



Business sector involvement in maritime spatial planning – Experiences from the Baltic Sea region

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ABSTRACT

In the European Union, Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) has been regarded as a means of promoting the sustainable growth of the blue economy. Consequently, where the planning outcomes affect the business operations in marine areas, commercial and industry stakeholders should have an important role in the planning process. However, the business perspective in MSP has gained little attention in stakeholder involvement literature. The aim of this study is to elaborate on the business sector's interest and involvement in MSP in the Baltic Sea region. The findings are based on the first-hand experiences of MSP authorities and experts. Furthermore, perspectives from two sea-use sectors, maritime transport and marine tourism, have been investigated using online questionnaires to discover their views. The study focuses on the questions of who to involve and what are the driving forces promoting business sector involvement. Even though MSP is a form of broad-scale planning, the results indicate that all spatial and organisational scales from local to international and from small enterprises to umbrella organisations should be considered when designing approach to business stakeholder participation. The planning authorities need to consider what are the benefits and challenges of involving different types of business stakeholders. Planners often rely on organisations that represent business stakeholders and individual companies. It is resource effective to interact with representatives as they are considered to have a wide and general knowledge of the respective sector's interests. However, in some cases it is beneficial to also integrate individual companies, especially in local or regional contexts.

1. Introduction

Stakeholder involvement is an inseparable part of the ecosystem approach, which is one of the general principles of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity [1]. According to Long et al. [2], the ecosystem-based management “recognizes coupled social-ecological systems with stakeholders involved in an integrated and adaptive management process where decisions reflect societal choice”. Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), which in turn is one of the cross-cutting tools of the European Union's (EU) integrated maritime policies, applies the principle of the ecosystem-based management [3]. Thus, MSP reflects the paradigm shift from authoritarian government to governance which includes societal actors [4]. This highlights the need to increase democracy in decision-making and the role of the stakeholders in the effective promotion of sustainable development [3,5,6].

While the definitions of the term ‘stakeholder’ vary, in broad terms

the stakeholders in MSP are individuals or groups of people having an interest in or being affected by the outcomes of the MSP (e.g. [3,5,7,8]). One of the key questions in stakeholder analysis and inclusion is to define who is entitled to participate, and in which phases of the MSP process (e.g. [5,9]). According to Morf et al. [4], the consideration of ‘who’ should be involved is based on the question ‘why’ the stakeholders are involved in the first place, which further influences the decision on ‘how’ to involve them. The objectives of the planning therefore should have a profound influence on the stakeholder selection [10]. Guidelines and recommendations on ‘how’ to include stakeholders in both national and transboundary MSP are available (e.g. [7,11,12]). Despite the general principles and guidance, the realities of the participatory processes and stakeholder involvement vary in different countries, and gaps between MSP theory and its practical implementation have been observed (see [8,9,13–21]).

The EU's integrated maritime policy regards MSP as a means of

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promoting the growth of the blue economy [22]. Potentially, MSP is a tool which can integrate and address the growth potential of both the emerging sectors and the traditional branches of blue economies [23]. On the other hand, criticism towards the neoliberalist logic of the blue growth concept and its inconsistencies with the environmental and social sustainability has been expressed (e.g. [16,17]). In the complex realm of marine activities, where different stakeholders have a variety of motivations for participating, as well as differing capacities and resources, the stakeholders may not be able to participate as expected or have ambivalent attitudes towards MSP [24]. The more capable and powerful stakeholders may be overrepresented in planning processes and may have a strong effect both on the objectives as well as the results of the MSP (e.g. [16]). The leading authorities should acknowledge these imbalances and “level the playing field” for different types of stakeholders [18,25–27].

The business sector is stated to be one of the most versatile and difficult group of key stakeholders to involve in MSP (e.g. [4]). Nonetheless, commercial and industry stakeholders should have an important role in MSP, as such planning affects the prerequisites of business operations in the marine and coastal areas. Their participation is important to supply the economic data as well as to reveal the scale and scope of the businesses [28]. Furthermore, as the blue businesses are the fundamental part of the coastal and maritime communities and culture, their inclusion assists the development of the welfare of the communities, and the conservation and sustainable use of the coastal and marine resources [23]. For the business sectors, especially those composed of mostly local, small and medium-sized companies, the stakes of the MSP may be high (e.g. [16,24]).

