



# THE ROLE OF LATVIA'S MARITIME SPATIAL PLANNING IN PROMOTING THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

Leila Neimane 

University of Latvia, Faculty of Law, Institute of Legal Science

Raina blvd. 19, Riga, LV-1589: Latvia

leila.neimane@lu.lv

Armands Pužulis 

Institute of Agricultural Resources and Economics

Strukturoru street 14, Riga, LV-1039: Latvia

armands.puzulis@arei.lv

**Abstract:** In an era of dynamic maritime spatial planning movement development, this paper offers insight into the relationship between Latvia's national Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 and the European Green Deal. The paper analyses what this might signify concerning the implementation and subsequent assessment of the plan by exploring the role of the maritime spatial plan in Latvia's planning system. Beginning with a brief history of how the national plan came to be, the paper then describes and evaluates the position of the maritime spatial plan within Latvia's planning framework before examining the connection between the maritime spatial plan and the Green Deal, identifying contact points. This paper offers a starting framework for studying how closely maritime spatial planning is related to and capable of supporting – or at the very least taking into account – the goals of the Green Deal. The conclusion is that implementation of maritime spatial planning is rooted in the state planning system, the interconnection among policy documents, and the specifics of the maritime spatial plan itself.

**Keywords:** European Green Deal, Latvian planning system, maritime spatial planning, Sustainable Development Goals.

## Introduction

The spatial planning traditions of Latvia's sea waters under the label of maritime spatial planning (MSP) have gradually evolved since the early 2010s in line with developments in the global and regional arena (see, e.g., Ehler et al., 2019). More specifically, the main driver of this rapid and targeted development was the adoption of Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning (MSP Directive) with the ecosystem-based approach (EC, 2014, preambular paragraph 14, Art. 5.1; for more, see Ehler & Douvere, 2009; EC, 2021e) as its core concerning the European Union (EU) coastal Member States. The MSP development was also affected by the United Nations (UN) Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNGA, 2015) as 'a long-term roadmap that sets the scene for public policies' (UNESCO-IOC,

2021, p. 38) globally. Therefore, the MSP is undoubtedly founded on ideas and methods that come from an admixture of international, global, and regional law as well as domestic law in the context of sustainable development of marine areas, sustainable use of marine resources, and sustainable expansion of the maritime economy (Pyć, 2019).

According to internationally recognised standards (e.g., Ehler et al., 2019), in Latvia, the Marine Environment Protection and Management Law (Saeima, 2010a) following the MSP Directive determines the framework for the national MSP. The Marine Environment Protection and Management Law (Art. 1.4) defines MSP as 'a long-term process for development planning aimed at protection of the marine environment, rational use of the sea and integrated management, as well as balancing the social welfare and economic development with the environmental protection requirements.' The first Latvian MSP cycle resulted in the Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 (The Maritime Spatial Plan for Marine Inland Waters, Territorial Sea and Exclusive Economic Zone Waters of the Republic of Latvia) (MSPlan 2030 or MSPlan). MSPlan 2030 is a long-term (12-year) spatial development planning document at the national level (Saeima, 2011, Art. 1.11), outlining in both writing and graphic form the use of and conditions for the use of the sea in Latvian waters, adopted in 2019 (CM, 2019b).

As a result, the MSPlan brings together the interests of diverse sectors and local government authorities in the use of the sea (Saeima, 2011, Art. 16) and is a tool to be utilised in the execution of MSP as a process (Pyć, 2019). During the establishment of the MSPlan 2030, its openness and transparency actively involving different stakeholder groups (AC Konsultācijas, 2017; informant #1, personal communication, April 21, 2022) and use of the ecosystem-based approach (ecosystem services) were positively evaluated (A. Ruskule, personal communication, January 20, 2022; S. Strake, personal communication, January 24, 2022; Veidemane et al., 2017a; UNESCO-IOC, 2021; WWF, 2022).

In the modern context, Green Deal Strategies greatly influence the further development and implementation of MSP. Green Deal Strategies are intended to mobilise the entire community and enterprises to create clean and green economies by implementing pro-environmental solutions in various sectors and considering the three aspirations of sustainable development: long-term economic viability, environmental protection, and human well-being (Smol, 2022). The best known and holistic among them is the European Green Deal (EGD), adopted in 2019, taking the place of Strategy 2020 (EC, 2010a) and mapping out areas where the 2050 climate neutrality goals should be attained (EC, 2019a; see also Koundouri et al., 2021).

Against this background, the paper offers an insight into the linkage between Latvia's MSPlan 2030 and the EGD, plus an analysis of what this might mean in the context of plan implementation and subsequent review, taking account of MSP specificity as a marine area-based management tool at the national level through exploring the role of the MSPlan in Latvia's planning system. MSP includes the normative regulation of planning – legal acts, MSPlan development methodology, its place and role in the planning system as a whole; development processes – MSPlan development, evaluation, and modifications or renewal; and the result itself – a specific MSPlan document. Analysing the role of EGD, the paper focuses on MSPlan as a reflection of the MSP concerted process and regulation.

Evaluating the available scientific literature through indexed databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, as well as Google Scholar, some observations can be made about the development of research in this field. Generally, studies have been carried out on the connection and linkage of the EGD and the MSP with SDGs. Fulfilling the obligations of the EU under the UN Agenda 2030 was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the EGD. Therefore, the connection between the EGD and SDGs is natural and well-affirmed (e.g., Koundouri et al., 2021; Smol, 2022). However,

the interaction between the MSP and SDGs is a relatively less studied area. One of the attempts to solve this gap by identifying how MSP can support the EGD is the *MSP-GREEN* project (2022–2024), funded by the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (MSP-Green, 2023). An interesting point here is that the latest studies confirm the connection of the MSP not only with SDG 14 'Life Below Water' and especially with its target 2 on sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems but also with several other so-called ocean-related UN SDGs (see, e.g., Gissi et al., 2022).

