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Palmowski, T.; Tarkowski, M.

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## BALTIC COOPERATION IN MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING

*T. Palmowski*<sup>1</sup>  
*M. Tarkowski*<sup>1</sup>



*Marine spatial planning is a relatively new area of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region — a site of long-term joint efforts towards environmental protection and sustainable development. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the integrated management of coastal zones and marine spatial planning emerged as a new area of international cooperation. Despite intensive theoretical work on the mentioned concepts, the development of a harmonised spatial planning in the Baltic Sea region is complicated by the complex nature of the problem, a relatively intensive exploitation of marine resources, diverse interests of the stakeholders, and differences in national institutional systems. We describe the key stages of the process, which is regulated by the EU standards on the one hand and affected by the activity of such organisations as VASAB and HELCOM, on the other. In this article, we examine basic documents defining the principles and scope of marine planning and analyse recent research works into spatial development. We conclude that marine spatial planning is a principal tool of the EU's integrated policy. Many European countries of the Baltic region are seeking cooperation with Russia to preserve the natural and economic environment of the Baltic Sea. Most joint spatial planning projects have been initiated by Finland, Sweden, Germany, and Poland.*

**Keywords:** Baltic Sea region, European Union, integrated coastal area management, spatial planning, Poland, Russia

### Introduction

### Environmental Basis of Baltic Co-operation

Although economic and political cooperation on the Baltic Sea enjoys a long tradition — of which the Hansea-

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<sup>1</sup> University of Gdańsk,  
4 Bażyńskiego St.,  
Gdańsk, 80—952, Poland.

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tic League<sup>1</sup> is a good example — the beginnings of the most recent chapter of economic and political collaboration date back to the seventies of the twentieth century and are related to the signing of international marine environmental protection conventions, an area least burdened by political divisions hindering the development of multilateral relations<sup>2</sup>. Gradually, the cooperation of countries around the Baltic Sea expanded to cover other areas of social and economic life. It gained momentum at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties of the twentieth century following the demise of the USSR and the emerging political transformations in Central Europe. These processes led to the EU enlargement covering nearly the countries in the Baltic Sea Region and eliminated many stumbling blocks, which impeded cooperation in the past. Nevertheless, not all problems disappeared and new ones appeared. Military détente and the accelerated economic growth of countries under transformation contributed to a growing economic interest in using the sea. Though the ratification of conventions for the protection of the Baltic Sea environment brought certain positive results [1], it became quite clear that the challenges of growing anthropopression and the reconciling of varied interests require new forms of international cooperation.

In the first decade of the twenty first century, the area of integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) and marine spatial planning (MSP) provided such new formats for collaboration. Although for the last four decades both concepts have gained in popularity, and are gradually implemented, they bring limited benefits to the environment and society. The exploration of complex ecological and social interactions in coastal zones and the sea remain a challenge. The integration of terrestrial and marine planning pose a similar challenge, particularly the transfer of standards and procedures of public participation in terrestrial spatial planning to marine planning, as well as convincing local coastal communities to turn to sustainable management of marine resources [2]. The true motivation underlying coastal management and marine planning continue to be

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<sup>1</sup> Hansa (Hanseatic League) — an association of medieval trading cities mutually supporting their economies. In the fifteenth century it comprised 160 member cities led by Lübeck. The Polish members included, among others: Chełmno, Elbląg, Gdańsk, Cracow and Toruń.

<sup>2</sup> Joint work towards the protection of waters and live Baltic Sea resources of all countries in the region (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, GFR, GDR, Poland and the USSR) started with the signing in 1973 of the The Gdansk Convention on Fishing and Conservation of the Living Resources in the Baltic Sea and the Belts (Gdańsk Convention), and in Helsinki, in 1974, the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (Helsinki Convention) The Conventions provided a cooperation plane for protection of the marine environment of countries of two contrary ideological, political, and economic orientations, which was a unique solution worldwide.

an open question. It is still a question how and to what extent efficient coastal management and marine planning can contribute to a sustainable and integrated approach to environmental protection and to what degree they can solve conflicts regarding the use of sea resources [3].

The article has two goals. The first is recapitulation of actions and measures up to date related to Baltic maritime spatial planning. The second goal is an attempt to summarize the achievements of cooperation between the EU and Russia in marine spatial planning and identify the strength and weakness both in the conceptual and implementation layers. The analysis, based on desk research methods, helps to explore the key documents regulating the nature and scope of marine planning and helps to identify the main theoretical provisions related to spatial development plans.