The stakeholders of MSP have been addressed in a great number of studies, covering a variety of aspects in relation to their engagement in the marine management processes (e.g. [15,21,29–36]). There are also linkages to the discussion on the participatory approaches in environmental management in general (e.g. [6] and references therein). The business sectors’ perspectives have been studied, often focusing specifically on a certain business sector’s views on MSP, such as fishery or offshore energy (e.g. [15,24,27,37,38]). Since the blue economy is urged to grow and as MSP has a direct and indirect impact on the operational environment of blue businesses, the role of the business community in MSP processes deserves further attention.

The aim of this study is to further elaborate on the business sector’s involvement in MSP from the perspective of the organisers of the participatory activities in MSP. In other words, the study presents an overview of the planning authorities and experts who have first-hand experience of stakeholder involvement in MSP around the Baltic Sea. They are responsible for the implementation of the participatory processes in national MSP and transboundary MSP projects, which makes them key actors in the practical application of MSP. To attain the perspectives of the marine businesses, reflections regarding the involvement and interest in MSP were collected from two different types of business sectors: maritime transport and marine tourism. While both these sectors utilise marine and coastal waters nationally and in cross-border contexts in all parts of the Baltic Sea region, they have profound differences in their level of organisation and the characteristics of their business operations at sea.

2. Material and methods

2.1. MSP in the Baltic Sea region

The study was conducted in the Baltic Sea region, where the national MSP processes are in different phases of the planning cycle. The Baltic Sea coastal countries apart from the Russian Federation are member states of the EU. According to the EU’s MSP directive [3], the member states need to finalise their first plans by 31 March 2021. The MSP directive represents a ‘new generation’ of EU legislation with broad boundaries and imprecise requirements, which allow the member states

to develop very different MSP frameworks [39].

In the Baltic Sea region, national planning systems differ from each other, for instance, in terms of scale and the peremptory nature of the plans, as well as in the planning cycle frequency. Apart from Sweden and Finland, the other countries typically have legally binding national plans. In Finland and Sweden as well as partly in Germany and Latvia, MSP is conducted on a regional or local level, to some extent also overlapping with legally binding land-use planning [40].

One of the mandatory components of the MSP directive is a specification for a competent authority, which may have an effect on planning prioritisations and on how the actual planning is performed, for example in a centralised or decentralised manner [3,39,40]. The responsibility for the national MSP process has been addressed to ministries with an environmental focus (Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden) or to ministries with a more economic focus (Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Poland).

Maritime transport and marine tourism have a different status in EU’s MSP directive, as the former is mentioned in the list of obligatory themes and the latter as a voluntary theme [3]. Maritime transport is an important stakeholder group as the Baltic Sea is one of the most heavily trafficked sea areas in the world [41,42]. The cargo volumes are predicted to grow simultaneously with the sizes of the ships and increasing autonomous shipping [42]. The growing vessel sizes and the optimisation of the routes will have an effect on MSP through the potential competition for space with other uses, together with a need for larger shipping lanes and more anchoring areas (e.g. [43]). The coastal and marine tourism sector, on the other hand, covers a complex web of sub-sectors including accommodation, food and drink, and leisure activities [43–45]. The importance of the tourism sector is expected to grow and is already quite substantial locally, especially in the southern Baltic Sea [46]. In general, the sustainable approach to the development of tourism in the Baltic Sea region is seen as a strength, and there is considerable potential for the development of nature tourism destinations [46], which in coastal and marine waters potentially belongs to the scope of the MSP.

2.2. Survey methods

2.2.1. Interviews

The study is founded on the interviews with planning authorities and experts. The main group of interviewees represented the maritime spatial planning agencies responsible for implementing MSP. A total of 13 people were identified via an internet search, comprised of representatives from all eight EU member states around the Baltic Sea. As a result, the interviewees represented five countries: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, and Latvia. To provide a wider perspective about the issues of the stakeholder involvement outside the limits of the formal planning processes, ten researchers who have worked in projects related to MSP, stakeholder involvement, and the selected sea use sectors were invited. They were identified from the webpages of Baltic Sea related projects. While the interviewed researchers were located in Finland, Germany, Poland, and Sweden, their research has an international character. Further in the text, the interviewees are referred to only as planners and researchers to assure anonymity as the interviews were confidential to enable the interviewees to speak freely. A total of 15 planners and researchers were interviewed.

