friendly infrastructure**, reducing the carbon footprint of tourism activities, protecting biodiversity, and supporting local communities. It also encourages businesses to adopt sustainable practices and travelers to engage in responsible tourism. The initiative aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 14 on Life Below Water and SDG 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production. A lot of effort is being made to promote synergies and foster multi-stakeholder engagement by bringing together various sectors and actors in the region, allowing for an effective **multi-actor approach**. Blue Tourism facilitates dialogue amongst several actors including national and local governments for policies that regulate and incentivize sustainable tourism, coastal communities for equitable distribution of tourism benefits and preservation of cultural heritage, the private sector, NGOs and civil society to ensure accountability as well as international organizations to promote cross-border cooperation. These stakeholders come together to share perspectives and best practices to manage tourism pressure, conserve ecosystems and promote long-term regional sustainability and prosperity.

According to Stavros Antoniadis, the Mediterranean region has come a long way to promote sustainable blue tourism as showcased by the **Barcelona Convention** and its associated protocols, such as the **Protocols on Integrated Coastal Zone Management** and the one for **Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity**. The **networks of Marine Protected Areas** have also been expanded significantly. However, there are still avenues for further engagement and cooperation at regional level, to ensure that blue tourism becomes more sustainable. National policies of Mediterranean countries must continue to be aligned and harmonized. While most countries have adopted national strategies for sustainable tourism, the **need for greater alignment of policies across borders** is still there. This includes **harmonized environmental standards**, tourism regulations and marine protection frameworks. Given that the Mediterranean Sea is a shared resource it is important to have a **more coordinated approach** to ensure that tourism development adheres to a common set of shared sustainability principles, especially in transboundary areas.

Different sectors should also be more strongly committed to promoting blue and green infrastructure to minimize the burden of the tourism industry, including eco-friendly transportation and sustainable water-management systems. Investments could be incentivized, making it possible to accessible funding mechanisms, particularly for smaller countries and local communities. Successful projects are often delivered through effective collaboration in public-private partnerships, and with comprehensive data on the environmental and social impacts of tourism

activities. Unless data is coordinated across the region, it is very difficult to monitor and assess the sustainability of tourism activities. **Engagement of local communities** as well as operators and tourists to promote responsible tourism is essential. Tourists should be encouraged to minimize their impact on ecosystems and to cultivate a deeper appreciation for the beauty of tourist destinations, ensuring these sites can be preserved for future generations. This can be achieved through measures such as limiting mass tourism, promoting agritourism, diversifying and expanding touristic hotspots geographically, and reducing seasonal tourism by spreading visitor numbers more evenly throughout the year. Moreover, the Mediterranean is very susceptible to the impacts of climate change. **Resilient infrastructures** should be developed to protect vulnerable coastal areas and to reduce carbon footprint of tourism. For instance, operators should be educated and incentivized to resort to renewable energy-powered facilities and to develop their enterprises in a low-impact tourism model.

Then, **Maria Boile**, Zero Emission Waterborne Transport Platform, presented the **European Waterborne Technology Platform** and its approximately 125 members from both industry and academic sectors which focuses on ships, shipping, the blue economy, ports and logistics. Their primary objective is to decarbonize the maritime sector, addressing both national and international concerns. Given its emphasis on promoting sustainable practices within the blue economy, the platform's work aligns closely with coastal and maritime tourism objectives. This synergy encourages collaboration and innovation in mitigating environmental impacts, thereby supporting the long-term resilience and sustainability of coastal tourism sectors. Maria Boile underscored the platform's importance, highlighting its diverse membership and shared interests with the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership, and emphasizing their **joint efforts towards decarbonization and promoting national interests**.

