

VALUABLE PRACTICE: Coastal assessment for evaluation of tourism and recreation pressure on ecosystem and public infrastructure

Description

In 2016 the National long-term thematic plan for public infrastructure development in Coastal area (further on Coastal plan) was adopted by Cabinet of Ministers. The coastal assessment was performed considering the initial methodology (in 2015) and repeated with some minor updates in 2019.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (MoERPD) in 2019-2020 analysed the visitor flow to the Baltic coast and assessed its pressure on key habitats, to improve their preservation.

The resulting assessment data are comparable with baseline information on the coastal visitor count, its environmental pressures and public infrastructure assessment made in 2015, which was obtained using the same research methodology. The assessment includes clearly structured information about:

- i. coastal development tendencies and interrelations of environmental pressure in the municipalities;
- ii. an assessment of the visitor flow intensity and spatial-temporal mobility;
- iii. long-term marine litter load and its dynamics on the Latvian beaches;
- iv. anthropogenic impact on vegetation in the coastal dune protection zone;
- v. evaluation of public infrastructure (capacity and quality);
- vi. access to the sea of emergency services.

In addition, detailed cartographic material has been produced specifying the intensity of coastal visits, marine litter load and anthropogenic impact on vegetation for every 100m segment of seashore. This information supports coastal planning and decision-making (both on national and local/municipal level).

The summary of the assessment is available here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QwWnD1gP84680XGjDZ_9pSVRLitnc6CO/view?usp=share_link

Practice typology

(ii) Monitoring, assessment and evaluation + (v) Others (analysis of tendencies for better decision making)

Topics addressed

Main	B. Climate change adaptation [B.2 Protection of climate-sensitive marine and coastal biodiversity and ecosystems, and landscapes and B.3 Anticipation of climate change-related effects (B.3.3 Identification of unplanned areas to be used in future (specific uses not identified))].
	D. Biodiversity and ecosystem protection and restoration [D.2 Restoring marine and coastal ecosystems (D.2.1 Remediation of contaminated marine and / or coastal sites)].
	F. Zero pollution [F.1.2 Measures related to coastal and maritime tourism

Sectors/Activity involved

The study focuses on:

- ✓ Coastal and maritime tourism
- ✓ Recreation
- ✓ Nature protection and restoration

Stakeholders involved

The main stakeholder groups directly engaged in the assessment were coastal visitors (surveyed participants), Nature Conservation Agency (national authority responsible for management of nature protection areas and protected species and biotope protection) and

representatives of the tourism sector, including small businesses and tourism information centres (at local municipality level). The national authority MoERPD which is responsible for both maritime and coastal planning used the assessment information in the Interim assessment of the Coastal plan in 2019.

The coastal visitors gave feedback through interviews on site (on the beaches of Latvian coast) and in online surveys.

The Nature Conservation Agency experts were involved in the assessment of the coastal visitor impact on vegetation (in coastal sandy and forested dunes), cross-checking the field work results to better reflect the coastal visitor impact on dune vegetation.

The results were also presented to and discussed within the Coastal cooperation and coordination group members (formal interaction platform established by MoERPD with relevant stakeholders from national, regional and local level, including all coastal municipalities, planning regions, NGOs and national authorities involved in coastal management).

Main purpose - stakeholders were involved in monitoring activities and also informed about the results, mainly the MoERPD and coastal municipalities can use the results for balanced spatial planning solutions.

Geographical scope

The coverage of the whole coastal area of Latvia along the shoreline (~ 496 km) accounts up to 300 m in direction to inland from the shoreline (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Coastal area of Latvia. Source: Nocticus, Jāņa Sēta, 2020.

Governance context

The Coastal assessment is interrelated with coastal development planning and tourism governance, giving information for decision-making.

It is foreseen by Coastal plan as one of the policy measures (task 3.4).

How this MSP practice can support the EU Green Deal

One of the issues that covers land-sea interactions in MSP is the tourism and recreation on coastal area.

This coastal assessment also contributes to the implementation of the EU's biodiversity strategy for 2030 (which is a core part of the Green Deal) by addressing the need for stronger action as marine and coastal ecosystem biodiversity loss is severely exacerbated by global warming and supporting the efforts to reduce the coastal visitor impacts on coastal dune vegetation.

The number of visits to the coast reached 8 million in Latvian coast



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in 2019. About 30% of the coastal vegetation in the dune area suffers from the impact of visitors and is strongly or even very strongly affected.

The main conclusions of the assessment were that there is a need for aggregated coastal visitor flows with sustainable infrastructure development in intensively visited places with large anthropogenic pressure and erosion risk.

In 2023 MoERPD plans to make similar assessment to assess the situation development, the coastal areas most affected by anthropogenic pressure on environment and the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and energy crisis on tourism and recreation in coastal areas.

Challenges/gaps/inconsistencies still to be addressed

The assessment gives an overview information necessary for balancing the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage with the sustainable economic development, considering Biodiversity strategy and Blue Economy goals.

Therefore, such assessment requires capacity and funding, which until now was supported by international cooperation projects. There are also a limited number of experts that can work with methodology for the assessment and field works are limited by the length of summer season.

Replicability /Elements which can be capitalised

Main approaches and concepts that might be replicable:

- i. Unified structure of information on coastal areas covering specific topics (it could be also other data besides the coastal visitors and other coastal assessment aspects like coastal erosion, etc.):
 - ✓ The assessment provided information on both the socio-economic drivers and the coastal visitor impact on nature in coastal areas;
 - ✓ Information is easier to use for various stakeholders, including municipalities;
 - ✓ The elaboration of methodology and the data gathering requires resources and capacity (time, funding etc.).
- ii. Relevant data stored and published in easy to use online tool (interactive map online):
 - ✓ The spatial data gathered and structured in one geospatial data base;
 - ✓ Data is accessible online;
 - ✓ Capacity of the institution publishing the data is needed.
- iii. Citizen surveys to get wider feedback on public needs for coastal planning and management:
 - ✓ Surveys can provide insights for public needs that benefits to planning solutions in Coastal development.
 - ✓ Surveys require additional capacity.