The article comprises three major parts. The essence of spatial planning is discussed below with special focus on the difference between marine and terrestrial planning and the European Union's contribution to the development procedures and methods for maritime spatial planning. Next, we present the scope of planning work embracing the Baltic Sea. Planning achievements feature diversified study methods and varied approaches to the task. In order to better describe the issue, the subsequent parts of the article present works related to selected examples of EU and Russia cooperation in the field. They are remarkably interesting because EU Directives, aimed at harmonising maritime spatial planning, are not mandatory for Russia. Yet, cooperation practice shows that such harmonisation is possible.

### The essence of marine spatial planning

Marine and coastal areas are becoming areas of dynamic human activity related to wind energy, pipeline transport and marine shipping, fishery and aquaculture. These activities may be complimentary, neutral or give rise to conflicts in using water basins. Insufficient coordination may lead to rivalry and generate pressure for valuable resources and consequently may lead to a continued degradation of the marine environment. The integrated management of coastal zones and marine spatial planning are to counteract this negative scenario. The two types of intervention in political and market mechanisms of utilizing sea resources are interlinked. Integrated coastal management is a complex tool for controlling all processes affecting this zone, particularly the land-sea interface in coastal areas, and a tool for ensuring sustainable development of coastal and sea areas. Owing to this tool, management and development decisions are made in a coherent manner in all economy sectors.



ICZM processes combine such issues as environmental protection policies, spatial planning, economic policies and even social policies as they all influence the status and the functioning of coastal areas.

Achieving consistency in terrestrial spatial planning (in coastal areas) and marine spatial planning is a challenge [4]. Coastal zones are a link between land and sea development. Catchment areas and the impact of various economic activities on land, such as agriculture and urban development, strongly influence the natural sea environment and the MSP trends. Therefore, terrestrial spatial planning should be done simultaneously with marine spatial planning. In practice, ICZM focuses strongly on terrestrial management and coastal management, whereas MSP refers mainly to big water basins more distanced from the coast and focuses on efforts to coordinate, organise and restrict their economic use. An additional barrier in coordinating terrestrial and marine plans is the 3D dimension of sea planning — the three tier approach, which accounts for the sea surface, seawaters and seabed developments.

According to VASAB<sup>3</sup> “spatial planning of maritime regions should be treated as a legally defined hierarchal process of reconciling competitive needs in using sea space (sea surface, waters and seabed) in line with the values and objectives of a given society which can be found in international and national priorities and agreements. Such a definition of planning affects the shaping and monitoring of maritime spatial planning by applying relevant instruments (e.g. visions and spatial planning strategies)” [5].

Maritime spatial planning defines more than the admissible and excluded forms of developing a given water basin. It also provides principles governing their development (e.g. cable laying in parallel bundles), as well as relevant guidelines (e.g. using certain sea areas today but leaving considerable sea parts for future generations to decide; the need to avoid sea location of projects that may be more efficiently placed on land) [6]. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission UNESCO (IOC) defines planning on the strategic and executive level as “a process for identifying and allocating fragments of 3D maritime space for

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<sup>3</sup> VASAB — Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea. The Conference of Ministers responsible for spatial planning, held in Wismar in 2001 adopted “The Action Programme for spatial development VASAB 2010 PLUS”, which specifies the development of coastal zones and islands as one of the themes of transnational collaboration in spatial planning, extending spatial planning to include the coastal lands. The VASAB secretariat is seated in Riga. VASAB prepares policy options for the territorial development of the Baltic Sea Region and provides a forum for exchange of know-how on spatial planning and development between the Baltic Sea countries; recommends transnational policy measures; promotes methodology development; promotes cooperation projects; cooperates with other cross-BSR initiatives; and promotes a dialogue with sector institutions.

concrete use to satisfy environmental, social and economic goals agreed in political processes” [7]. The European Union (EU) became involved in the process of developing maritime spatial planning and joined the process of developing relevant planning systems. The European Commission [8, 9] defines this issue as the domain of public authorities, which are to coordinate human activity in maritime regions, both in space and time, to satisfy environmental, economic and social goals.

