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Stakeholder-Driven MSP in Northern Sardinia: shaping and testing a locally-driven approach to MSP solutions.

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In September 2024, Italy approved its first National Maritime Spatial Plans (MS Plans). By adopting a multi-scalar approach, coastal regional authorities were empowered to develop proactively their MSP strategy within the broader national framework. Despite this relevant progress, challenges emerged regarding the participation of local stakeholders, sparking the debate about the extent to which this first planning cycle effectively engaged with the actors at the local scale.

To respond to such a challenge, within the REGINA-MSP (Regions to boost National Maritime Spatial Planning) project, we tested a **participatory democracy planning process** directly engaging regional and local stakeholders in Northern Sardinia to co-design MSP solutions responding to regional and local needs. This area was selected as a case study due the high concentration of marine protected areas, valuable landscape assets and several maritime activities, such as fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, recreational shipping, maritime transport, and port operations.

A bottom-up process allowed to involve a community of over 30 stakeholders, including NGOs, port authorities, coastal guard authorities, associations of fisheries and aquaculture operators, research institutions, natural park authorities, offices of regional and municipal authorities.

The process involved six phases: **(i) Preliminary workshops**; the spatial provisions and measures identified by the Italian MS Plan concerning the Sardinia Region were presented to the stakeholders in two thematic events, focusing on Gulf of Olbia and on the Gulf of Asinara, and aimed at mapping conflictual and synergistic interactions of relevance at the case-study level. Stakeholders collaboratively worked, confirming and/or providing feedbacks about these interactions and integrating knowledge on the local needs; **(ii) First review exchange**; through bilateral interviews with the stakeholders, this step further detailed the identified conflicts, synergies and needs, ensuring coherence and further verification; **(iii) Drafting targeted solutions**; this step identified potential solutions to address the conflicts, support the synergies and respond to the needs; **(iv) Informative and preparatory exchange**; a preliminary document, including a portfolio of proposed solutions was shared with the stakeholders to set the basis for a conclusive workshop; **(v) Conclusive workshop**, proposed solutions were presented and

discussed with the stakeholders: interactive tools enabled to collect feedback, suggest modifications, explore additional new solutions, and prioritize solutions based on local urgency, readiness and feasibility; **(vi) Final validation**; the results of the second workshop were used to finalise the portfolio of co-created and scientifically-based solutions, that was eventually shared with all stakeholders.

This participatory process led to the definition of five stakeholder-driven solutions, each responding to a specific local need, that might be incorporated into the next Italian MSP cycle. The co-designed solutions address **spatial conflicts** (overlapping interests among artisanal fisheries, transport and biodiversity conservation) by promoting a new Particularly Sensitive Sea Area in the Gulf of Asinara, and **governance challenges** in the Gulf of Olbia, by promoting a permanent technical table between aquaculture farmers and port authorities.

The developed and tested participatory approach can support the co-definition of inclusive planning solutions and offers a replicable model for incorporating local knowledge into multi-level governance frameworks for MSP.