It has been acknowledged that accomplishing goals and targets is aided by allocating space to activities and listing them during the MSP process (EC, 2022). More specifically, for example, major blue economy initiatives can be set up using the MSP, which can, for instance, determine the sites and needs for wind-generating installations (EC, 2021d). Otherwise, the MSPlan can specify priorities for assigning such space during licensing.

Moreover, legally the MSP has a 'branching' effect and a direct impact on several different sectors, which at the regional level is also reflected in the linking of the MSP Directive to achieving the aims of other directives and the vision of policy documents (EC, 2022; cf. EC, 2010b). However, according to the information available to the authors, practically no such studies have been carried out on the connection and linkage between the EGD and the MSP, at least at the national level. In contrast, at the regional level, there has been a study on the relevance and effect of the MSP Directive in the context of the EGD (EC, 2022). Hence, this paper seeks to fill in the knowledge gaps from the perspective of a case study of Latvia by inquiring:

1. Have the circumstances of the development of the MSPlan 2030 affected the connection between its content and the EGD?
2. What is the role of the MSPlan 2030 in the common planning system of Latvia, and what are the effects of the system on the content, scale and detailing of the MSPlan?
3. Does the EGD appear in the MSPlan 2030, and to what extent?

This paper uses a three-step strategy to offer an answer to these queries. First, it briefly overviews the genesis of the national MSPlan 2030, including analysis and characterisation of its content to establish the relevance of MSPlan concerning the EGD. Secondly, it characterises and analyses the place of the MSPlan 2030 in Latvia's planning system since this approach helps to reveal its inherent advantages and limitations as well as its specifics of implementation. The core discussion section identifies the contact points between MSPlan 2030 and the EGD. The conclusion offers a summary, combining the main findings that result from the previous sections. This paper offers an initial framework to examine the extent to which the MSP and, more specifically, the plan as its outcome document is linked to and can contribute to/support, or at least take into account, the objectives of the EGD. The usefulness of the approach proposed in this paper can be verified by using it as a future basis for analysing and comparing the plans of several countries and then drawing more general conclusions.

The paper is based on qualitative research methodologies, including a thorough examination and content analysis of Latvia's MSPlan 2030, a survey of the literature (related policy documentation, legislation, scientific publications and project reports, as well as interviews carried out with the persons involved and/or interested in the development of the MSPlan in Latvia), evaluation, and use of the triangulation method. Information obtained from interviews is called 'personal communication' in the following text. Those respondents who have chosen to be anonymous are marked as 'informants' with a corresponding serial number.

## The genesis of maritime spatial planning in Latvia

Latvia's inland sea waters, its territorial sea (12 nautical miles from the baseline) and its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters are marine waters under Latvian jurisdiction (Saeima, 2010a, Art. 1.3, see also Arts. 3 and 31; MSP, 2022). A total of 28,500 sq. km of Baltic Sea waters (including the Gulf of Riga) fall under Latvian jurisdiction, comprising 17,656 sq. km. (EEZ), 10,178 sq. km. (territorial sea) and 668 sq. km. (inland sea waters). In the Baltic Sea, Latvian marine waters comprise 7.2% of the total area and border Estonia, Lithuania, and Sweden (MSP, 2022). Up to the outer border of the EEZ, the MSP has been created for the entire portion of the Baltic Sea under Latvia's purview (CM, 2019b). The MSPlan outer limits align with state boundary accords and hydrographically determined maritime borders that fall within Latvian sovereignty, where the state can exercise its jurisdiction consistent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982; CM, 2019b). It has to be done 'on behalf of [its] citizens in accordance with a public choice paradigm' (Zauchā & Jay, 2022).

In light of the Latvian Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030 (Saeima, 2010b; CM, 2019b) – 'the hierarchically highest long-term development planning document' (Saeima, 2008, Art. 9.2) in Latvia and the ensuing legal framework developed in the following couple of years (such as the Spatial Development Planning Law [Saeima, 2011]), creation of a planning system for the marine realm started in 2010 (S. Strake, personal communication, January 24, 2022; Veidemane et al., 2017b). It is significant that – as the MSP was not an important topic at the time – the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030 was developed with its primary focus on the terrestrial part of the country's territory. That is, the sea is not indicated as a space of national interest in the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030 (only the coast of the Baltic Sea is a space of national interest). However, paragraph 392 of this strategic document pinpoints the necessity to develop an MSPlan, mentioning it as an action within implementation for the coastal territory of national importance. The functional link between the terrestrial part and the sea is underlined in the Spatial Development Planning Law (Saeima, 2011, Art. 1.11, see also Art. 16.1; for the practical side of this approach, see Veidemane & Nikodemus, 2015).