The semi-structured thematic interviews were conducted during autumn 2018 and were concerned with stakeholder identification and engagement in MSP, as well as the business sector’s involvement in these processes (Table 1). The background information on the study and the list of the main topics and questions were sent to the interviewees in advance. While the interviewees were allowed to talk rather freely, the list was used to guide the discussion towards the predetermined topics. Consequently, all the interviewees covered all the main themes but the individual question were answered in varying degrees and lengths. The interviews were conducted in English and the countries were represented by one planner, except for Finland, where planners from all three

Table 1

The overall topics covered in the interviews with the planners and researchers together with the main questions related to the respective topics.

Interview topics	Main questions
Stakeholder selection	What kind of stakeholders were involved in general, and specifically regarding the tourism and maritime transport sectors?
Perceived activity of the business sector in MSP	Which [stakeholder involvement] methods were especially functional for business representatives?
The role of companies in MSP	What is your impression about the role of companies in the MSP process?
Business sector's expectations	In your opinion, what are the business sectors' expectations regarding the MSP process?
Motivation	Can you identify any factors that affected the willingness of business stakeholders to share their knowledge?

regional planning areas were interviewed in the national language. The discussions were recorded and detailed notes were later compiled based on the recordings. The topics outside of this study were removed and the remaining notes were analysed and compiled into thematic groups.

The majority of the interviewees had been involved in MSP for several years and they embraced various fields of expertise, either through their educational background or their occupation (Table 2). Most of the respondents had some background in planning or management. One third had studied geography or had expertise in Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Political sciences and economics were also represented, as well as some disciplines of natural sciences.

2.2.2. Online questionnaire

To capture comparative insights and the perspective of the business community, an online questionnaire was prepared for companies, associations, and other organisations representing the two case sectors. The potential respondents were found via an internet search, and the invitations to participate in the survey were sent via email either directly to a suitable person in the management or to the general address of the organisation to be distributed further. The original surveys were open during winter 2018–2019, and a supplementary round with the same questions was re-opened in January 2020.

There were two versions of the questionnaire: a more comprehensive one and a reduced one. Both versions included multiple choice questions as well as statements to be assessed in a five-level Likert-type scale (strongly disagree; disagree; neither agree nor disagree; agree; strongly agree). The topics were related to the business community's familiarity with MSP, their impressions of their sector's role in the planning process, as well as their expectations of and possible drivers for participating in the planning process.

Table 2

Background information on the interviewees (n = 15). The reported years refer to the official MSP processes, in addition to which some respondents had experience of spatial planning and the development phases preceding the regulation of MSP. Expertise may include several fields for an individual respondent, and therefore the total number exceeds the number of interviewees.

<i>Role in MSP process</i>	
Planner / authority	8
Expert / researcher	7
<i>Involved in MSP</i>	
0 – 2 years	4
3 – 10 years	9
> 10 years	2
<i>Field of expertise</i>	
Planning / management	10
Geography / GIS	5
Natural sciences / ecology	2
Political sciences / economics	4

For the more comprehensive questionnaire, a total of 71 representative unions and organisations operating in the EU member states around the Baltic Sea were identified, 13 of which represented the maritime transport sector and 58 the marine tourism sector. The latter was regarded as including a wide array of recreational activities ongoing in marine areas, ranging from commercial nature tourism to leisure boating, diving, and underwater cultural heritage. In total, 17 representatives answered at least part of the questionnaire, which results in a response rate of 24%. The shorter version of the questionnaire was sent to 172 companies operating in the EU member states in the Baltic Sea, including commercial ports, local guest harbours, shipping companies and ship-owners, operators of passenger ferries and cruise lines, as well as nature-based tourism companies such as kayaking and diving operators. The questionnaire received altogether 14 responses and thus a response rate of 8%. In both versions, the response rates varied considerably among the sub-sectors (Table 3). Responses were received from all around the Baltic Sea (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden), the respondents ranging from one person companies to international business support organisations.

3. Findings

3.1. The views of planners and researchers on engaging the business sector in MSP processes

3.1.1. The involved stakeholders

At the time of the interviews, a majority of the Baltic Sea countries were still in the early phases of their national planning processes. Therefore, the stakeholder involvement issues related to the first round of planning, and at times the first stages of the planning process were emphasised in the discussions. These early phases of the planning cycle are nevertheless important as the early involvement of stakeholders is seen as critical for the successful participatory process and the social acceptance of the plans [5,18].

