Strengthening the Science-Practice-Policy interface in Blue Growth

InnoBlueGrowth

Capitalization report for recommendations

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Specific Objective: 1.1 To increase transnational activity of innovative clusters and networks of key sectors of the MED area

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Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe

ASCAKE (Association of Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry)

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1. Context and objectives of the conference

The Mediterranean Blue Growth community met for the 6th time on the occasion of the capitalization and community event on "Strengthening the Science-Practice-Policy Interface in Blue Growth" which was held on 16th & 17th of April 2019 in Marseilles, France. This conference was organized by Plan Bleu in the framework of the InnoBlueGrowth project, with the support of the Intermediterranean Commission of the CPMR and in collaboration with all the other BG partners (CONISMA, ASCAME, UoM & NTUA).

The blue economy, defined as a sustainable ocean economy that balances economic activity with preserving the long-term capacity of healthy coastal and marine ecosystems, offers enormous potential for job creation and investment in the Mediterranean. It thus contributes to human development, regional integration and stability for and in the area.

To foster this blue economy, the integration of science into policy and practice to support evidence-informed decision-making is essential. However, new technologies or innovative methodologies developed by researchers are not always widely and quickly transferred or fully exploited by all stakeholders. Therefore, clusters or collaborative platforms to bring investors, funders, industry, public sector and other stakeholders together represent opportunities to bridge science to policy and practices frameworks through the exchange of knowledge and data and the tackling of sea and land-based challenges jointly.

The main objective of this event was to ensure the communication and capitalization activities of thematic projects dealing with Blue economy issues in the Mediterranean region in order to increase their impacts towards common identified targets.

InnoBlueGrowth relies on pillars associated with the marine and maritime environment such as blue energies, maritime surveillance technologies, yachting business models, maritime clusters, etc. This innovative community of actors has been running for more than 24 months, and has allowed the reinforcement of an integrated approach between blue economy projects funded by the Interreg Med Programme and transnational key stakeholders. It has hence been creating a whole Community of blue economy actors to support the activities of the thematic projects it works with.

This integrated and multi-level approach has indeed been recognized as a sine qua non condition to support Mediterranean clusters in their transnational activities processes, which also answers one of the main objectives of the Programme.

Through the Science-Practice-Policy Interface approach (SPPI), this capitalization and community-building event was the opportunity to discuss ways to strengthen the SPPI in the blue economy and Blue Growth community frameworks, while highlighting the main outputs of Blue Growth projects answering this issue.

Part of the discussions also addressed more thoroughly the issue of training and education for the blue economy, which will serve as a strong basis to support the Blue Growth Summer School of this upcoming
July 2019. The summer school will be the occasion to focus on youth opportunities and to help bridge the qualifications discrepancy in the blue economy sector. To that end, the Community Building workshop outcomes fueled the training and educational Summer School roadmap in terms of defining the specific theme courses and workshops that will cover several areas related to the blue growth, the analytical training programme, and the activities that will foster the team building sense among students. As such, sharing views, knowledge and experience in round-table discussions will be key to identify the blue economy challenges and opportunities to be tackled through the Summer School initiatives.

Expected outputs of this event were the following ones:

- Enhanced recommendations reflecting on the way to improve the Science-Practice-Policy interface for the blue economy in the Mediterranean
- An increased visibility of projects results to the public at all territorial levels and a stronger Blue Growth network
- The development and application of some shared basic standards and guidelines that support a sustainable blue economy
- A widened and shared knowledge among scientists, decision-makers and entrepreneurs on fundamental blue growth issues and topics
- Draft reflection axes for the Blue Growth Community Policy Paper
- Reflection axes to complement the 2019 Blue Growth Summer School approach

Around 80 individuals participated at the COMB&CAP event, including a great variety of stakeholders, ranging from policy makers to researchers and academia, representatives of regional public authorities, NGOs, and the private sector from the Mediterranean region.
2. Minutes of the conference

During the first day (16th of April 2019), the main barriers for innovation in the Blue Economy have been reported such as the difficult access to finance, the regulatory uncertainty and the lack of understanding between inventors and investors. To meet these challenges, new financial tools and approaches should be set, as well as assessment tools to measure the full and true impact of a project. Presentations from Blue Growth Community actors illustrated the key role of clusters in supporting cross-linkage and communication between civil society, academia, private sector and decision-makers to tackle these challenges and meet market expectations.