Initially, as part of the INTERREG IVB *BaltSeaPlan* project (2009–2012), a pilot plan was developed for the Western Coast of Latvia (A. Ruskule, personal communication, January 20, 2022; Ruskule & Veidemane, 2011). The 1st edition of the MSPlan was co-financed by the financial instrument for 2009–2014 of the European Economic Area (in the framework of the 'National Climate Policy' programme) (CM, 2019b). The final version of the MSPlan 2030 was elaborated based on the results of the INTERREG *Baltic LINes* project (2016–2019) (AC Konsultācijas, 2017), the *Baltic SCOPE* project (2015–2017) and the Pan *Baltic Scope* project (2018–2019), funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (M. Grels, personal communication, December 17, 2021). Similar to the experience of other countries such as Poland, the external funding for the projects and the experience of the Baltic Sea Region allowed for better preparation for the development of the formal MSPlan and ensured its quality at the national level (M. Grels, personal communication, December 17, 2021; Zaucha, 2014; in this regard, see also positive scoring of the MSPlan 2030 in WWF, 2022). No less critical in this process were the initiatives of the Helsinki Commission (the executive body of the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, HELCOM) and Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (ministerial cooperation in the fields of spatial planning and development in the Baltic Sea Region countries, VASAB) (e.g., HELCOM-VASAB Working Group).

Thus, MSPlan 2030 was formed as an integration of the results of various earlier completed projects under the remit of the Latvian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (A. Ruskule, personal communication, January 20, 2022; M. Grels, personal communication, December 17, 2021; Veidemane et al., 2017b) as the national MSP authority (Saeima, 2011, Arts. 9.1, 16.2; EC, 2014, Art. 13). It was done 'in co-operation with sectoral ministries, planning regions and local governments the administrative territory of which borders upon the sea' (Saeima, 2011, Art. 16), ensuring systematic coordination and cooperation (Veidemane et al., 2017b). Development of these events took place mainly due to the adoption of the MSP Directive, the preparation of which had already been known for several years (S. Strake, personal communication, January 24, 2022).

Legally, the MSPlan 2030 was developed in line with the goals and regulations of the Marine Environment Protection and Management Law (such as the application of the ecosystem-based approach and adherence to the principles of spatial development and environmental protection [Saeima, 2010a, Art. 14.1]), as well as the Spatial Development Planning Law (Saeima, 2011) and Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 740, 'Procedures for the Development, Implementation, and Monitoring of the Maritime Spatial Plan' (CM, 2012) (Regulations No. 740) (see also Neimane, 2020). More specifically, Regulations No. 740 establish the primary elements and critical factors that must be considered when defining the usage of the sea (Veidemane et al., 2017b).

In that regard, it is essential to note that the development of the plan was founded on a legal basis, namely, laws, rather than on a separately developed political document, such as the Maritime Strategy (A. Ruskule, personal communication, December 7, 2022) – an approach used by other EU coastal Member States. Additionally, Latvia is not among those countries that had established strategies for biodiversity or offshore wind farms before the definition of global and regional marine strategies and related field strategies (unlike some other countries [Trouillet, 2020a]).

Taking into account the requirements of the MSP Directive (following its Article 15.3, the establishment of plans in EU coastal Member States had to be completed by March 31, 2021), the MSPlan 2030 was approved by Latvia's Cabinet of Ministers on May 21, 2019 (CM, 2019b). Thus, completion and approval of the plan took place almost two years earlier than required by the MSP Directive and preceded the promulgation of the EGD by about half a year. Every six years, the MS Plan 2030 is reviewed (CM, 2012, para. 30) to ensure regular revision or updating (see also EC, 2014, preambular paragraph 18, Art. 6.3).

The plan is divided into four sections: an explanatory note, a strategic section, a section on 'Use of the sea', and the graphic part (CM, 2012, para. 12, 2019b) that need to be analysed content-wise and characterised to establish the relevance of MSPlan 2030 with the EGD.

**The explanatory note** describes EU strategies, the EU and national legal framework, and MSP principles and methods. This section characterises the current situation regarding the sectors and different environmental media. This part has an illustrative function, providing a background for what follows with the MSPlan's attempt to 'regulate.'

**The strategic section** sets out the vision, priorities and goals (6 priorities and 3 goals). By themselves, they do not regulate or require anything. There are also no indicators and values for these goals which impose any specific achievable results. The basis of these shortcomings is most likely a lack of strategies at the national level. For example, such documents as the Strategy for Latvia's Low-Carbon Development for the period until 2050 (currently known as Strategy of Latvia for the Achievement of Climate Neutrality by 2050) (MoEPRD, 2020), Latvia's Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the period until 2030 (CM, 2019a), as well as Latvia's National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021–2030 (CM, 2020) were under development at the time of preparation of the MSPlan 2030. This was a disadvantage and affected the MSP process compared to other coun-

tries since these crucial documents were adopted only after the establishment of the MSPlan 2030 (A. Ruskule & K. Veidemane, personal communication, September 12, 2022).

**The 'Use of the sea' section** offers planning solutions and a zoning description, recommendations and references to the regulatory framework to respect various interests. The section contains Table No. 6, which defines measures (the plan of measures) and responsibilities, where many measures are of a research nature. This means that the state does not have previous information to a sufficient extent to be able to plan the use, protection, development, and so on of certain sea territories. In addition, several measures mentioned in this section should also be carried out without the MSP, for example, monitoring the marine environment. In parallel, the existing regulatory framework in sectoral areas should be considered.

**The graphic part**, which predicts what can be done, where and which area has what priority, is the most critical part of the MSPlan. At the same time, it is inextricably linked with the section on 'Use of the sea', both of which ensure precise and prescriptive zoning (Trouillet, 2020b) (for more, see section 'Latvian maritime spatial planning in the context of the European Green Deal' in this paper).