When discussing transportation, which plays a pivotal role in facilitating tourism, emphasis was put on ferry and cruise transport. **Decarbonization poses a significant challenge in the cruise sector**, while ferry transport is deemed equally, if not more, critical. Often, ferry services serve as the sole connection to remote regions and industries, offering a viable and sustainable alternative to other modes of transport, particularly when those alternatives are limited. Facilitating the movement of goods and people within coastal areas through ferry transport stands out as one of the most sustainable approaches. The Waterborne initiative strives to introduce new solutions and technologies to advance this decarbonization agenda. Decarbonization efforts necessitate further exploration for answers and solutions, a path the Platform is currently pursuing. A study conducted within her ministry in Greece aimed to devise operational measures for decarbonizing island transport services, ensuring efficiency and accessibility for local communities dependent on such services. However, **achieving the goal of zero-carbon emissions remains challenging due to technological limitations**, with some solutions applicable in specific sectors but not yet universally viable.

Collaboration between vessels and port infrastructures is crucial, and progress is being made through ongoing dialogue and coordination. **Research and Innovation holds a pivotal role in advancing solutions.** While new technologies and solutions exist, they require testing and implementation. Partnerships remain essential for developing and utilizing these translated solutions at a micro level.

### 2.2.3 Thematic panel discussion: Spatial Planning and Mediterranean Ports

This session aimed at looking at achievements on Marine/Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) for the Mediterranean Sea basin. MSP is a crucial tool to resolve conflicting uses in the blue economy and to minimize impact of human activities on marine ecosystems. Therefore, with its intervention area “managing sea uses”, the Partnership promotes an **ecosystem-based MSP interlinked with relevant EU policies** including the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Common Fishery Policy (CFP), the Habitats and Birds Directives and the new Nature Restoration Regulation. Under this intervention area, the Partnership co-funds the project [MEDSEAPLAN](#) to develop Decision Support Tools (DSTs) for evidence-based decision-making in the Mediterranean in the context of a Business in nature strategy<sup>1</sup>. The Partnership also supports MSP within the UN Ocean Decade Programme on Sustainable Ocean Planning, which aims at acting as an overarching unifying framework for all policies dealing with the ocean.

Besides, based on the growing and crucial role of ports for the blue economy, and since an ecosystem-based management approach calls for a holistic perspective of the spatial planning, including its terrestrial component, this session also aimed at discussing needs regarding the integration of ports into MSP.

**Christos Economou** (DG MARE) highlighted the EU leadership on MSP worldwide. *“The EU MSP Directive has set a clear legal framework for 10 years already: this is a major achievement worldwide. There are already 19 plans adopted by Member States.”* The **compendium on the EU MSP Platform**<sup>2</sup>, for which the EC has collected best practice examples, including multi-use case studies involving in particular offshore renewable, protection and restoration of nature, aquaculture and fishing. Christos Economou stressed the need to tackle **multi-use** of the seas in order to enhance the development of MSP. *“We need space to develop the solutions we need for the future”*, he said. The EU and the Mediterranean are looking strategically at how to develop multi-use of marine and maritime space in order

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<sup>1</sup> Businesses should not only be profitable but also contribute positively to environmental conservation, social well-being, and ecosystem health - thus perfectly aligned with the objectives of both MSP and the Sustainable Blue Economy. It associated the concept of “innovability” to have a positive impact in societies, as well as increasing the resilience of social-ecological systems (the basis of all policy formulations both in Europe and in the Mediterranean area). (MEDSEAPLAN)

<sup>2</sup> [Homepage](#) | [The European Maritime Spatial Planning Platform \(europa.eu\)](#)

to combine offshore activities synergistically. The **Community of Practice on Maritime Spatial Planning for the Mediterranean “MED MSP CoP”** has been mentioned as a pilot project to develop concepts for a shared area, and where the Union for the Mediterranean plays a key role. Through the exchange of good practice, Communities of Practice are an important tool to improve knowledge and to develop transboundary cooperation. Finally, Christos informed that MSP was at the agenda of the Our Ocean Conference in Athens in April 2024 and that beyond the EU, the European Commission cooperates with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO on **MSPglobal**<sup>3</sup> as an important tool to gain valuable knowledge and promote MSP worldwide.

