



The European Union supports sustainable and digital maritime processes

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The maritime industry in the Baltic Sea Region has experienced reforms in recent years. For example, digital development has taken real leaps forward and various parties are working together to develop operations and processes that are more sustainable for the business and the environment. Regulation has played a significant role in this development. New regulations and emission targets, set by the IMO and the EU, both demand and encourage organisations towards more environmentally-friendly maritime operations. At the same time, more and more national and EU funding programmes are supporting R&D projects with environmental targets without disregarding how to boost the regional economy. The Pan-European Institute at the University of Turku has been able to contribute to the development of the maritime sector in various development projects due to these funding programmes.

The Pan-European Institute is a research unit which specialises in several research areas, including the economic and business development of Europe with its bordering countries in the East. The maritime industry of the Baltic Sea Region has been a key research area for close to 10 years. Several maritime projects co-funded both by the EU and national funders have been implemented, such as SmartComp (Interreg Central Baltic), DigiPro (Business Finland) and CSHIPP (Interreg Baltic Sea Region). The latest example is the EU-funded Interreg Baltic Sea Region project titled 'Expanding efforts to bring eco-efficiency to maritime industry processes in Baltic Sea Region via digital tools' (EXOPRODIGI), which was put into action this year. EXOPRODIGI benefitted from the outputs of an earlier project with almost an identical name, ECOPRODIGI (2017-2020), by making more mature versions of several digital tools as well as broadening their purpose and deployment within target groups.

To be more specific, EXOPRODIGI focused on the development and implementation of digital tools within three maritime areas 1) shipping, 2) cargo stowage and 3) shipbuilding. As drafted in the application form, the objective was to support business processes by making operations more transparent, enhancing decision-making and reducing working hours. Ultimately, the project aimed at cutting energy consumption, waste materials and emissions in the industry. In other words, the project targeted at making maritime operations more sustainable both environmentally and business-wise. This was done through international collaboration between different actors from four countries: Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Lithuania. The project partners represented universities, a local authority, expert organisations specialised in the maritime sector and the Baltic Sea Region, as well as a great number of private enterprises. The group of enterprises consisted of established shipyards, shipping companies and solutions providers in the Baltic Sea Region. EXOPRODIGI was able to reach a large part of its objectives by its finish date in September 2021. Now is a good time to reflect on what was behind the success.

The support from the European Regional Development Fund, the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme and national funders enabled the establishment of networks and transnational collaboration, which would have been impossible to achieve on such a large scale without this support. Sharing the know-how and expertise between experts from different fields yielded new ideas and led development forward within organisations. Problem sharing and solving can often be easier and more productive in teams. Furthermore, the funding made it possible to gain access to and dig deeper into the maritime processes and the challenges within these processes. The funding further enabled the testing of tools and engagement of specific target groups, which is essential in order to receive feedback to the development work and to make sure that the tools work well when actually used in business operations.

The results and best practices of the project could also be communicated to larger target audiences through multiple channels thanks to the funding.

The maritime industry in the Baltic Sea Region is in the midst of a sea of opportunities and challenges created by digitalisation and need for environmental sustainability. The EU-funded collaborative projects serve as bridges between actors in different countries around the Baltic Sea, bringing them together to ponder over common goals and to initiate innovative solutions.

Please see an animation summarising the achievements of EXOPRODIGI (video by Tussitaikurit Oy / Marker Wizards Ltd. and Centrum Balticum Foundation):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfN41qn4L7U>

For more information on the project, please visit: <https://ecoprodigi.eu/exoprodigi>

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