This section provides information on MSPlan 2030, its background, legal framework, and critical features. However, to consider its connection with EGD, a broader description of MSPlan 2030 is necessary, including its place in Latvia's planning system.

## Place and feature characteristics of the maritime spatial plan in Latvia's planning system

The MSPlan 2030 is specific in the sense that it has different characteristics. According to its structure, it is a long-term strategy because it aims at achieving strategic goals (vision, priorities, action plan). According to its formal title and zoning, it is a territorial plan that regulates where and what can be developed. As to the level of detail, it can be considered a thematic plan (see Table 1, I.3), as it details a specific territory on a national scale and focuses on individual sectors. In that sense, as stated in the study by Trouillet (2020b) of MSPlan 2030: 'The strategic orientations are only a variation of sectoral plans, for most sectors (wind power, transport, fishing, tourism, etc.).'

The Development Planning System Law (Saeima, 2008) and the Spatial Development Planning Law (Saeima, 2011) provide insight into national planning levels and documents, as depicted in Table 1. The three different categories of development planning documents are policy planning documents, management documents of authorities, and spatial development planning documents (Saeima, 2008, Art. 6.1). A policy planning document outlines the goals, actions, and tasks necessary to promote growth in one or more policy domains, sectors, or sub-sectors (Saeima, 2008, Art. 6.2). Policy planning documents include guidelines, plan and conceptual report (CM, 2014, para. 11). Management documents of authorities, which are based on the authority's competence, establish the connection between budget planning and development planning, as well as guaranteeing sequential implementation of development planning documents (Saeima, 2008, Art. 6.3). The long-term development priorities and spatial perspective for the relevant territory are set out in the long-term spatial development planning documents, while the medium-term spatial development planning documents contain the medium-term priorities and the necessary set of actions to carry them out (Saeima, 2008, Art. 6.4).

Under national law, spatial planning is based on the settings of the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030 (I.1) (Saeima, 2010b) and National Development Plan (I.2) (Saeima, 2012, 2020), two development planning documents which were both approved by decision of the Latvian Parliament. In this way, these policy planning documents are assigned a different rank to the MSPlan 2030, which is approved by the order of the Cabinet of Ministers (CM, 2019b).

**Table 1.** Latvia: National planning levels and documents

No.	Document type/Document level and normative form	I. National		II. Regional		III. Local		Policy planning documents (Planning documents, management documents of authorities and spatial development planning documents)	
			Approval of parliament		Decision of the Planning Region Development Council		Decision of the local government council		
1.	Sustainable development strategy*	Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030	Approval of parliament	Sustainable development strategy of planning region	Decision of the Planning Region Development Council	Sustainable development strategy of local government	Decision of the local government council		
2.	Development programme**	National Development Plan		Development programme for the planning region		Development programme of local government			
3.	Thematic plan*	a. Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 (The Maritime Spatial Plan for Internal Waters, Territorial Waters and Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Latvia)	Order of the Cabinet of Ministers	Depends on topic		Depends on topic			
		b. National long-term thematic plan for development of public infrastructure in the coastal area of the Baltic Sea							
4.	Spatial plan*	x		x		Local government spatial plan	Binding regulations of local government		
5.	Local plan*	x		x		Local plan			
6.	Detailed plan	x		x		Detailed plan	General administrative act of local government		
* long-term									
** medium-term									

Source: authors' elaboration after Saeima (2008, 2011) and CM (2014).

As recognised in national legal doctrine, an order by its legal nature includes political calls, internal decisions of the state administration, and general administrative acts (Briede, 2020). According to the Administrative Procedure Law (Saeima, 2001, Art. 1.3), a general administrative act is ‘a decision issued by an institution in the cases provided for in the law with regard to an individually undetermined range of persons who are under specific and identifiable circumstances.’ Therefore, it can be claimed that the MSPlan creates binding rights and obligations for those it applies (cf. Briede, 2020).

In addition to the fact that, as follows from the above, the type of approval of a planning document is essential, the binding nature of planning documents is determined through the hierarchy of the planning system – documents of a lower planning level must take into account documents of a higher level. In the case of the MSPlan, this means that the principles and requirements contained in it are also taken into account when planning sectoral policies. The MSPlan is strategic but has some binding requirements, such as developing offshore wind farms (M. Grels, personal communication, December 17, 2021). Thus, MSPlan 2030, as a general administrative act, is binding on:

- state institutions that promulgate policies related to marine issues,
- planning regions and municipalities, and
- industry representatives.

Therefore, MSPlan 2030 establishes legally binding rights and obligations for those it pertains to. Alternatively, in other words, it is ‘the framework for conduct’ (Pyć, 2019, p. 315).

It follows that, along with the National Long-term Thematic Plan for Public Infrastructure Development in the Baltic Sea Coastal Area (coastal plan) (CM, 2016a), MSPlan 2030 is, in the authors’ view, classified as a thematic plan (both I.3) that is ‘a spatial development planning document addressing specific issues related to the development of separate sectors [...] or specific themes [...] according to the planning level.’ Combining these two thematic plans, which both detail territories and sectors, to a certain extent, ensures fulfilment of the land-sea interactions condition as one of the minimum requirements of the MSP Directive (Recitals 9, 16, 18, Arts. 4.2, 4.5, 6.2(a), 7.1; for more, see Neimane, 2021). However, the two plans present this detailing on different scales. The MSPlan 2030 map is on a scale of 1:250 000 (1 cm – 2.5 km). The coastal plan maps in the main document are on a scale of 1:1 000 000 (1 cm – 10 km), and in the graphic part on a scale of 1:50 000 (1 cm – 500 m). The coastal plan, which is infrastructure-oriented, is highly detailed and scale-incompatible with MSPlan 2030. Although the two plans cannot be matched mechanically, it should be noted here that these two planning documents need not be on the same scale, as they address different tasks. On the other hand, municipalities are allowed to plan a 2 km strip of coastline (Saeima, 2014, Arts. 15.5, 1.1, para. 7; see also CM, 2012, para. 6; MoEPRD, 2019) in the form of thematic planning (M. Grels, personal communication, December 17, 2021).