Anne Claudius-Petit, Regional councilor to the Region Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, welcomed the participants and raised in her speech the importance of Blue Economy as an important sector to create jobs and to support Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean region. « Si la Science sert la politique, l’inverse est également vrai ».

Caterina Praticò, Coordinator of InnoBlueGrowth project, presented the Blue Growth community and announced the upcoming Summer School on Blue economy.

The first session, facilitated by Céline Dubreuil, Senior programme officer for Plan Bleu, was dedicated to the role of clusters in supporting cross-linkage and communication between scientific research and policy communities.

Spyros Kouvelis, Programme Director, EPLO/CISL Centre on SDGs Governance & Public Law, stated that Blue Economy is political only and still too fragmented as an economic reality. He analyzed briefly the importance of Blue Economy sectors i.e. fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, and how these sectors are interconnected. He described the well-established BE sectors i.e. shipping, marine transportation and the emerging ones such as marine aquaculture, offshore wind energy. All these sectors are becoming more and more important and can be drivers to the world economy by 2030. In the next decade these sectors are potential for growth and networks can boost their development. Basis on a study contacted 2.5 years ago (by WWF), the MED area is the most highly valued sea in the world and sectors like coastal tourism, fisheries, aquaculture, marine transportation will be developed more & more in the MED, leading to a total turnover of more than 450 million dollars as an annual economic value. This is an about 20% of the gross maritime products, that is created in the MED area, which covers almost 1% of the geographic percentage all over the world.

Roberto Cimino, President of National Technology Cluster Blue Italian Growth, raised the necessity to create concrete initiative and plan and joint our efforts to reinforce the industry and mentioned as an example the WestMed initiative.
Markos Damasiotis, Head of the Development Programmes Division at the Centre for Renewable Energy Sources and Saving (CRES), representing the PELAGOS project, presented the value chain of blue economy. "Our activities and services are designed to support international cooperation; to promote industrial academia cooperation and to foster commercialization of innovative technologies". PELAGOS project aimed at creating blue energy cluster involving European Countries such as France, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Portugal and Spain, which count around 459 members.

Maud Favre, Responsible for Maritime issues and Logistics, CCIMP, presented the call launched by the 4Helix+ project to offer to SMEs and start-ups the opportunity to acquire knowledge and coaching supplied by providers who will help them to develop innovation project and to create innovative product services.

In a session dedicated to decision-makers’ viewpoints, Emmanuel Maniscalco, EU Programmes Senior Officer to the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission, presented the last developments of the Co-Evolve (Interreg Med) and MedCoast4BC (Union for the Mediterranean labeled) projects resulting from a long capitalization process stemming from the Bologna Charter. This Charter aims at strengthening the role of coastal administrations in the context of European policies and initiatives at the Mediterranean scale regarding coastal protection, integrated coastal zone management, and adaptation to climate change. It also helps to get access to diversified funding resources with a high capacity of mainstreaming and therefore constitutes a true tool and good practice in terms of linking science to policy and practice.

Tools and levers to strengthen the SPPI have been presented through activities from iBlue, MAESTRALE and MISTRAL projects: for instance, the implementation of living Labs or innovation incubators. The BIG-TC project presented its 3 years-Action Plan, a document for policy-making, aiming at establishing the Italian Marine Renewable Energies (MRE) Natural Hub, boosting Italian MRE Technologies and developing the Energetic Archipelagos. An interesting project to support Small Medium Enterprises was presented, the Neptune Blue Growth Accelerator. NEPTUNE’s Blue Growth Accelerator provided a unique opportunity for Small and Medium Enterprises, Entrepreneurs and Would-be-Entrepreneurs to get direct financial support of vouchers up to € 60,000 and access to a wide range of professional coaching and mentoring services to develop innovative technologies, services and products in the Blue Growth Sector.