In the interviews, the planners named stakeholder groups that have participated in the planning processes in their respective countries. In general, the listed stakeholders mostly represented local or national levels. Efforts to involve international, cross-border stakeholders were rare in the official MSP processes. As mentioned by one of the planners, “the cross-border issues are more for the MSP planners to discuss.” Similar results have been observed in other recent studies in the Baltic Sea region [32,35]. While the planners state the need for transboundary planning efforts, the main impediment to transboundary stakeholder involvement is the lack of a legal framework and resources [32]. The

Table 3

The numbers of survey invitations and the respective response rates divided by the sub-groups within the case sectors of maritime transport and marine tourism.

	No. of invitations	No. of responses	Response rate
<i>Representative organisations, associations, etc.</i>	71	17	24%
Ship-owners' associations	8	1	13%
Port organisations	5	3	60%
Tourism organisations	42	6	14%
Leisure boating associations	7	3	43%
Diving associations	4	1	25%
Underwater cultural heritage organisations	5	3	60%
<i>Companies</i>	172	14	8%
Commercial ports	33	6	18%
Shipping companies and ship-owners	79	3	4%
Operators of passenger ferries and cruise lines	7	0	0%
Local guest harbours	36	3	8%
Nature-based tourism companies	17	2	12%

planners highlighted the role of research projects for encouraging the interaction among neighbouring countries. It has been noted that the international MSP projects in the Baltic Sea region have increased the transboundary interaction of planners and some self-motivated key stakeholders through informal contacts [34].

The most commonly mentioned stakeholder groups were municipalities, business support organisations and associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governmental organisations (especially ministries), as well as representatives of research and education sector. The business sector was typically reported to be represented by business support organisations, unions, associations, and other umbrella organisations representing specific sectors. While individual companies are, in general, less frequently involved, the practices and level of involvement varied among the countries. In some cases, companies participate in MSP as consultants or invited speakers at stakeholder events. Typically, the participation of small companies was especially infrequent.

Westholm [40] anticipated that the selection of the responsible ministry may have an impact on the national emphases as regards how the actual planning is performed as more weight could be put on either the perceptions of the blue economy representatives or the environmental issues. The planning culture related to sustainable development has already been noted to be influenced by the professional identity of the planning authority (i.e. environmental, economic, or general planning) [47]. The planner and researcher interviews nevertheless revealed no major differences in the involvement of the business community between countries that have addressed the responsibility for the MSP to the ministries responsible for environmental issues or to ministries with a more economic focus. However, it should be noted that the impact of the national organisation on the MSP planning results can be fully identified only after the first round of planning is finalised. As the selection may affect the very foundations of the MSP process and its results, the issue should be transparently assessed in the evaluation phase of the planning process.

The planners further identified organisations that tend to represent the two case example sectors of this study. Shipping administration typically represents the maritime transport sector. Several planners also mentioned ports. However, their involvement activity varied considerably from country to country. Occasionally, the shipping sector interests were additionally raised by the municipalities that operate the ports in order to secure the accessibility and the operations of the respective ports. The marine tourism sector was found to be more complicated to involve than the maritime transport sector because the former is more diversified than the latter. According to the interviewees, the tourism sector has been represented by, for example, investment and development agencies, ministries responsible for tourism, and local tourism organisations. In some countries, the feedback covering the needs of the tourism sector also come from the local municipalities, especially in areas where coastal tourism is very important for the local economy.

3.1.2. Business sectors' involvement through representative organisations

The interviewees were asked whether the business sector ought to be represented by organisations representing a certain business sector's interests (such as associations, interest groups, and umbrella organisations) or by the individual companies themselves. They appreciated the representative organisations because of their wider view on the respective sectors. The organisations were regarded to have general knowledge and understanding about the sectors' needs, instead of focusing on the revenues of individual companies. This view was elaborated by one planner: *"In spatial planning, we try not to consider single interests of a single person or a single company. Shipping as such is important – I am not interested in who operates the ship, I just want to have space for ships."* The view was supported by a researcher who considered it important to focus on the umbrella organisations, because the business sector has a tendency to lead the discussion towards their own interests.