Municipalities generally plan their territory in great detail, according to the usual practice, where 1 cm on the map corresponds to 100 m in nature. The coastal plan is also quite detailed in order to be able to identify objects, but the MSPlan can handle a low level of detail. With time, as more knowledge becomes available, this could change.

This section raises the questions – of what the planning system means in the context of EGD, how the binding nature of planning can impact the ability to organise and direct development processes in the sea and coast, and what the MSP limiting factors in this context are. In the case of Latvia, the place of MSPlan in the system of planning documents has a dual nature. First, as the highest planning document of national importance for the sea, including the interests of various sectors, it is represented in the planning system with the approval of the Cabinet of Ministers (in contrast to the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030 [Saeima, 2010b]). According



to the type of document, it is a thematic plan that should address the issues of a field. This is where the peculiarities of forming planning documents are manifested – when the system was created, the place of MSP needed to be clarified. From this follows the need to discuss the role of planning documents in the context of MSP. By itself, the binding nature of the MSPlan does not significantly impact development processes in the sea, which are determined by other planning documents and regulatory frameworks. From a development perspective, the MSPlan acts as another limiting filter alongside other policies for the spatial arrangement of specific interests. In addition, there needs to be a wholly understood connection between land, coastal and maritime development, which is a separate topic to explore (see, for example, the ongoing *BALTIC SEA2LAND* project; Baltic Sea2Land, 2023). Overall, the place of MSPlan in the Latvian planning system has not been fully resolved. This is determined by the lack of MSP traditions (since it is a historically new process) and by the orientation of the planning system towards land, as a planning area.

## Latvian maritime spatial planning in the context of the European Green Deal

The EGD is one of the best-known, holistic and significant Green Deal Strategies designed to bring about systemic reforms that will safeguard the environment and ensure human well-being and economic progress (Smol, 2022). The core of the EGD is zero net emissions of greenhouse gases for the goal of 2050 while decoupling economic growth from resource use (EC, 2019a). At the same time, the EGD is an umbrella concept covering many fields, and its content has different interpretations (e.g., Koundouri et al., 2021; Smol, 2022). According to the information available on the European Parliament's 'EU legislative train' website on May 15, 2023, there are 40 'arrived' (enacted) and 58 'departed' initiatives, including sector-specific strategies of the EGD (EP, 2023). As a cross-cutting set of initiatives, the EGD offers a preliminary road map of the essential regulations and actions required to accomplish its challenging objectives. It also refers to pro-ecological activity directions in various economic areas. Its remit ranges from energy through the agricultural industry to biodiversity (Smol, 2022) and maritime developments, including methods for sustainably managing maritime space, as well as maritime transport, fisheries and the sustainable blue economy more generally (EC, 2019a; see also EC, 2021e, 2022).

For this study, the authors chose to fill the content of the EGD with those initiatives resulting from the critical actions mentioned in its annex (EC, 2019b), adapting them accordingly. Two actions in the field of climate were combined ('Climate ambition' and 'Working together – a European Climate Pact' were integrated under one name of 'Climate action'). The activities 'mainstreaming sustainability in all EU policies' and 'the EU as a global leader' were omitted because, at the moment, their close connection with the tasks and functions of the MSP cannot be deduced. In addition, a sustainable blue economy (EC, 2021a) dimension was added since it includes more specific actions associated with the EGD (see also EC, 2022). The activities are arranged in alphabetical order, and analysis of MSPlan 2030 was carried out using the content analysis approach and expert qualitative evaluation to determine whether (see Table 2):

- MSPlan 2030 aims to support the development of the particular sector/topic/issue (xx);
- the particular sector/ topic/issue is considered in MSPlan 2030 or its preparation (x);
- the particular sector/topic/issue is not addressed in MSPlan 2030 (o).

Through analysing the sections of the MSPlan (see also the section ‘The genesis of maritime spatial planning in Latvia’ in this paper), insight is offered into the extent to which MSPlan 2030 meets the objectives of the EGD. As a result, it is possible to assess the extent to which the current MSPlan has managed to ensure the branching of various sectors and simultaneously integration of the EGD target settings.

**Table 2.** Coverage of the EGD components in the MSPlan 2030

Components of the EGD (EC, 2019a, 2019b)	Explanatory note, pp. 9–82	Strategic section, pp. 83–85	The ‘Use of the sea’ section, pp. 86– 109	Graphic part
C-1. Clean, affordable and secure energy (EC, 2020c, 2020d)	xx	xx	xx	xx
C-2. Climate action (EC, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2021d)	xx	x	x	x
C-3. Greening the Common Agricultural Policy (EC, 2021c, 2023) / ‘Farm to Fork’ Strategy (EC, 2020e)	x	x	x	o
C-4. Industrial strategy for a clean and circular economy (EC, 2020g, 2020h)	o	o	o	o
C-5. Preserving and protecting biodiversity (EC, 2020f)	xx	xx	xx	xx
C-6. Sustainable and smart mobility (EC, 2020a)	x	x	x	x
C-7. Sustainable blue economy (2021a)	xx	xx	xx	xx
C-8. Towards a zero-pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment (2021b)	x	x	x	x
xx	The issue is addressed directly: does the MSPlan aim to support the development of the particular sector/topic/issue?			
x	The issue is addressed indirectly/partially: is the particular sector/topic/issue considered in the MSPlan or its preparation?			
o	The particular sector/topic/issue is not addressed			
	Existing use and priority use			
	General use			

Source: authors’ elaboration.