The first day ended with a session moderated by Elodie Nunes, Executive Secretary to the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission, focusing on the further scientific developments required to enhance the development of the Blue economy in the Mediterranean region. The debates particularly addressed the limitations of current policies and the potentialities offered by cooperation frameworks to overcome them. Various ideas, tools, and initiatives were presented by contributors from the European Commission’s Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) and the EU Commission’s Joint Research Center at Ispra (Italy). Respectively, underlining current gaps in some blue sectors in terms of policy and implementation coordination, but also presenting efficient tools for the further development of the blue
economy through regional smart specialization strategies and the mainstreaming of European funds. Representatives from the BlueMed Initiative, the WestMed Initiative Assistance Mechanism’s French National Hub, and the Union for the Mediterranean completed the discussions, presenting their respective works and aiming at a true coordination between governance actions throughout the Mediterranean and in an inclusive way. All participants underlined the necessity to further involve the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean in the efforts to bridge science to practice and policy, bearing in mind the sound development of a sustainable blue economy for the Mediterranean.

**Funding, education, and training for Blue Growth**

Following a wrap-up of the main first day’s highlights, the second day (17th April 2019) of the event started with a session dedicated to funding issues. A panel composed by five speakers and facilitated by Spyros Kouvelis (Programme Director, EPLO/CISL Centre on SDGs Governance & Public Law) tackled manners to improve funding research programs for Blue Economy sectors and paths to facilitate access to finance research and innovation projects.

Sandrine Devos, Secretary General to the European Boating Industry, raised the necessity to **connect innovation with market needs**. SMEs need more straight forward approach in order to overcome barriers and the lack of transparency when looking for EU funding. Due to lack of funding, SMEs usually “sell” their ideas to bigger companies. “We should be ambitious and think globally – not individually, as benefits will be for everybody, by providing jobs and welfare for the society.”

Bernard Ziller, European Investment Bank Representative to the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat, reaffirmed the EIB commitment on Blue economy and mentioned the creation of a platform to encourage private contingency funds. The disadvantages that SMEs face are the risk and uncertainty (at regulation level as well) when it comes for funding.

Andrew Smith, from Greenbackers Investment Capital, presented this initiative which objective is to facilitate access to finance for blue economy research and innovation projects: by implementing a plan for a stable policy environment, showing that there is a market and finding the solution together. “We should give the right money to the right project, on the right time.”

Michele Colavita, National Agency for Territorial Cohesion in Italy, presented the PANORAMED project on how to address mainstreaming and capitalization of the projects. There’s a need to collect information of the results achieved and to integrate these results at policy level. It is important to develop further the relationship between public and private sectors.

The second session aimed at sharing tools and practices regarding awareness raising for innovative education and training models towards a more efficient Science-Practice-Policy interface. Two round-
tables allowed the participants to exchange views about the themes that will compose the Blue Growth Community Summer School program taking place from 1st to 5th of July 2019 in Kotor, Montenegro.

Charalampos Coccossis, Professor Emeritus for Spatial Planning, University of Thessaly, Greece, presented the best practices in the framework of Co-EVOLVE. The project allowed the creation of sustainable toolkit to measure and monitor sustainable tourism to inform strategic planning & policy making and also to improve education thanks to training workshop: new ways such as distance learning.

Samir Grimes, Researcher and teacher at Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Sciences de la Mer et de l’Aménagement du Littoral (ENSSMAL – Algeria) stated that the main challenges are related to socio-economic issues, environmental issues and the reduction of the dependence of the national economy on fossils fuels.

Marino Spilotros, Manager of Research, University of Bari appealed to decision makers to take immediate action to address pressing environmental issues to achieve the sustainable development goals as well as other Internationally Agreed environmental goals such as research work helping to develop maritime economy.

Nikolaos Ventikos, Professor, National Technical University of Athens, suggested to focus on the KSA framework in terms of training:
- Knowledge understanding the concept: theatrical not practical
- Skills capabilities developed via training & hands-on experiences
- Abilities & innate traits/talents a person brings

The debates highlighted the main difficulties in the capitalization process and the weaknesses on which to focus in order to find appropriate solutions: it emerged that there is good communication and transfer of experience between the two sectors of science and enterprise, but there is no equal correspondence between the scientific sector and policy makers who, very often, are those who must fund and strategically direct the activities for blue growth.

Finally, it came to the conclusion that the integration of science into policy and practice to support evidence-informed decision-making is essential in order to foster the blue economy. The coordination and complementarity between initiatives and strategies are also key to ensure a true impact on the territories, as well as the sustainability of tools over time.