Starting 2004, most of the Baltic Sea area remains under the jurisdiction of EU member states. Thus, the solutions put forward by EU bodies under the European maritime policy have a meaningful impact on spatial development and the state of the Baltic Sea natural environment. The European Commission favoured the adoption of an integrated and holistic approach to the economy and management of oceans, seas and coastal areas, as well as to the coordination of all sea related policies. Marine spatial planning (MSP) is the key tool for implementing an integrated maritime policy. Public authorities and other stakeholders can coordinate actions and optimise the use of maritime space to the benefit of the economy and the marine environment. This approach was expressed in the Green Paper and Blue Paper regarding the policy [10; 11], and later by a Framework Directive [9], which established the framework for maritime spatial planning. The Directive promotes sustainable growth of maritime economy, sustainable development of marine areas and sustainable use of marine resources, at the same time taking into account the land-sea interaction and close trans-national cooperation (tab. 1). Coastal member states collaborate to achieve coherent and coordinated maritime planning in the entire sea region. This cooperation takes into account, in particular, transnational matters. Member states make efforts to cooperate with third countries in their maritime spatial planning actions in accordance with international conventions. They take advantage of international fora and regional institutional cooperation to pursue this goal.

*Table 1*

**Minimum requirements for maritime spatial planning and fields of interests specified in the EU directive on maritime spatial planning**

<b>Maritime spatial planning requirements</b>
Coherent terrestrial and marine interaction in maritime planning
Inclusion of environmental, social and economic aspects as well as safety and security aspects
Strengthening maritime spatial planning cohesion with integrated management of coastal areas and terrestrial spatial planning
Involvement of stakeholders
High quality data and information base
Trans-national coordination and consultation of Member states
Promoting cooperation round water basins with countries outside EU

*End of table 1*

<b>Potential scope of spatial plans</b>
Mariculture areas
Fishing areas
Raw material exploitation areas, exploration, installations and infrastructure, crude oil, gas minerals, aggregate mining, production of renewable energy
Maritime transport lanes and traffic
Military ranges
Environmental protection and protection of species
Areas of scientific research
Underwater cables and pipelines
Tourism
Underwater cultural heritage

Source: Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning.

### **MSP on the Baltic Sea**

Maritime spatial planning (MSP) in Baltic Europe has been developing for merely a dozen years. The Conference of Ministers responsible for spatial planning, held in Wismar in 2001, adopted “The Action Programme for spatial development VASAB 2010 PLUS”, which specifies the development of coastal zones and islands as one of the themes of transnational collaboration in spatial planning and extends spatial planning to include coastal terrestrial areas. Following the Conference, the first Baltic MSP project called BaltCoast [12] was launched in 2002. The project elaborated ICZM spatial planning principles. Based on the developed guidelines, the 2005 VASAB Conference of Ministers in Gdańsk stressed that “sea use planning could serve as a tool to prevent conflicts of use in intensively used offshore areas”.

The experience in MSP obtained in international projects has played a fundamental role in the implementation and development of spatial planning in the Baltic. The projects facilitated MSP planning in Germany and contributed to amending relevant legislation in the country. Mecklenburg-West Pomerania planners introduced the first MSP spatial marine development plan [13], which entered into force in 2005 [14]. It referred to German territorial waters covered by spatial planning of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. It showed the broadening scale of terrestrial planning and the inclusion of the sea territory into it. Follow-up activities of the Baltcoast project included the elaboration of ICZM and maritime spatial planning recommendations adopted by VASAB in 2005. The BaltSea-Plan emphasised the transnational dimension of maritime spatial planning and the role of cross-border cooperation in it. It also indicated cultural



differences among the Baltic Sea region countries that have their institutional implications, which hinder the integration of planning works. Projects developed in Baltic Europe resulted in producing a vision of sustainable marine spatial planning for this water basin [15]. The areas that require international collaboration in marine spatial planning were identified. These include environmental protection, energy, sea transport, fisheries and mariculture. Conclusions showed the need for the Pan-Baltic dimension in effective use of space and the assurance of connectivity.

The next important step in MSP development on the Baltic was the establishment of a VASAB Working Group, in 2006, for planning the use of sea resources and ICZM. The concept for planning the use of marine resources of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) was proposed in October 2008. The concept clearly stated the need to develop a long-term vision of the Baltic Sea area development as well as the principles and priorities to realise the vision.

The VASAB Working Group for maritime planning was transformed into a joint HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG task force for maritime spatial planning in 2010. It provides a regional platform for international collaboration of Baltic Europe for a cohesive implementation of such planning, also in the transnational environment. This group manages EU horizontal actions for the Baltic Sea Region strategy referring to planning of maritime regions. The strategy assumes that by 2020 the ecosystem approach in maritime spatial planning will have covered the entire Baltic region. The Working Group is to facilitate this process. A major building block supporting the action includes the above-mentioned general principles of spatial planning for the Baltic Sea [14]. They indicate that spatial plans of sea areas in the countries of the Baltic Sea region should meet numerous criteria ensuring their adequacy to the needs, comprehensiveness and effectiveness (tab. 2).