One planner observed that in the early phases of MSP, it is important

to raise awareness of the process among the stakeholders, and the associations and representative organisations may play a major role in distributing information further to their members. The importance of the umbrella organisations is highlighted especially when planning large areas. In national scale planning, the national level associations are more important than the small local ones. As one business sector might be comprised of hundreds or thousands of individual actors, companies or local associations, involving them all directly would be extremely resource consuming, if not impossible. A planner compared the situation with a land-use planning process, where the agricultural issues are not discussed separately with every farmer and forest owner in the area but rather with the interest organisation representing them. Another planner found the role of interest organisations especially useful for the small companies, which might have difficulties in discussing with the policy-makers at the relevant level. The organisation can act as an intermediary in converting the language of local company problems to a societal discussion about the issues that needs to be addressed in the MSP processes. According to the planner, it is easier for the larger companies to participate in the discussion without intermediaries.

A concern was also raised that interest organisations may not always be able to represent all the views of the respective sectors. A planner noted that there might be individuals whose contacts with the representative organisations are loose or non-existent. The views of these individuals might be missed if the planners discuss only with the organisations and not with the individuals themselves. Other studies have similarly noted that the dissemination of information and interaction with all members may be inadequate [31,37]. However, several other interviewees found it crucial that they could trust the organisations to be able to represent their sectors. The assumption is that discussions have already taken place within the sector before their answers and needs are presented to the planning process. In the Polish example, the fishers' organisations had failed to distribute information to their members, leaving planners in a difficult position with limited resources and problems handling the high expectations and misconceptions of the fishers [37].

3.1.3. Involvement of individual companies

While the role of umbrella organisations was appreciated, there were also views supporting the direct involvement of companies. One planner considered that benefits are gained when entrepreneurs with strong and versatile societal views are involved in the stakeholder process. Having these influencers included in the stakeholder participant listings increases the credibility of the process. This also reflects the view that associations and interest organisations do not always represent the entire sector or even its members' opinions uniformly, therefore, there may be dominant or locally important actors that may have to be taken into account separately. The planning organisation's knowledge concerning the stakeholder groups thus affects the results of the stakeholder consultations.

Some planners found that the need to involve companies is situation-specific. For instance, if there is an acute conflict situation that cannot be ignored, the companies affected by the situations should, naturally, be included in the discussion. It was seen beneficial to communicate directly with the companies that have high stakes or considerable influence in a certain area or regarding some activities included in the MSP. A local example of such a case could be a company with an existing sediment extraction permit. On a national or transnational scale, the largest cruise ship companies were mentioned as possible stakeholders, because they have a strong impact on tourism in the cruise ports and cities.

In general, the planning processes are organised in a way that allows all the interested parties to participate in stakeholder activities. Information on stakeholder events and public hearings is distributed through a variety of means (e.g. internet, social media, newspapers), with the aim of reaching all potential interest groups and making involvement possible for all. Thus, even though the companies in many cases are not

specifically invited to stakeholder workshops, they are welcome to participate if they are willing and interested. The problem is that the companies cannot be forced to participate if they are not willing to do so. The challenge was put into words by a planner: “*We have an obligation to tell and listen, and we have an obligation to process their suggestions. It’s clear that it’s important that they are involved, but we cannot force them to be interested in our plan.*” Another planner asked for a realistic assessment of expectations as regards company participation as company representatives are typically too busy to participate in MSP processes. Here the motivation of the stakeholders to participate is highlighted. Motivational aspects are further discussed in the following chapters.

Overall, there were no incentives to solely involve companies rather than associations and interest organisations. While both were welcomed on a general level, participation of the organisations was regarded as more important. Involving only companies was not supported. As a planner summarised, “*having only single companies, partly also competing companies, [...] you have lot of discussions that might not support your planning process but that are leading into different directions*”. The strictest opinion was given by an experienced researcher who simply stated that, while the case sectors should be involved, the companies should not. According to the researcher, “*the individual companies [...] don’t need to be involved*” as the sectors are represented by other means. The tourism sector, for instance, is commonly represented by the local municipalities. At the same time, many planners found it important to obtain better representation from companies. As the planners play a central role in the MSP processes, their variable and subjective views on the stakeholders may affect the emphasis of the stakeholder interaction.

For established and well organised sectors, such as maritime transport, integrating national and international organisations could be the feasible level of involvement: strong organisations guarantee the input of knowledge and an expression of interest representing the whole sector. However, if the planners know of niches in the sector not represented by the organisations, they can invite individual companies from these niches to ensure representation of their interests and needs which may be outside of the mainstream [48]. For sectors such as the coastal and marine tourism, with many small companies, which often do not have strong business support organisations, more inclusive methods might be needed to ensure good representation of the different sub-sector interests.