**Mitja Bricelj** (Slovenian Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning) highlighted the need for transboundary dialogue to achieve the green transition in the Mediterranean. *“It is easy to adopt a program but the implementation is always a challenge. And at multilateral level it is even more complex.”* Based on his experience of the Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP), Mitja Bricelj highlighted the needs to **address the interaction between land and sea**. *“The process of preparing and implementing the protocol of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) is extremely important because it brings together land and sea.”* He also highlighted the need to consider the different geographic scales when developing programs for the sea (local, national and macroregional).

This was illustrated with the **best practice case of Slovenia on MSP in the Northern Adriatic**: Slovenia enhanced its MSP by combining the regional sea and macroregional approaches, namely the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionic Region (EUSAIR), MSP, MSFD, the Water Framework Directive, River basin management, and ICZM. As the EUSAIR is structured alongside four pillars: 1) blue growth (blue economy), 2) connectivity (transport and energy), 3) quality of environment, 4) sustainable tourism, the “smart approach” consists in developing interpillar projects on transboundary and macroregional levels. *“It is a priority to think, act and deliver. We have succeeded in delivering a contingency plan for the Northern Adriatic integrating ICZM and MSP, synergistically with the macroregional Adriatic strategy and within the Barcelona convention framework.”* Challenges consist in integrating small countries in a fair way with regards to Exclusive Economic Zones. Mitja Bricelj called for the implementation of the side of the Italian and Croatian partners.

With this best practice case on the implementation of an integrated ecosystem-based approach, Mitja Bricelj highlighted the need to consider the “ecosystem connectivity” since our economies rely on ecosystem goods and services. Blue and green corridors are strategic tools to develop blue economy activities. *“We are taking very seriously the source to sea approach because ecosystem goods*

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<sup>3</sup> [MSPglobal: international guide on marine/maritime spatial planning | The European Maritime Spatial Planning Platform \(europa.eu\)](https://mbspglobal.europa.eu/)



*from the sea are very much connected to rivers and what they are draining. Therefore, we are connecting river basins management, coastal management and MSP."*

**Olivier Laroussinie**, French Centre for Studies and Expertise on Risks, the Environment, Mobility and Urban Planning (CEREMA) highlighted the intrinsically **political issue of MSP**. *"When you are at sea, there are immediately international matters. **Borders between national jurisdictions are sometimes not clear and countries sometimes disagree about them.**"* For instance, there was a political disagreement between France and Spain to design a plan, and a diplomatic crisis a few years ago between France and Italy. But still national MSP is possible: *"and most importantly the environment does not know about national limits: when you are talking about cetaceans' protection, air pollution, collision, noise from maritime traffic, risk of accidents from maritime transport, then you must consider environmental issues to develop MSP."* In order to support effective management of the area-based space while ensuring biodiversity protection in the Mediterranean, Olivier Laroussinie highlighted the need to work both with sectoral organizations such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and within frameworks of regional sea basins. Best practice examples are the "Bonifacio straights" with a very strong regulation on the maritime traffic to avoid accidents, as well as the particularly sensitive sea area (PSSA) for the protection of marine mammals in the Western Mediterranean. Olivier Laroussinie pointed out challenges related to political and economic considerations: *"you cannot protect cetaceans or develop offshore wind parks which could create a problem for French sports in the Gulf of Lion and give advantage to Geneva and Barcelona. It is not only a question of national limits but also a question of economic competitiveness."*

Olivier Laroussinie introduced the co-funded project MEDSEAPLAN coordinated by the World Ocean Council. *"We want to obtain a method for a more proactive industry in the [MSP] process, to be able to identify data needs and contributions from stakeholders more precisely, and to reach better decision-making tools."*

On the question of the coherence of the MSP framework regarding the integration of ports, the speakers highlighted the crucial role of ports for ecosystem-based MSP and the need to better involve ports stakeholders in MSP processes. *"Ports are key to the overall chain of the blue economy. And they need space, so they are part of the MSP the way it is conceived."* said **Christos Economou**. Compared to other sectors, ports can provide services to other sectors (offshore wind supply chain, supply chains, fisheries, etc.) meaning that they connect all sectors for supply and exchange. Ports also play a key role for the implementation of EU policies on decarbonization. By providing clean energy supply, ports are the backbone of green shipping. Besides, ports play a role at different scales (local, regional, international). *"Ports are not isolated in the chain: they are key to the economy, for regional development, and how they connect between each other."* DG MARE promotes the role of ports as hubs of the blue economy and

exchange of good practices: WestMED supported Technical Group on “green shipping and ports” and the Atlantic Smart Port Blue Acceleration Network (AspBAN). This project run under DG MARE promoted the role of ports to achieve decarbonization targets but also as innovation hubs and to create regional clusters benefiting economic value chains.