However, as noted earlier, the MSPlan and the EGD were adopted more than half a year apart, the MSPlan 2030 being the first. As a result, the Latvian maritime spatial design has yet to incorporate the EGD goals directly because they were not formulated and known when developing and adopting the MSPlan 2030. It is the typical situation in many other countries where plans were already elaborated/under elaboration and/or adopted when the EGD was promulgated (see EC, 2022). For instance, an examination of MSPlans reveals that only one MSPlan in the Baltic Sea mentions the EGD, compared to over half of the MSPlans in the North-East Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea; regarding other EGD components, a similar pattern is seen (EC, 2022). The EGD is referred to in the Spatial Plan for the Exclusive Economic Zone in the North Sea and in the Baltic Sea of Germany (BSH, 2021) in the context of ‘the spatial safeguarding of sites for wind energy production.’

A content analysis of selected parts of the MSPlan 2030 identified three main themes coinciding with the EGD that are directly addressed in MSPlan. These are:

- C-1. 'Clean, affordable and secure energy' (in the MSPlan 2030 – research area for wind park development [E1, E2, E3, E4, E5]);
- C-5. 'Preserving and protecting biodiversity' (in the MSPlan 2030 – investigation area of nature values [B1, B2, B3, B4, B5], as well as marine protected areas, biosphere reserves and nature reserves);
- C-7. 'Sustainable blue economy' as a cross-cutting theme that is reflected in the prescriptive zoning of the MSPlan 2030 (Trouillet, 2020a, 2020b) in the section 'Use of the sea' and graphical section (CM, 2019b).

One would expect the MSP to address the 'Farm to Fork' Strategy for aquaculture. However, the explanatory note states that aquaculture has little potential in Latvia. The country is currently not focusing on the broader development of this sector in the sea. MSP envisages aquaculture development, considering each project individually. Similarly to fisheries, priority areas for aquaculture are not determined (see also ZM, 2023).

Marine space use is divided into three categories by the MSPlan.

Firstly, **priority uses** are those uses of marine space that are now being used or planned and are necessary to protect the spatial interests of the priorities listed in the strategic section. The MSPlan depicts biodiversity and wind energy as priority uses in the plan (see Figure 1, marked in bold). The graphic part shows that investigation areas of nature values overlap with research areas for wind park development and are significant. This means that during planning, there needed to be more data to determine the best territories for each use, and these territories are not fixed. In the further course of the research, as part of the environmental impact assessment procedure, it may be revealed that one of the study areas is not suitable, for example, for the development of wind farms (A. Ruskule, personal communication, January 20, 2022; M. Grels, personal communication, December 17, 2021) or is not needed for biological diversity. However, the latest discoveries about multi-use might allow combining these two uses if sound research justifies such an approach (S. Strake, personal communication, January 24, 2022).

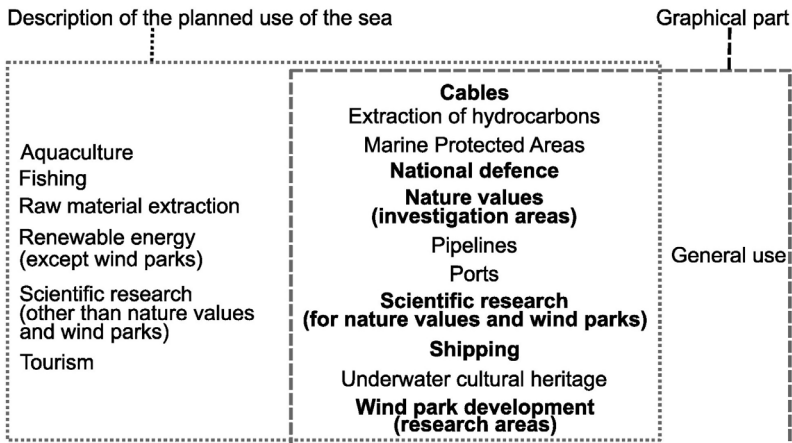
Latvian industry representatives admit that, in practice, a large part of the research areas for wind park development can be considered very difficult or almost unusable: different sectoral interests (military, shipping, biological diversity) overlap (K. Eglite, personal communication, personal communication, March 22, 2022). K. Eglite (personal communication, March 22, 2022) characterises this situation in the following way: 'If you put it all on the map... about what remains... the situation is quite motley and finding a free spot where to place a [wind energy] station, and for it to be economically justified, is very difficult and challenging.'

Secondly, **existing uses** and objects are also included. Statutory regulations provide for where they are located and how they will be managed.

Thirdly, **general use**, including fishing, shipping, tourism and recreation, and scientific research, are permitted. Any actions that do not violate the limitations outlined in regulatory enactments and do not significantly harm the marine environment are permitted in these zones (CM, 2019b).