3.2. Driving forces behind business sector involvement

3.2.1. Awareness of the effects of MSP

According to some of the interviewed planners, the main issue is that the companies do not know what MSP is: either they are not aware of the process at all, or alternatively they do not regard it as important for them. This lack of knowledge or interest, in turn, leads to inactivity in the stakeholder involvement process. As one of the planners expressed it: “*I have a feeling that they don’t see MSP as a tool for them, and that’s why they are silent.*” The low response rate of the online survey (24% for representative unions and organisations; 8% for companies) may reflect this inactivity. The opinions of active organisations may be overly represented in the results as, according to the survey answers, 63% of representative organisations ($n = 16$) and 36% of companies ($n = 14$) had participated in some MSP process. Those that had not participated, stated that they had either not been invited or they did not know about any possibilities to participate.

The tourism sector, which is flexible and constantly under changes, may especially have difficulties in identifying the potential benefits derived from the MSP process. The planners considered that the stakeholders sometimes have misconceptions about the results of the MSP processes. For example, even if offshore wind power parks are planned, the plans are not necessarily implemented – at least not immediately. On the other hand, the stakeholders may ignore the consequences that the future plans can have on their businesses [37]. According to the interviews, it is a challenge for the planners to clarify to the business

community what are the realities of the planning process. This was exemplified by a planner: “*They have this tendency to ask for more quick, and clear, and easy solutions, and sometimes it was hard to explain that the process is pretty long.*”

Another challenge that may arise from the lack of understanding about the MSP process is related to trust in the process. If the sector considers that MSP will increase the regulations against it, the sector representatives will not be interested in stakeholder involvement. A researcher therefore highlighted the importance of communicating to the stakeholders what will happen if they do not participate and what the consequences of being left out are. Furthermore, the planners need to be careful with the wording when inviting business sector stakeholders to avoid giving false impressions of the stakeholder involvement process and the possibilities to influence the planning decisions.

3.2.2. Potential gains and losses as motivational aspects

The planners highlighted the role of motivation in all stakeholder activities. The motivational aspects tend to be especially underlined when talking about businesses. The business sector representatives are regarded as busy people with few incentives to participate in activities that are not relevant to their operations. According to the interviewees, the willingness to participate increases when the stakeholders have the impression that they may gain something. A researcher stated that those who see the opportunity of having an influence on the regulations or recommendations are active. Furthermore, one planner expected that the business sector participates only if there are concrete decisions made about concrete issues relevant to their business operations. According to this planner’s previous experience, “*they do not participate for fun*”, which means that the business sector representatives do not participate in general discussions without direct linkages to their operations. The stakeholders typically want to participate in those stages of the MSP process where “*gains and losses are fought over*” [9]. This also illustrates the scale of MSP and the level of abstraction for the business stakeholders. As the companies or business organisations address the specific local issues, they may not need to interfere with the national MSP unless it involves issues directly influencing the company.

The scale of planning greatly affects the concreteness and relevance perceived by the stakeholders, which, in turn, affects their willingness to become involved. According to the interviewees, stakeholders lack interest if the planning takes place on too general level. For instance, an entrepreneur with local interests will most likely find the national level planning issues irrelevant to his or her business operations. Similarly, companies, which usually operate close to the shoreline, might lack interest towards the planning efforts in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). In some cases, the stakeholders may find MSP redundant as the issues that are relevant to the companies have already been solved elsewhere (e.g. in regional or local land use planning). In the Baltic Sea region, the scale of planning also has an effect on the integration and coherence of transboundary MSP co-operation as the regulatory systems vary among the neighbouring countries [49,50]. Consequently, these different scales should be acknowledged and the involved stakeholder groups should be selected accordingly [51].

Another crucial aspect influencing the interest of the business sector is how peremptory the planning results will be. It has been assumed that if the process leads to a non-binding, strategic MSP, stakeholders will be less committed to it than if the plan is a binding document or an enforceable law.

The interviewees were further asked about their impressions of the expectations that the business sector have about the stakeholder activities. In general, the planners regarded the business sector as being more guided by the fear of losing opportunities than having an interest in looking for new ones. However, this too is sector specific. It was mentioned that, while the maritime transport sector is more afraid of losing space to operate, the energy sector sees the MSP process as a possibility to get its operations on the map. It is typically regarded that the old and traditional sectors want to keep the situation unchanged.