**Mitja Bricelj** developed the best practice example illustrated by the **port of Koper** in Slovenia. While more than 20 years ago, the enlargement plan of the port to the area of the wetland first led to a huge debate and was eventually stopped, the added value of the plan advanced by the port authority was gradually recognized. It is now a port in the middle of a protected area. It is a very rich habitat with birds and a recreational area, providing ecosystem services through temperature regulation. Posidonia meadows are even expanding in the area. With that example, Mitja Bricelj stressed the need to consider eco-connectivity as being at the core of developing resilient economic activities on the coast. This is also why Slovenia is developing green and blue corridors with Croatia.

**Olivier Laroussinie** emphasized the **strategic role of ports for effective ecosystem-based MSP**. *“As ‘dots’ on the map, ports are theoretically not really concerned by spatial planning.”* But they both influence and are influenced in the context of MSP. For instance, investing in the extension of a harbor to increase capacity for larger ships or yachts increases the influence on maritime traffic, the risk of collision, and the coastal area for boating. Vice versa, developments in other blue economy sectors based in the area strategically influence port developments. For instance, if the shipping industry develops larger ships, adequate access to ports is necessary. ***“That is why ports should be very involved in MSP preparation, perhaps much more than what I have seen so far in France. It is a question of vision of the future. Ports can win in participating in MSP, on influencing what will be planned.”*** For ports, this also means securing their investment. For instance, ports play a crucial role in developing wind farms as construction and maintenance bases.

Olivier Laroussinie illustrated the *“full importance of the question of ports in MSP”* with a French example tied to the development of sea basin strategies: as French marine plans are integrating needs related to ICZM and the MSFD, the question of how to integrate ports based on their strategic role to achieve decarbonization targets is also being targeted. As port development requires “more space”, needs for re-industrialization implying nature destruction conflict with needs for nature restoration. Instead of destroying nature when you need more space, Olivier Laroussinie suggested there could be a common strategy for nature compensation. In France, there is an inventory of areas that could be restored and a better foresight in terms of what could be needed in terms of port infrastructure. To conclude, he stressed that the **MSP framework is successful as an enabling framework since it is the place where it has been possible to crosscut sectoral policies that normally work separately**: on the one hand policies for nature compensation, and on the other hand the necessity for reindustrialization.

The **key messages** of the panel have been summarised below:

- Over the past decade, MSP has been established as a successful framework enabling a cross-sectoral approach to mitigate conflicting uses of the sea for the blue economy.
  - The EU plays an important role in supporting the development of MSP worldwide through exchange of good practice on key achievements including from the Mediterranean Sea basin (i.e. EU MSP Platform, MSPglobal, Community of Practice on MSP for the Mediterranean, Slovenian MSP in the Northern Adriatic, ...)
  - The Partnership promotes ecosystem-based MSP through:
    - o its intervention area “managing sea uses”,
    - o the co-funded project MEDSEAPLAN,
    - o involvement in the UN Ocean Decade Programme on Sustainable Ocean Planning.
- 
- Ports were recognized as catalyzers of the blue green transformation to achieve EU policy goals and to enhance thriving communities.
  - The Port of Koper in Slovenia was showcased as a best practice example of sustainable area-based port management combining development and conservation.
  - The following needs were identified to enhance MSP:
    - o Enhancing MSP by fostering the **multi-use** of marine and maritime space to combine offshore activities synergistically.
    - o Enhancing an ecosystem-based MSP by addressing **ecosystem connectivity** (eco-connectivity) at the land-sea interface and combining relevant frameworks with MSP (EU Water Framework Directive, River basin management, integrated coastal zone management, source to sea approach).
    - o Promoting **green and blue corridors** to ensure ecosystem connectivity.
    - o Following the example of EUSAIR which promotes transboundary interpillar projects, endorsing projects supporting different intervention areas could be explored.
    - o Promoting cooperation with sectoral organizations (i.e. International Maritime Organization) and within macroregional frameworks.
    - o Promoting tools such as **Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSA)**.
    - o Recognizing all **political and economic considerations** for the successful development and implementation of plans.