*Table 2*

**Principles of maritime spatial planning in the Baltic Sea Region**

Sustainable management
Ecosystem-based approach
Long-term objectives and prospects
Prudence (in the environmental, economic and social dimension)
Participation and transparency
Quality data and information sources
International coordination and consulting
Coherent terrestrial and marine planning
Planning adjusted to the characteristics and specific conditions of various areas
Planning continuity

Source: author's own elaboration based on [14].



HELCOM together with VASAB coordinate MSP actions. The MSP HELCOM-VASAB Working Group studies, reviews and builds on the results of MSP related projects such as Plan Bothnia, BaltSeaPlan, Parti-SEApate and Baltic SCOPE. The Baltic MSP Roadmap (2013—2020) supports the ultimate quality related expectations regarding the plans. By 2018, the guidelines developed by the Working Group on transnational consulting and cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region will have to be implemented. The EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region (EUSBSR)<sup>4</sup> assigns an important role to VASAB and HELCOM in promoting MSP in the region together with other stakeholders “encouraging spatial planning on land and at sea in all member states round the Baltic Sea and developing a common approach to cross-border collaboration”. By 2017, all Baltic European countries, with the exception of Russia, had adopted legislative acts facilitating maritime spatial planning. It marked the next step in the realisation of the strategy. Russia is also working towards reaching this goal.

#### Selected examples of the EU and Russian cooperation in MSP on the Baltic Sea

EU countries of the Baltic Sea region — Finland, Sweden, Germany and Poland — strive to collaborate with Russia in preserving the natural and economic environment of the Baltic Sea. Russia is at the beginning of the road towards developing maritime spatial planning legislation as a tool for governing the country’s extensive water basins. The government have made a number of important decisions to elaborate relevant legislation and the process of introducing maritime spatial planning in Russia is going on. Its stages and achievements are clear. The most important factors supporting and hindering the process of introducing maritime spatial planning in Russia have been identified.

In October 2016, in cooperation with German partners<sup>5</sup>, a three year programme “Environmentally friendly land use concepts for the Baltic

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<sup>4</sup> The main goal of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (SUE RMB) adopted in October 2009 is to strengthen cooperation in the region and benefit from the potential generated by EU expansion. The essence of the Strategy is multilevel co-operation: Its essence is multilevel co-operation on the national, regional and local level with the participation of the world of science, research centres, academics, regional structures institutions managing operational programmes as well as the private sector. The strategy facilitates wide-ranging contacts with macroregion partners, including Russia, to initiate new projects and promote projects in progress on the international forum.

<sup>5</sup> The German Federal Environmental Agency.

Sea coast of the Russian Federation" was completed. Its objective was to develop an environmentally friendly concept for spatial management of the Neva River estuary and the Gulf of Finland that provides a compromise for satisfying social and economic requirements with environmental priorities. During the XV Russian Saint Petersburg forum "Strategic planning in Russian towns and region", recommendations and guidelines were published for spatial planning of maritime regions in Russia. They support the progressing spatial planning processes in Russia, which are beneficial for all the Baltic Sea countries.

In 2006—2008, partners from Poland, Lithuania and the Kaliningrad Oblast (the Russian Federation) in the years implemented the transnational project POWER. The conducted studies made it possible to gain experience in planning, to identify the necessary information, to prepare the basis for spatial planning and create conditions for the efficient development of wind farms along the Baltic Sea coast of Lithuania, Russia and Poland. The project included joint research and exchange of best practices in the assessment of wind energy resources, their potential economic benefit and risks. Potential areas for locating wind farms were identified. The project provided important information for wind farm investors.

Within the framework of the document "Understanding on the system for the exchange of information on the ecosystem state of Vistula Lagoon in frame of the Polish — Russian transboundary cooperation" (2011) IMGW-PIB and the Kaliningrad Hydrometeorological Monitoring Centre (KCHM) have been exchanging the monitoring data collected by the centre of the Baltic Oceanography and Monitoring, and KCHM of the Gdańsk Gulf and the Vistula Lagoon.