They want to make sure that the MSP process does not create new restraints, bans, or risks as regards their operations. The emerging sectors, on the contrary, see MSP more as a possibility; thus, they are active in participation, as they want to ensure that their operations are included in the plans.

Moreover, the presence of other sea use sectors seems to increase interest towards stakeholder participation. Seeing the interest other users have in the same sea areas helps the business sector to understand that they are not there alone. This may raise interest towards securing their own activities in the increasingly crowded sea areas. However, there are discrepancies in the perceptions between well-established industries and the newcomers (e.g. offshore energy) seeking room for themselves [30]. Furthermore, the motivational aspects of stakeholder groups may be linked to their divergent viewpoints towards the sea area. For the shipping and mining sectors the sea appears as a physical space and resource, whereas for nature conservationists it is a living environment and dynamic ecosystem [33].

According to the survey, internal competition seems not to be a major problem for the business representatives. Especially the tourism sector rather more disagreed (57%, n = 14) than agreed (7%) with the following statement: “Competition within the sector weakens its co-operation possibilities regarding the maritime spatial planning process”. A similar overall trend applied to the shipping sector as well (46% disagreeing, 18% agreeing, n = 11). In both groups, 36% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. The overall disagreement with the statement could indicate that while internal competition is not regarded as problematic, the companies do not consider it necessary to participate themselves but find it reasonable to be represented by the representative organisations and associations. In total, 48% of the 25 respondents agreed and only 20% disagreed with the statement “the sector is better represented in maritime spatial planning process by umbrella organisations than individual actors (citizens or companies)”. In general, this matches the planners’ perspective. While the majority agree that participation through organisations and associations is preferable, those individual companies who find direct involvement necessary are also welcome to participate in the process.

The survey further asked about the business community’s expectations of the MSP processes and any possible drivers for their participation. While the answers of the marine tourism sector (n = 15) were rather evenly distributed in general, gaining visibility to the business sector and its needs, and acquiring information and knowledge of other marine activities were notably more strongly emphasised by the tourism sector than the maritime transport sector. The maritime transport sector (n = 12) especially highlighted the possibilities of solving or avoiding conflicts among other sea users and finding synergies or collaboration possibilities. On average, the maritime transport sector valued securing business opportunities over learning about new ones, whereas for the

marine tourism sector there was a slight preference for the opposite (Fig. 1).

Finally, the participation of companies was seen to be directly linked to the personal motivation and interest of the personnel responsible. As reasoned by one planner, “the employee participates if the boss tells them to do so, but in these cases the participation may be very different than if the participation is derived from a personal motivation instead of being forced to”. Sometimes personnel changes within the organisations affect the level of participation in the MSP process. It was noted by the planners that a perceived lack of interest by a stakeholder organisation may at times stem from one individual in the company. Therefore, the level of individual motivation was regarded as being very important for the commitment of the organisations.

3.3. The considerations of why and who to involve

While public participation as such is required by the EU directive [3], the stakeholder involvement can serve several purposes and the purposes should dictate ‘who’ to include [4]. Two main approaches to the ‘why’ when involving stakeholders can be discerned: 1) to promote stakeholders’ democratic rights (normative reasons) or 2) to fulfil a particular purpose within the MSP process such as legal requirements or to gain knowledge from stakeholders (instrumental reasons) [10]. The interviews revealed that in the Baltic Sea region, both main approaches have been considered, often simultaneously.

Regarding the business sector involvement, many of the interviewees supported the aim to include both the representative organisations and individual companies as their involvement provide different benefits – as well as challenges (Table 4). The interviews confirmed that, for different purposes, the planners find certain organisational levels more suitable than the others. The business representative organisations, for example, may help with information dissemination and distributing knowledge from the planners to the companies and vice versa. Business organisations can also strengthen the democracy of the MSP process by helping companies that lack resources to participate or by acting as their representative at higher levels of planning. However, the democratic aspirations fail if the business representatives are not able or willing to present the diversity of the business sectors’ needs and opinions uniformly.