- **Involving ports stakeholders** better into spatial planning processes to promote sustainable ocean governance.
- **Promoting R&I solutions for ports** across intervention areas based on the connecting role of ports across blue economy sectors and ecosystems at the land sea interface.
- Promoting ports in the context of the **EU Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy** given their crucial role for offshore construction and maintenance
- Through the World Café, following additional needs were identified: tackling marine pollution through ports, including as circularity hubs, differencing between smaller and larger ports, developing national strategies for ports.

## 2.3 Session II – Panel Discussion on Enablers

### 2.3.1 Synergies

The Panel was dedicated to the crucial role of **building synergies** in the framework of the Partnership and beyond, focusing on how to better converge efforts towards the continued development of the sustainable blue economy in and for the Mediterranean basin, and on how to strengthen and maximize interlinkages among ongoing and emerging initiatives and programs across the region.

During the session, recognizing the role and potential of the Partnership in enabling cross-border cooperation in the sustainable blue economy, speakers showcased key examples on how they promote synergies in the Mediterranean, as well as best practices emerging from actions/initiatives in place or in the pipeline. **Monica Bellisario, Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers**, highlighted the ongoing pilot experience promoted by the Department for cohesion policies and Southern Italy, Interreg Unit, involving five regional managing authorities and meant at **facilitating synergies between Interreg and mainstream cohesion programs** and beyond. Indeed, **cross-border cooperation** must be at the core to advance towards a sustainable blue economy that brings economic, social, and environmental benefits across the entire Mediterranean Sea basin, and that is truly sustainable, climate-neutral, innovative, circular, fair, inclusive, multi-stakeholder, and productive. This is done by **enhancing coordination and complementarity among the different programs** that are in place in the region and that will continue to emerge; utilizing/maximizing the existing frameworks in place; avoiding duplication of efforts; building on each other's strengths; enshrining complementarity, alignment, and convergence as key guiding principles; enhancing inter-program coordination; and by extending/scaling up – as feasible – successful EU-led initiatives to the wider basin.

This is the **approach taken by the countries of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)** under the agreed upon **mandate on Sustainable Blue Economy** underpinned by the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy and by the Roadmap for its implementation. With the landmark 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on SBE, the agreed upon scope of action was significantly expanded in both depth and range, covering ten Ministerial priorities, both key economic sectors of the Med SBE (*Sustainable food from the Sea: fisheries and aquaculture; Sustainable, climate-neutral and zero-pollution maritime transport and ports; Coastal and maritime tourism; Marine renewable energies*) as well as the key enablers/accelerators that can support the sustainable development of the sectors and activities of the Med SBE (*Governance and the future of sea basin strategies in the Mediterranean region; Marine research and innovation, skills, careers and employment; Interactions between marine litter and the blue economy; Maritime Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Zone Management; Maritime safety and security of blue economy activities; and Sustainable investments in the blue economy*).

### 2.3.2 Business and Funding opportunities

**Martin Humburg**, European Investment Bank (EIB), presented how and why the EIB supports the blue economy. The EIB is a promotional bank owned by EU Member States. It provides support for eligible investments in the form of advantageous loans and other financial instruments with the aim of addressing social and economic challenges.