The project VILA<sup>6</sup> (VILA-Opportunities and benefits of joint use of the Vistula Lagoon/common benefits of developing the Vistula Lagoon potential), carried out by partners from Poland and Russia in 2013—2015, aimed at using the full potential of the Vistula Lagoon, a water basin cut by the Polish and Russian border. The major objective of the project was to specify possible actions supporting social and economic cooperation of both parts of the Vistula Lagoon. The VILA project facilitated the preservation the unique character of the Vistula Lagoon's natural environment and the development of collaboration between local communities. Results of the project were published and provided information about the natural, social and economic environment of the area. The first publication presents the European context of spatial planning of the Vistula Lagoon sub-region and a synthetic overview of spatial planning

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<sup>6</sup> The VILA project was carried out under the Lithuania-Poland-Russia Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2007—2013.



systems in Poland and Russia. It also includes a description of the main regional and local spatial planning documents in force on both sides of the Vistula Lagoon. This information should help to identify forms of cooperation beneficial for both parties. The project also assessed possible forms of cooperation between Poland and Russia in the cross-border area of the Vistula Lagoon [16]. The second volume describes the hydrotechnical infrastructure of the Vistula Lagoon water basin — ports and harbours — and indicates options and conditions for their development and modernisation [17]. The next volume, apart from presenting the baseline natural, economic and social resources, indicates possible scenarios for the development of the Vistula River sub-region [18]. The VILA project publication series closes with an atlas containing a description of the cross-border catchment area of the Vistula Lagoon developed according to the guidelines of the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention).<sup>7</sup> Besides maps of the Vistula Lagoon catchment area, its major rivers and their tributaries, the atlas also provides information about the spatial character of the catchment area and contains numerous maps, records and graphs [19]. Although the project did not result in the development of a long-term regional cooperation strategy, the outcome may potentially improve standards of living in the area; stimulate the economic development and mobility of the Vistula Lagoon region.

## Conclusions

Foundations of the Baltic collaboration were laid in the seventies of the twentieth century and are related to the signing of international marine environmental protection conventions. Environmental protection is an area least burdened by political disputes that impede the development of multilateral relations. International cooperation in this field gained momentum at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties of the twentieth century following the demise of the USSR and the emerging political transformations in Central Europe. These processes led to the EU enlargement covering nearly all countries around the Baltic Sea and eliminated many obstacles impeding cooperation in the past. Nevertheless, not all problems disappeared and new ones appeared. Though the ratification of conventions for protection of the Baltic Sea environment brought positive results, it is quite clear that the challenges of growing anthropopression and the reconciliation of various interests re-

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<sup>7</sup> The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes was adopted in Helsinki in 1992 and entered into force in 1996.

quire new forms of international cooperation. In the first decade of the twenty first century, the area of integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) and marine spatial planning (MSP) provided such new formats of collaboration.

MSP is a key tool of the EU integrated maritime policy. Public authorities and other stakeholders can coordinate actions and optimise the use of maritime space to the benefit of the economy and marine environment. The EU Maritime Strategy Frame Directive provides grounds for marine spatial planning in the form of environmental protection regulations. According to the Directive, all EU member states are to reach environmental status of marine waters by 2020, to apply the ecosystem approach and to guarantee the attainment of a good status of environment protection in general.

The Baltic Sea MSP experience indicates that the specificity of particular water basins — the natural environment, the interests and aspirations of coastal societies, should be taken into account in MSP. It requires a more active public participation in the process of developing, implementing and evaluating marine spatial plans. The MSP experience gained in international Baltcoast, PlanCoast and BaltSeaPlan projects, among others, were of fundamental significance in implementing and developing Baltic spatial planning. The HELCOM-VASAB taskforce for maritime spatial planning provides a regional cooperation platform for Baltic Europe countries towards a coherent implementation of these plans. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) assigned an important role to the taskforce in promoting MSP among all Baltic Sea member states and in developing a common approach to transnational cooperation in this field.

EU Baltic countries strive to collaborate with Russia in preserving the natural and economic environment of the Baltic Sea. Finland, Sweden, Germany and Poland have implemented international projects with partners from Russia. Polish-Russian projects were aimed at developing maritime cross-border cooperation on the Vistula Lagoon, the water basin divided by the Polish-Russian border. Although a long-term regional cooperation strategy was not adopted, the results may improve the residents' life standards, stimulate mobility of local society and the economic development of the Vistula Lagoon in general. Both Polish-Russian cross-border basins — the Gulf of Gdańsk and the Vistula Lagoon — are exposed to growing anthropopressure and increasing conflicts over the use of marine resources [20] (Fig.).

The ongoing work on the spatial development plan for the Polish sea areas revealed five existing and 17 potential conflicts related to the existing/planned ways of using the sea [21]. Most of them, thanks to spatial planning, will be mitigated. Chances of success will be greater if planning is coordinated across the borders.