The planners hope to increase the business community’s acceptance and compliance towards the plan by the legitimization of the process and its results, and by empowering stakeholders to formulate their interests and to make their voices heard (see [4,35,52]). However, several studies have revealed that the real-world planning examples deviate from the ideals of the literature and guidance on stakeholder involvement (e.g. [8,17]). The interview findings are in line with this notion, as the planners stated that it is not easy to obtain the companies’ interest in

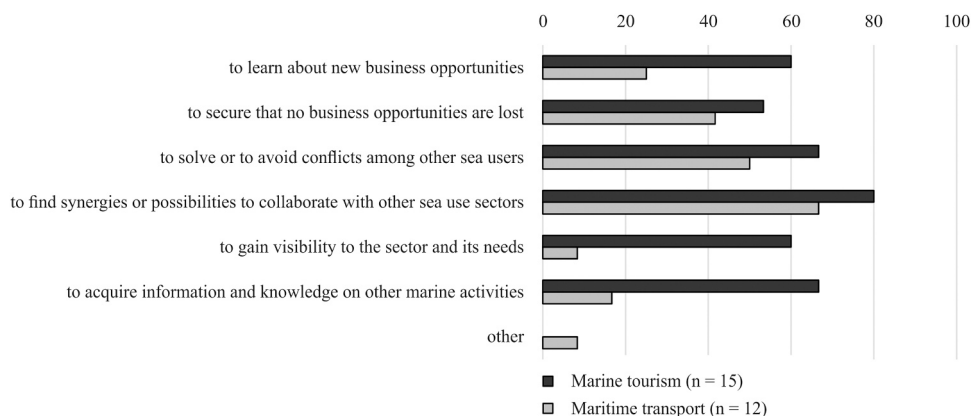


Fig. 1. The survey responses to the question that mapped the sectors’ expectations and possible drivers for participating in the maritime spatial planning processes. The responses of the representative organisations and the companies are combined to cover the proportion of their respective sea use sectors (n = 27).

Table 4

A summary of the potential benefits (+) and challenges (-) encountered when involving either associations and interest organisations or individual companies in the MSP processes. The findings are based on the interviews conducted with the planners and MSP researchers around the Baltic Sea.

Organisations representing business sectors	Companies
+ Providing a wider view on the needs and interests of the respective sea use sector	+ Enhance the interaction among companies as well as other sea use sectors
+ An intermediary actor between companies and planning authorities	+ Searching for potential synergies among sea users
+ Communication of MSP information to the sector at large	+ Discussion about conflicts that directly affect business operations
+ A representative for companies who lack resources or skills to participate themselves	+ Increasing societal credibility by involving individual entrepreneurs
+ Capacity to represent a business sector at national and international levels	+ Acknowledging the needs of the local and regional economy
- May not reach all the voices of the respective sector	- Reaching all individual actors is resource consuming if not impossible
- Not always able to present the interests and opinions of the members uniformly	- May lead the focus to be placed on narrow interests and individual needs or opinions

participation. While involving them might be ideal for certain instrumental and normative reasons, in the real-world planning, the ‘who’ might actually dictate the ‘why’ as the planners need to adjust their practices according to the list of willing participants.

4. Conclusions

While the MSP processes are stated to be open to all, practical reasons, such as available time and resources might affect the operative measures of the stakeholder involvement. The planning authorities often rely on a variety of organisations that represent business stakeholders, as they are considered to have a better general knowledge and understanding of the respective sector’s interests and not prone to focusing on the interests of individual companies. Involvement of the latter is seen to be more situation-specific. The drivers necessary for the business community to become involved in MSP are, in general, connected to the potential gains and losses it will cause.

The in-depth analysis of the stakeholders is an important early step of the MSP cycle. Regarding the business community, this analysis means acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of the business environment and the economic structure of the planning region. The planners should be aware of the character and strength of the representative organisations in order to evaluate their contribution to the MSP process. However, despite the planners’ aspirations and attempts, the business stakeholders are often not willing to participate. This underlines the need to promote the MSP process to the business community well before the planning starts. Moreover, the business community and the authorities operate on very different timescales. While MSP is an iterative process that takes time, the business representatives tend to hope for quick and definite solutions. This may cause contradictions between the business stakeholders’ expectations and the nature of the planning processes.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Hanna Luhtala: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization, Project administration. **Anne Erkkilä-Välimäki:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Søren Qvist Eliassen:** Conceptualization, Writing - review & editing. **Harri Tolvanen:** Writing - review & editing, Funding acquisition.

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Declaration of interest

None.

Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.marpol.2020.104301.

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