



VALUABLE PRACTICE: From energy transition to spatial reconfiguration into ports

Description

As logistical hubs, ports play an important role in achieving the EGD’s offshore energy targets. For instance, they can serve as hubs for storage and pre-assembly of wind turbine components, or as a base for construction and maintenance ships. In turn, this means that ports need to find space to support the ORE sector’s growth. In La Rochelle, the "Port Horizon 2025" planning document strongly reflects the spatial prioritisation given to ORE as an emerging sector. It foresees the creation of a new terminal capable of handling heavy goods, explicitly meant to meet development needs from ORE. It also plans for a new logistical hub that should similarly support ORE.

The prioritisation of investments in ORE infrastructures also feeds into a logic of transitioning away from the port’s reliance on activities related to fossil fuels. In 2020, petroleum products still represented 30% of the port’s traffic. The 2020-2024 Port’s strategy anticipates that the energy sectors currently operating in the port will be strongly impacted by the ecological and energy transitions. In practice, La Rochelle seeks to address the risks faced by oil-dependent ports such as stranded assets (e.g. oil storage infrastructures, terminals or pipelines) and decrease in revenues. However, the 2020-2024 strategy of the GPM of La Rochelle also acknowledges that the immediate proximity of the city limits and close sensitive marine areas are constraints for the development of new industrial port activities such as ORE. To overcome such a challenge and reinforce its position in the growing ORE market, a complementary strategy from the Port consists in planning outwards and partnering with other ports in the South Atlantic basin. This is in line with measure 03-POR-A03 from the French South Atlantic MSP plan.

In fact, the port played a key role in ensuring the creation the association « Aquitania Ports Links ». The creation of the association expressly originated from the objective of jointly applying for a call for expressions of interest launched by the French Agency for Ecological Transition (ADEME) on port infrastructures for offshore floating wind farms. The four associated ports aim to create synergies and leverage complementarities in their existing and planned infrastructures. Key activities have already been distributed between ports based on their comparative advantages to offer an attractive and integrated logistical chain. For instance, La Rochelle capitalises on natural assets such as its deep-water bathymetry and a location that gives easy access to the whole Atlantic sea basin, as well as the experience gained in participating to the construction of a previous offshore wind farm, the ability to handle heavy loads, and the construction of new berths dedicated to ORE. Together, the four ports can cover all needed elements to deploy offshore wind farms in South Atlantic Sea basin.

The cooperation strategy is already proving successful, since in 2023, all four ports were successfully included in the winners of the ADEME call.

Practice typology

(iii) Process-related practice

Topics addressed

Main	A. Climate change mitigation [A.1. Renewable energy production, storage and transportation (A.1.1. Development of marine renewable energy installations and A.1.7. Coordinated, transboundary initiatives); A.2. Clean energy transition in maritime sectors and A.3. Transformations in ports]
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Sectors/Activity involved

Ports activities, offshore renewable energies.

Stakeholders involved

At a local scale, the Grand Port Maritime (GPM) of La Rochelle is a public body. The GPM of La Rochelle is the only deep-water port in the French South Atlantic basin.

At a regional scale, « Aquitania Ports Links » is an association that brings together the Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region, the Trade and Industry Chamber of Nouvelle-Aquitaine, and the four commercial ports of the region – the Grand Port Maritime de La Rochelle, the Charente Atlantique port, the Grand Port Maritime de Bordeaux and the port of Bayonne.

Geographical scope

Grand Port Maritime (GPM) of La Rochelle, and by extension, the South Atlantic Sea Basin.

Governance context

The port of La Rochelle is a «Grand Port Maritime» (GPM). It is a public body under the direct supervision of the State (Ministry of Ecological Transition - Directorate-General for Infrastructure, Transport and the Sea - DGITM).

The GPM implements its own strategy (currently the 2020-2024 port strategy and the project « Port Horizon 2025 »). As a member of the Façade (Sea basin) Maritime Council (CMF), it is involved in the definition and implementation of the French South Atlantic MSP strategy. At a national level, it is represented towards the State by the national port association (Union des Ports de France) and should also contribute to the implementation of the National Port Strategy.