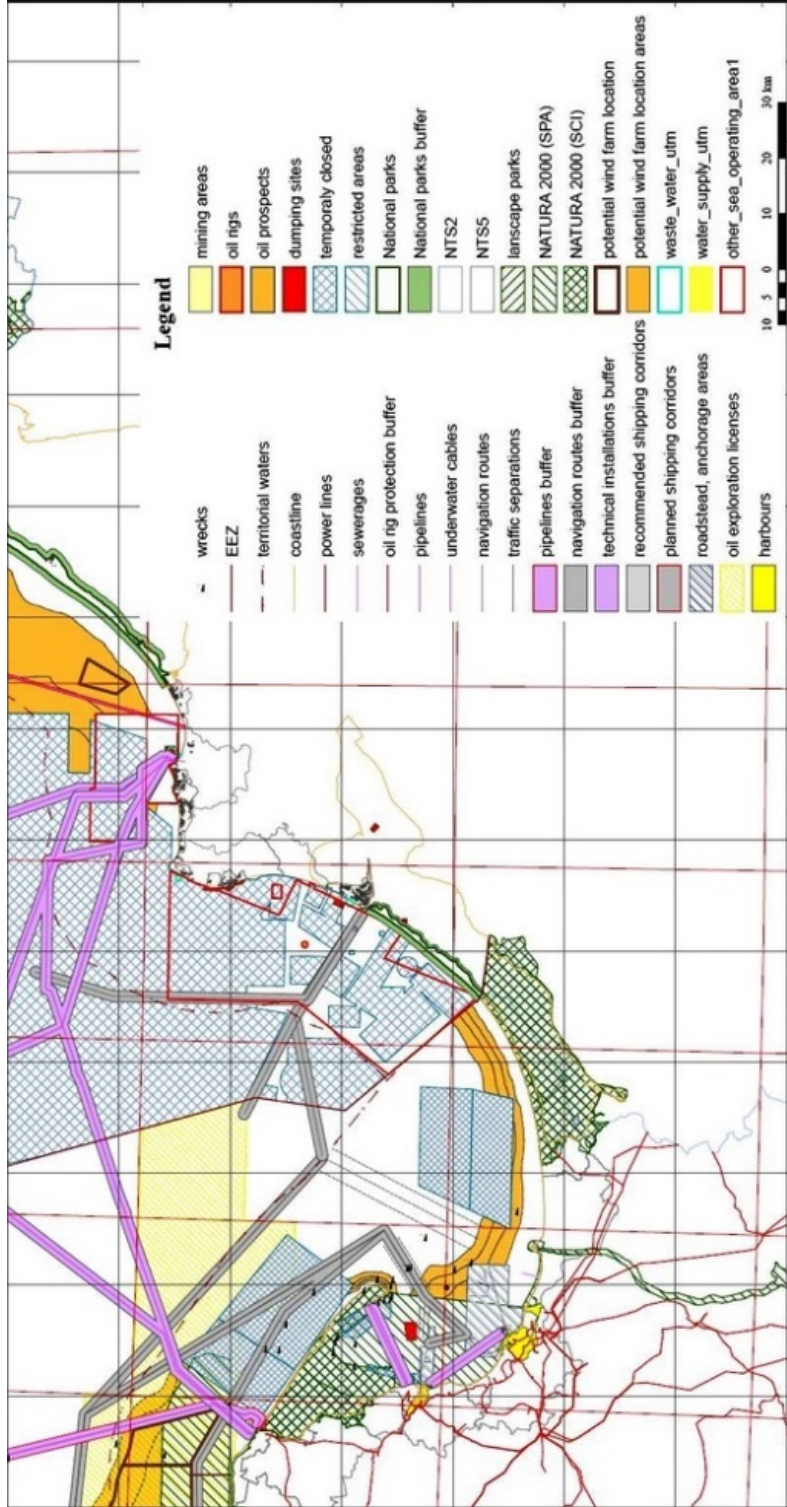


Fig. Inventory of the potential use of sea in the Gulf of Gdańsk area

Source: Maritime Institute in Gdańsk.

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The authors

*Prof. Tadeusz Palmowski*, Head of the Department of Regional Development Geography, University of Gdansk, Poland.

E-mail: tadeusz.palmowski@ug.edu.pl

*Dr Maciej Tarkowski*, Assistant Professor, Department of Regional Development Geography, University of Gdansk, Poland.

E-mail: maciej.tarkowski@ug.edu.pl

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