The MSP Directive (Art. 8.2) lists the areas of the blue economy that must be considered in the national MSP. In this sense, the MSPlan 2030 has considered the interests of all areas mentioned in the MSP Directive. Figure 1 also reflects that not all of the uses discussed in the 'Use of the sea' section are zoned and, therefore, can be found in the graphic part (such as aquaculture, fishing areas, extraction of raw materials and aggregates, tourism) (A. Ruskule, personal communication, December 7, 2022). The main difference between the categorisation of the areas presented

above is that priority uses (marked in bold, Figure 1) can be implemented only in prior established areas, and no other activities can interfere with them; at the same time, non-priority uses can be implemented anywhere they are allowed (so-called general use) (M. Grels, personal communications, December 17, 2021, and December 7, 2022).



**Figure 1.** Representation of blue economy sectors in Latvia's Maritime Spatial Plan 2030  
Source: authors' elaboration after MSPlan 2030 (CM, 2019b).

Latvian MSPlan 2030 is 'dealing with the ensemble of economic and environmental concerns' (Trouillet, 2020b). Two primary categories of objectives are listed: economic expansion (such as shipping, wind energy, fisheries, and tourism) (number one) and conservation (number two) (Trouillet, 2020b). Marine protected areas are included with sectoral plans for specific economic sectors such as wind energy and transportation (Trouillet, 2020b). Therefore, the content of the plan reflects the origins of the sharp rise in MSP development on different scales, i.e., two oceanic occurrences: expansion of maritime sectors in terms of blue growth (EC, 2012) – today known as the sustainable blue economy (EC, 2021a) – in the EU and extension of marine protected areas (Trouillet, 2020a; see also CEC, 2008; EC, 2010b).

In this regard, it must be recalled that pre-established objectives, which can be monitored using suitable indicators, should be a direction for MSP procedures (Lukic et al., 2018). However, the content analysis of MSPlan 2030 shows that the part on 'Implementation and updating of the MSPlan' in the section on 'Use of the sea' does not provide a clear answer as to what will be evaluated, according to what indicators and what the proposed implementation and updating model of the MSPlan have to do with the document itself as such. From its presentation, it is clear that the MSPlan involves analysis of many areas that have little to do with this document. This drawback results from insufficient political support and guiding documents (policy planning documents and strategies or implementation tools) deriving therefrom. It creates much uncertainty that prevents industries from making logical decisions, even though there is approximate clarity on the location of the territories where wind energy development might eventually take place (E.Groza, personal communication, March 22, 2022; also cf. R. Aboltins, personal communication, March 22, 2022) and, as a result, reduce the transaction costs (Zaucha et al., 2019).

However, the situation has improved in this regard. For example, as Latvia does not have its biological strategy, it implements the EU strategy (EC, 2020f) and marine strategy (CM, 2016b; MoEPRD, 2022) for the achievement of good environmental status in the Baltic Sea Region (Saeima, 2010a, Art. 7; see also EC, 2008; M. Grels, personal communication, January 25, 2023).

Additionally, the Environmental Policy Guidelines 2021–2027 (CM, 2022) are related to the EGD and set several biodiversity goals and indicators, as well as to the status of the marine environment. Several documents in the climate field have been adopted, such as the Strategy of Latvia for the Achievement of Climate Neutrality by 2050 (MoEPRD, 2020), Latvia's Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the period until 2030 (CM, 2019a) and Latvia's National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021–2030 (CM, 2020). All of these, to some extent, respond to the EGD. In Latvia's National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021–2030, several different attainable goals have been set (for example, to ensure at least 50% of the share of renewable energy in Latvia's total energy consumption). However, there is no specific information about the volume of offshore wind energy. This document mentions the 'Study on Baltic offshore wind energy cooperation under BEMIP' (EC, 2019c). According to this study, within 29 wind farm blocks, Latvia's identified potential offshore wind energy capacity of 14.50 GW could generate 49.20 TWh of power per year.

Therefore, when assessing how the settings contained in the MSPlan 2030 could be implemented, it can be found that to do this, two things are needed, namely:

- the vision on which the MSP is based;
- the connection with policy planning documents (guidelines, plans and conceptual reports) and strategies of other sectors (so-called implementation tools).

In turn, the existence of these documents depends on political support, which has so far been lacking, e.g., in the field of wind energy (Aboltins, 2019; G. Galvins, personal communication, January 24, 2022; R. Aboltins, personal communication, March 22, 2022).

## **Conclusion: the way forward**

The chronological lag between the development of the MSPlan 2030 in Latvia and the formulation of the goals of the EGD has created a situation where the MSPlan does not directly include or directly refer to the EGD and its priorities. Additionally, it should be recalled that the EGD is a complex set of measures, and these measures, although they may be interconnected to each other, do not mean that they are directly applicable to the MSPlan and that implementation of the MSPlan can have a direct impact on the EGD measures. Therefore, the MSPlan **can facilitate rather than ensure** the achievement of such goals. Indeed, the MSP is a process that involves more than just producing a document (Trouillet, 2020a) in its functional meaning as a planning process instead of in its instrumental sense only (i.e., spatial plan) (Pyć, 2019). Moreover, no MSPlan alone can achieve internationally defined goals (M. Grels, personal communication, December 17, 2021). Elsewhere, a close, although implicit, relation between the respective goals of EGD and MSP has been argued (EC, 2022). Depending on the plan's place in the system, the MSPlan interact differently with the EGD in diverse countries.