The EIB's focus is on the impact of the project to society and economy at large not only the financial return to borrower and company. Some key facts are shown below:

- *With backing from Member States, the EIB can borrow cheaply at the international market, and channel the proceeds as more affordable loans to SMEs.*
- *The European Investment Fund is part of the EIB Group, investing equity in startups and SMEs.*
- *The EIB can provide advisory services, as it has experts for instance in renewable energy. Because of its expertise, the European Commission mandates the EIB on certain initiatives such as Blue Invest.*

The EIB also supports funding of research infrastructure. For example, Greece asked if the EIB could fund a vessel for the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (HCMR). Martin informed that “*In May this year, the European Commission and the European Investment Bank unveiled twenty 'EU Blue Champions' who will receive advisory support to grow their business*”. He emphasized that **to develop the blue economy, it is essential to deepen our understanding of ocean processes and the**



**effects of climate change on these systems.** Simultaneously, we must closely **monitor how economic activities impact water resources** to prevent overexploitation and ensure their sustainable use. This requires guiding economic stakeholders through a green and transformative process that balances growth with environmental stewardship.

**Mahdi Khomsi**, representing **BusinessMed**, highlighted the organization's 24 years of activity, reflecting the commitment of 25 Confederations of Enterprises from UfM member states. BusinessMed focuses on various areas, including social dialogue, trade, and promoting sustainable economic activity in the region, with a particular emphasis on boosting economic development in the southern neighborhood. Their efforts are supported by EU funds provided through DEVCO. Mahdi Khomsi explained how BusinessMed fosters innovation and what this entails. One key initiative is the InvestMed project, which aims to develop sustainable economic small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and provides a business support framework for these enterprises. The project operates in Tunisia, Egypt, and Lebanon, playing a vital role in driving sustainable economic growth in the southern neighborhood.

The project comprises two main components: the first focuses on sustainability, emphasizing the connection with SMEs, research, and training on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) tools to drive innovation. The second component provides both financial and business support to 41 SMEs.

Key lessons learned from this initiative include the **critical role of Business Support Organizations (BSOs)**. They are essential, particularly in assisting SMEs with investments needed for the transition toward sustainability. Additionally, BSOs play a vital role at the local level by **linking local actors with regional and EU-level opportunities**, such as those offered by the EIB, Horizon Europe, and the Partnership.

When it comes to sustainable transformation, there are promising developments emerging within the region. Jordan and other countries have begun addressing this issue, though concrete action plans and dedicated budgets are still lacking. In contrast, Europe is heavily investing in the region's transition efforts, allocating significant funds such as €8 billion in Egypt and €1 billion in Tunisia to support sustainable transformation. Key challenges and opportunities related to research-based innovation, sustainable transformation, and skills were highlighted and listed below:

- *There is a mismatch and weak link between research and innovation with SMEs;*
- *Business must be engaged during the first part of the development of the innovation;*
- *Research needs must be more engaged with the private sector, to hear their needs and to channel the innovation into the market;*
- *Private sector lacks understanding and awareness on need for sustainable innovation;*

- *Horizon European and projects like the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership are a great opportunity to bring the business sector closer to the sustainability concept;*
- *EU investments such as those in Tunisia must be targeted to the local level. Business Support Organizations are a great opportunity to channel and promote sustainable praxis and awareness activity;*
- *There is a mismatch between the demand and the supply of skilled people;*
- *There is a need to finance all this process. Horizon European, the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership and all regional initiatives can play a major role in developing the region.*

Mahdi concluded saying “We need to work with vocational training centers and with the support of research to fill the skills demand, engage private sector to generate awareness and identify their skills needs, and we need the skills to implement the change”

**Vincent Cappel**, representing the Spanish Maritime Cluster, outlined the extensive scope of the cluster, which spans a wide range of sectors, including maritime transport, shipbuilding and repair, engineering, fisheries, aquaculture, recreation, marinas, marine renewables, regional clusters, and R&D. He shared his insights on the industry's competitiveness, focusing on policy bottlenecks, innovation, and skills development.

Cappel highlighted that **international actors**, such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), are working closely to enhance the global competitiveness of the maritime sector, which also extends to ports. However, he pointed out a critical issue: **EU regulations apply to ports within the EU**, such as those in Malta, **but not to ports in non-EU countries** like Morocco. This creates an **imbalance**, effectively “penalizing” European ports. Furthermore, this **discrepancy fails to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> footprints**, as containers still need to be transported from African ports to European shores, negating any environmental benefits.