«Aquitania Ports Links» is an association that brings together ports with various administrative status:

- Grands Ports Maritime of La Rochelle and Bordeaux: direct supervision from the State.
- Port of Bayonne: owned by the Region Nouvelle Aquitaine, managed by the Trade and Industry Chamber of Bayonne Pays Basque.
- Charente Atlantique port: owned by the Charente-Maritime Department, managed by the Syndicat mixte (mixed economy company) of the Rochefort/Tonnay-Charente trade port.

The national port and energy policies are managed by two distinct directorates within the same ministry (Ministry for Ecological Transition: DGITM and DGEC). Also relevant is the national strategy for the sea and coast, which is led by a DG shared by the Secretariat of State for the Sea and the Ministry of Agriculture (DGAMPA).

Private stakeholders from the ORE sector and other activities involved in the port area often are companies operating at a national or international scale.

How this MSP practice can support the EU Green Deal

The GPM’s planning strategy anticipates shifts in future energy trades by moving out from oil related activities while prioritizing emerging greener sectors such as ORE. The port’s proactive transformation directly supports the EGD targets both on ORE development and phasing out from fossil fuels. It is estimated that the port generates about 16,400 jobs. A forward-looking transformation of the port therefore also supports the sustainability its hinterland. Planning such a transformation will act as a driving force towards greener activities and jobs for many other sectors gravitating around the port.

To face spatial limitation in the port area and remain competitive in

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ORE logistics market, La Rochelle looks outward by means of a formal association with other ports in the South Atlantic. By turning comparative advantages into articulated complementarities, associated ports not only distribute spatial pressure from ORE growth but also create integrated logistical chains at a sea basin level. This provides concrete support to the EGD by ensuring that future offshore wind farms projects in the South Atlantic basin will benefit from competitive and adequate logistical support infrastructures.

Both practices illustrate how the EGD's offshore energy targets can lead to reorganisation of space not only at sea but at the land-sea interface with ports and their hinterland. They show the added value of a sea basin level approach when planning for ORE and port transformations.

Challenges/gaps/inconsistencies still to be addressed

"Aquitania Ports Link" was foreseen in the French South Atlantic MSP document's action plan. Action "03-POR-A03: Promote synergies between ports in the region and the link with their territory" includes a sub-action 1 "Strengthen cooperation and synergy between the ports of the facade by creating a regional space for dialogue permanent between the ports of the façade", which mentions the creation of a formal association. However, action 03-POR-A03 refers to a study that had already been conducted when the action plan was drafted. Likewise, the action plan only refers to the "validation" of the principle of a future association of ports and remains vague in terms of future concrete steps. The added value of the MSP process in the concrete establishment and functioning of the ports' synergy remains unclear. It seems the action plan might have only taken stock of ongoing initiatives rather than catalysed it or planned new ones.

Adopting an industrial ecosystem approach, the next MSP cycle could work on better integrating new offshore wind energy targets with sectors such as ports at a sea basin scale. It should assess the needs stemming from offshore energy targets, including in terms of port infrastructures needed, and could deepen the complementarity analysis already initiated by « Aquitania Port Links ». MSP could also be used to ensure coherence at a sea basin scale between the ports' strategies and other relevant planning documents. The next MSP plan should also reflect newly available information, with regards to what the anticipated quantitative targets for offshore energy production in the South Atlantic basin and the technology to be favoured (e.g. floating) mean in terms of port infrastructure offer in the sea basin.

It is also worth noting that the National Port Strategy does not consider MSP and DSF at all, nor does it refer to the National Strategy for the Sea and Coasts, including in the governance section. Better integration of port, energy and MSP policies could also be explored at a national level.

Replicability /Elements which can be capitalised

Ports that still rely on fossil fuels should prepare for shifts in demand and related activities, and therefore anticipate decrease in revenues and risks of stranded assets. Such ports would benefit from analysing which are the emerging green sectors they could favour (for instance ORE but also blue circular economy sectors). Identifying the most promising sectors for port investments should be done beyond the port area, i.e considering the surrounding economic and industrial environment and relevant planning documents at multiple scales.

Identifying possible synergies and complementarities with other ports can help guiding investments and reinforce competitiveness. Cooperation between ports at sea basin level to propose integrated

logistical chain can be replicated elsewhere. This will also help with addressing the challenge relating to finding space for ORE-related activities by distributing industrial and logistic infrastructures in multiple locations.