Although MSPlan 2030 has several specific features in Latvia's planning system, it is essentially a development planning document, more specifically, a spatial planning document under the subgroup of thematic plans at the national level. In this regard, a question about the possibilities of a spatial planning document to ensure the achievement of the selected goals (6 priorities

and 3 goals) arises when planning means can indicate zoning – that is, the priorities of territorial use and the principles to be followed when interests overlap (even in cases where they are exclusive). In principle, spatial planning answers the questions ‘where and what’ may or may not be done. In turn, ‘how, in what way’ it happens is the task of other regulations and is carried out using other instruments, such as certification and licensing. ‘Where, what’ as a task of the MSPlan and ‘how, in what way’ as a question of the scope of other tools are aspects that need to be distinguished when analysing the MSP. Nevertheless, due to its strategic nature, MSPlan 2030 is binding on all state agencies that develop marine-related policies, planning regions, municipalities, and industry representatives as a general administrative act.

A content analysis of selected parts of the MSPlan 2030 identified three main themes coinciding with the EGD that are directly addressed in the MSPlan: biodiversity, energy and the sustainable blue economy. Along with existing uses and objects and general use, both biodiversity and wind energy are depicted as priority uses in the plan. However, all areas of the blue economy mentioned in the MSP Directive have been considered by the MSPlan 2030.

In general, since the MSPlan 2030 has relationships with other documents both horizontally and vertically, its implementation in terms of supporting the sustainable blue economy and EGD goals depends less on the existence of laws and other secondary legal acts but, instead, more on its ability to create the necessary connections and connect with the policy planning documents (such as guidelines, plans and conceptual reports) and strategies of other sectors (so-called implementation tools) if they exist. This connection needs to be strengthened since, concerning some sectors, such documents need to be developed sufficiently, or that linkage needs to be established. This – even though giving a rough idea of the territories – causes a great deal of ambiguity, inhibiting industries from making sound decisions. In addition, it leads to a situation where the MSPlan does not contain appropriate indicators and values to estimate its implementation and perform the necessary review meaningfully.

In sum, the results of this analysis call for two-level solutions at regional and national levels, where several possibilities are available.

On a regional level, several offers have already been made. For instance, the need for more guidance on the relationship between the EGD and the implementation of the MSP Directive by providing a handbook on implementation, highlighting best practices, and developing a thorough strategy to align with EGD goals, as well as more precisely defining some minimum requirements to be taken into account in the MSP (EC, 2022). Especially important is that to maintain oversight of the entirety of a complex situation, it has been advised to operationalise the EGD objectives and also specify when the EGD will replace the current law (EC, 2022).

At the national level, two types of action are required. **Firstly**, Latvia has many different policies covering the EGD – policies that partially overlap, depending on the focus of the document area. Firstly, at the national level, there are documents related to the EGD, sometimes even overlapping, and secondly, areas where a policy at the national level is missing or where common EU policy is implemented (e.g., maritime affairs, fisheries). Therefore, the political dimension of the MSP (instead of lowering it ‘to the rank of a technical protocol’) (Trouillet, 2020a, p. 447) needs to be emphasised, recognised and implemented at the national level. This approach would involve elaborating policy planning documents (such as guidelines, plans and conceptual reports) and strategies of other sectors. **Secondly**, it might be necessary to have overarching, hierarchically high visions (such as a national Integrated Maritime Policy and maritime strategy) at the national level. In both cases, hierarchically, the most necessary would be a **national** Green Deal guidelines/plan/conceptual document, providing a so-called transformation of economics. Based on the eco-

conomic transformation model approach, ideas should be put forward about the priority sectors of the economy that require zoning. In addition, modernisation of the national Sustainable Development Strategy would be needed as a minimum to give importance to the MSP in the national spatial perspective, linking it with sectoral strategies. National Green Deal guidelines might form part of the comprehensive Sustainable Development Strategy. In that light, for future planning, it would be advisable to prepare 'a political framework assessment report for MSP' (cf. ELI, 2020) to evaluate and elaborate further measurable indicators, which would contribute in a meaningful way to the achievement of global and regional goals, which should form part of national targets. In addition, if and when the situation changes, it is essential that a review and update of the plan can be practically carried out well within the six-year deadline.

The concept used by MSP and the experience of other countries predicted their approach to how it is necessary to form MSP. As a result, to a large extent, the MSPlan was 'seated' in the Latvian planning system. It answers the question about the existence of achievable indicators and goal formulations, which is not the issue of the essence of this document. MSP does not address systemic planning deficiencies and should not handle them if it is assumed that spatial planning reflects sectoral policies. Otherwise, spatial planning as an integrated tool for the use and development of space reflects the necessary changes in the system.

Overall, the conclusion is that implementation of MSP is rooted in the state planning system, the interconnection among policy documents, and the specifics of the MSPlan itself. There is still some uncertainty regarding MSPlan's position inside the Latvian planning framework. The lack of MSP traditions (as it is a relatively new process) and the planning system's focus on land as a planning area are the determining factors in this.

As a result of the analysis shows that even MSPlans adopted before the announcement of the EGD might address its essential elements. At the same time, MSP cannot be expected to fully depict the features of EGD. In the case of Latvia, combining territory zoning, text analysis, established priorities and compliance with EGD elements took work. The different formats of the documents also determined it.

The case of Latvia demonstrates the contact points between the system of planning documents and EGD. The example evidences that an initially developed document is subjected to a bureaucratic procedure, which can be lengthy and ineffective in adapting new policy directions. The policy was not ready then, and the regulation needed to be aligned with the new need. However, the form of the project made it possible to learn and create the best solution. The reflection of EGD directions in MSP and planning altogether, in general, raises the question of the openness of documents to changes in response to the rapidly changing situation.

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