

Designing Communication on Maritime Spatial Planning and the Sustainable Blue Economy Across EU and Non-EU Mediterranean Shores

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Keywords

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Background

The European Union's **Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive (2014/89/EU)** establishes MSP as both a governance framework and a mandate for transboundary cooperation, including collaboration with non-EU neighbours. In the Mediterranean, ecological interdependence intersects with political, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Effective communication of MSP and the **European Green Deal (EGD)** is therefore essential to foster a sustainable blue economy and strengthen cross-border cooperation. However, MSP and EGD frameworks are often communicated through highly technical policy formats, limiting accessibility and engagement; particularly among non-EU Mediterranean partners operating under the **Barcelona Convention** framework.

Methods

The study was conducted within the **MEDIGREEN project (2024–2027)** and adopted a mixed design-research approach combining theory, comparative analysis, and participatory validation. A literature review explored design for policy, science communication, co-design, and visual storytelling in environmental governance, while a comparative assessment examined communication frameworks in Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), the European Green Deal (EGD), and previous EMFAF-funded projects (MSP-MED, MSP-GREEN). An initial focus group with Tunisian, Algerian, Spanish, French, and Italian MSP experts identified priority topics, formats, and linguistic considerations. The resulting multilingual materials were then tested in a workshop with 32 participants, policy makers and MSP experts from Tunisia, Spain, Italy, France and Croatia, using Mentimeter questions to rank the usefulness of formats (e.g., flashcards, factsheets, short videos) and to assess alignment across Arabic, French, and English versions.

Research Aim

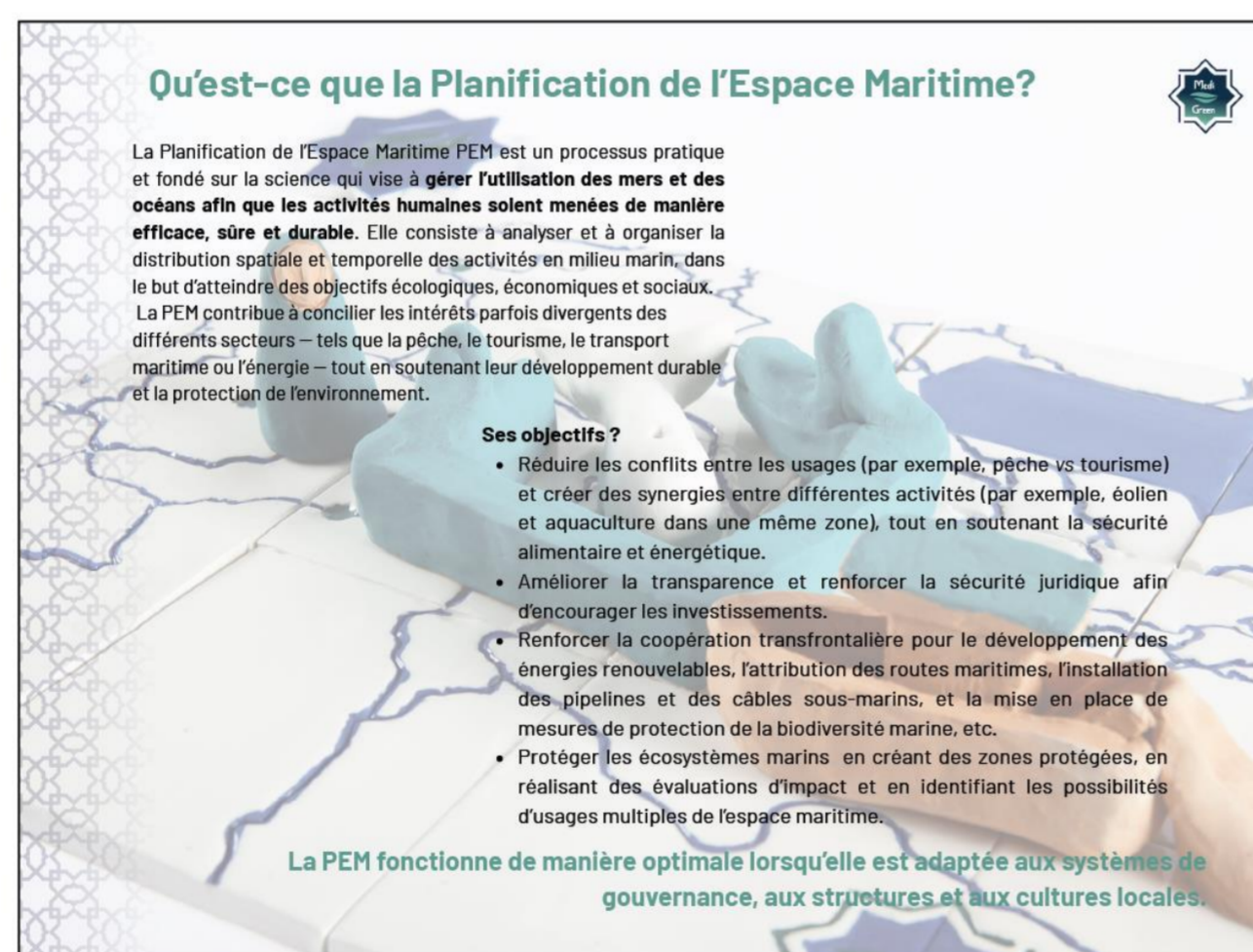
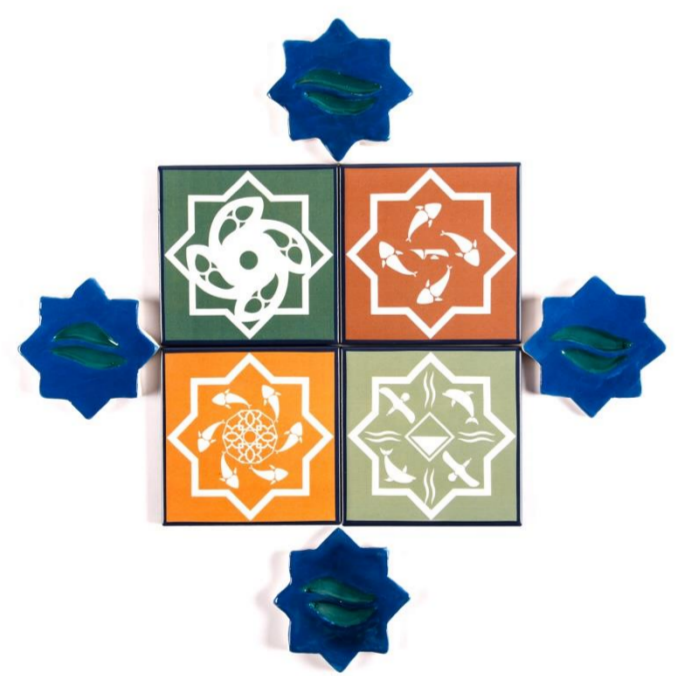
This study investigates which **visual and narrative communication tools** can support the understanding, legitimacy, and dissemination of MSP in the Mediterranean context.