He highlighted that “We need a global level playing field - geographical imbalances and diminishing European competitiveness in a global industry are the consequence, when the EU regulates on top of international organizations like IMO “

**Education and skills** development pose a significant challenge for the maritime sector, which struggles to attract younger generations. There is a shortage of seafarers, engineers, and other skilled professionals, making it imperative to increase efforts to inform students about the many opportunities this sector offers. Both at the European level and within maritime clusters, initiatives are being developed to address this issue. One major consequence of this **talent gap** is its impact on research and innovation. Many companies are unable to fully engage in or properly develop research activities due to a lack of skilled professionals needed for expansion. This represents a critical issue, and support at the European level is being sought in the hope that additional guidance and initiatives can help tackle this pressing problem.

**Innovation opportunities**, particularly those driven by green policies, are abundant. For instance, although we are still far from meeting the targets of the Paris Agreement, this gap presents numerous opportunities for companies to develop and offer solutions. In the maritime sector, **significant advancements are being made in propulsion methods and alternative fuels**. Six options—liquefied natural gas, biofuel, methanol, ammonia, batteries, and hydrogen—are emerging as alternatives to traditional fuel oil, potentially creating substantial growth opportunities for companies. This serves as an example of how innovation in alternative fuels can drive progress. It also highlights the need for **engine manufacturers to adapt to and comply with evolving regulations**, paving the way for continued technological advancement in the industry.

## 2.4 World Café

The World Café methodology allows for large groups discussions and is based on dynamic and inclusive interactions, as participants move from one discussion table to another in restricted time slots. The World Café at the Mediterranean workshop comprised five tables based on the workshop agenda. The word *MARE NOSTRUM*, which is the Roman name for the Mediterranean Sea, has been used to give titles to each of the groups (MA-RE-NO-STR-UM). The inputs provided by participants are listed below and complement the recommendations of each session.

**MA:** *What are the key challenges and opportunities in developing multi-use offshore platforms in the Mediterranean and how can these challenges be effectively addressed? [Based on the Panel discussion on Marine Energy and Multi-Use Offshore Platforms]*

Challenges	Opportunities
Cost	Efficient use of space
Different needs/priorities	Combined use
Deployment in deep waters	Technology development
Energy transport	Cross border aspect of marine space
Service/maintenance	Synergies with other sectors - aquaculture
Cost effectiveness	Waste recycling utilising mussels and seaweeds
Advanced competitiveness	Reducing environmental impacts
Leading role in sector in country	
Large investors	
Legal Framework	
Dietary patterns change on a global level	
Hidden costs	

Survivability	
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**RE:** *How can we balance a strong tourism sector (or: tourism development) with the protection of coastal ecosystems to ensure the resilience of Mediterranean coastal communities? [Based on the Panel discussion on Coastal and maritime tourism]*

Tools	Challenges
Monitoring and assessment -digital tech a keep check of parameters ex pollution, no of tourists	Limitation of resources (space and coastal areas)
Financial support by tourists to keep nature's assets in a pristine condition	Overtourism
Cooperation actions between regional cohesion managing authorities	Morey vs Nature (urban development).
Diversify: costal/non-costal	Avoid massive touristic patterns
Legislative and regulation framework against overtourism	Environmental degradation
Artificial islands	Waste management
Limit tourists to high-quality tourists	Local diversified traditional products in local communities, in coastal zone, promote a more traditional touristic pattern in combination with traditional activities (ecotourism)
MPAs: Expose citizens – increasing the tourists' education and in turn lowering tourisms' impact Literacy for non-native tourists' ex cruise passengers.	
Visibility of neglected sites to spread tourists	
Active tourism to protect costal ecosystems	

**NO:** *What innovative solutions should be prioritized for sustainable ecosystem-based planning in the Mediterranean, and how can ports contribute? [Panel discussion on Spatial planning and Mediterranean Ports]*

Challenges	Marine Spatial Planning	Ports
Environmental impact	Implementation	Education of managers to green areas
Energy transition	More data	Balance economical/ecological needs
Transnational collaboration	More research	Designing the transformation