Research questions:

- Which communication formats most effectively convey Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and European Green Deal (EGD) concepts in a Mediterranean transboundary context?
- Which visual and linguistic design choices influence clarity, engagement, and cross-cultural comprehension of MSP?
- How can Ocean Literacy-oriented communication strategies support stakeholder trust and cooperation in MSP processes beyond EU?

Communication Outputs

The project developed a coordinated set of visual communication tools structured around four dimensions: formats, languages, topics, and visual narratives. It produced flashcards, multilingual factsheets, and short animated videos in Arabic, French, and English to communicate Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and European Green Deal (EGD) concepts in accessible ways while respecting governance discourse. The content focused on blue economy opportunities, particularly aquaculture, fisheries, offshore renewable energy, and nature protection, highlighting their links to MSP and EGD objectives. Visually, the materials combined geometric elements inspired by Mediterranean heritage with inclusive depictions of maritime livelihoods, balancing policy clarity with cultural resonance.



Factsheet



Card



Social media video

Key Results

The validation workshop (n = 32) shows that **factsheets were the most consistently valued format** (Mdn = 6; IQR = 5–7) for accessibility and shareability across linguistic contexts. **Flashcards** were positively rated for intuitive use (Mdn = 6), particularly as introductory tools, though considered less suitable for sustained professional engagement. **Animated videos** received more heterogeneous evaluations (Mdn = 5), but were recognised as effective for digital and social media dissemination. Ranking results indicate a preference for **hybrid strategies**, combining social media with conferences and in-person exchanges. Linguistic feedback emphasised the importance of Arabic terminological consistency and contextual explanation of technical planning concepts.

Discussion & Conclusions

The findings confirm that **communication is not peripheral to Maritime Spatial Planning, but a structural component of transboundary governance**. Visually structured formats, particularly factsheets and flashcards, function as stabilising translation tools, reducing policy complexity across multilingual Mediterranean contexts. Animated videos show strong potential for digital dissemination, though their effectiveness depends on platform-sensitive design and audience alignment. Crucially, multilingual MSP communication requires negotiated meaning and cultural adaptation rather than literal translation, especially in Arabic governance contexts. A hybrid communication ecosystem, combining digital outreach with conferences and dialogic engagement, emerges as the most effective strategy. Purposefully designed, culturally attuned communication tools therefore can act as governance enablers, strengthening inclusiveness, European Green Deal visibility, and cross-border cooperation in the Mediterranean.