National coordination	Advanced technology	Integrating ports into urban spatial planning
Harmonisation	MSP needs ports for the energy transition	Stakeholder cooperation
	Based on offshore renewable	The need for a national strategy – for small ports
	Public awareness – more engagement for citizens especially land-sea component	Logistics are important – private sector and authorities for good management
	More collaboration	Decarbonisation of needs VS cruising
	Services to sustain these initiatives, boosting capacity and ensuring space/yards are available through stakeholder cooperation.	<b>Recycling</b> – ports as circularity hubs
		<b>Pollution</b> in ports <input type="checkbox"/> contaminants from the source <input type="checkbox"/> Tourists <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic pollution and marine litter

**STR:** How can we enhance cross-border cooperation in the Mediterranean for a sustainable blue economy? [Panel discussion on enablers: Synergies]

Examples/Best Practices	Challenges/Lessons Learnt
Maintaining/enhancing the inter-programme coordination	Speaking the same language
Strong cooperation at Mediterranean Level	Avoid duplication of efforts as limitations emerge
Increased capacity building	Harmonised data sharing
Take into consideration geopolitical realities	Integrating the entire basin
Capitalization	
Educational cooperation	
Effective mapping	

**UM:** What are the main bottlenecks, including funding and research infrastructure, in developing knowledge-based cross-border clusters for a green Mediterranean blue economy, and what solutions can address these issues? [Panel discussion on enablers: Business and funding opportunities]

<b>Structural bottlenecks</b>
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Lack of market and economic skills in research and vis à vis. Research can spurt market/industry. Cultural challenge/ language
Innovation is not tradition in the University sector, new area takes time
University training students in industry is important
Intermediators, in terms of co-creators to get industry and university to speak the same language from the start of the project an in defining it
Output is often vague in research and industry; ask very precise questions to be answered which research is hesitant to do
Will industry go for green, -Yes, but only if there is a commercial market where the solution is competitive
<b>Research bottlenecks</b>
Research does not want to innovate not of interest due to costs of doing so
Aversion to risk in Europe compared to US
Aversion to failure in US it is considered good
Many researchers say "Not time to manage a company"
Bring venture capital early on for feasibility they bring in tech and market expertise, good for projects to understand this early on
<b>Regulatory and processual bottlenecks</b>
Simplify funding processes at all TRL level
IPR Standards regulation need to go hand in hand with technology requiring an innovative approach in government

## 3.0 NEXT STEPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The main take home messages and reflections from the workshop are listed below:

- *The event provided valuable insights into the sectors of Blue Economy industry's current landscape regarding innovation, digitalization, and sustainability. It also informed on the international state of play of perspectives of industry and service sector for research in the future, being a topic in several stands.*
- *The complexity of data access due to the many data gathering opportunities*

*today is not simplifying but making it challenging for many actors to analyze and thereby use the data. Therefore, data needs to be translated to feed decision-making also in the maritime industry.*

- *There are substantial benefits to be gained from connecting to business events like Posidonia.*
- *Achieving sustainability in the blue economy requires innovation, new approaches to interaction, effective pathways for translating research into tangible market outcomes, and the ability to produce more efficiently and, above all, more sustainably than we do today.*
- *Enhancing coordination and complementarity among the different programs requires utilizing/maximizing the existing frameworks in place, avoiding duplication and extending/scaling up – as feasible – successful EU-led initiatives to the wider basin.*

## 4.0 ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Partnership would like to warmly thank George, Sofia, Argyro, Maria, Christie and Ayet, the Partnership Mediterranean Sea Nodes from Greece, Malta and Tunisia, for organizing this event with great passion and generosity. The regional sea basin nodes are professionals from some of the countries of the five European all Ocean/Sea basins who strongly support the Partnership's bodies, through its Brussels Cellule, by advising on the strategic agenda and creating a 'red line' between global and regional dimensions, with their respective articulations and fragmentations. In so doing, the regional nodes contribute to the realization of synergies and connectivity, the European added value of the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership.

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