



BlueGreen
Governance

Policy Brief on Institutional Barriers and Enablers

Blue Green Governance Project Deliverable 1.2



This policy brief was produced by:

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In the project BlueGreenGovernance we are developing innovative land-sea governance schemes. Why? Because the current management of oceans, seas and coasts is fragmented across multiple institutional layers and policy areas and based on past experience. The project responds to the need for better-informed decision-making processes, social engagement and digital innovation.

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INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AMONG FIVE DIMENSIONS

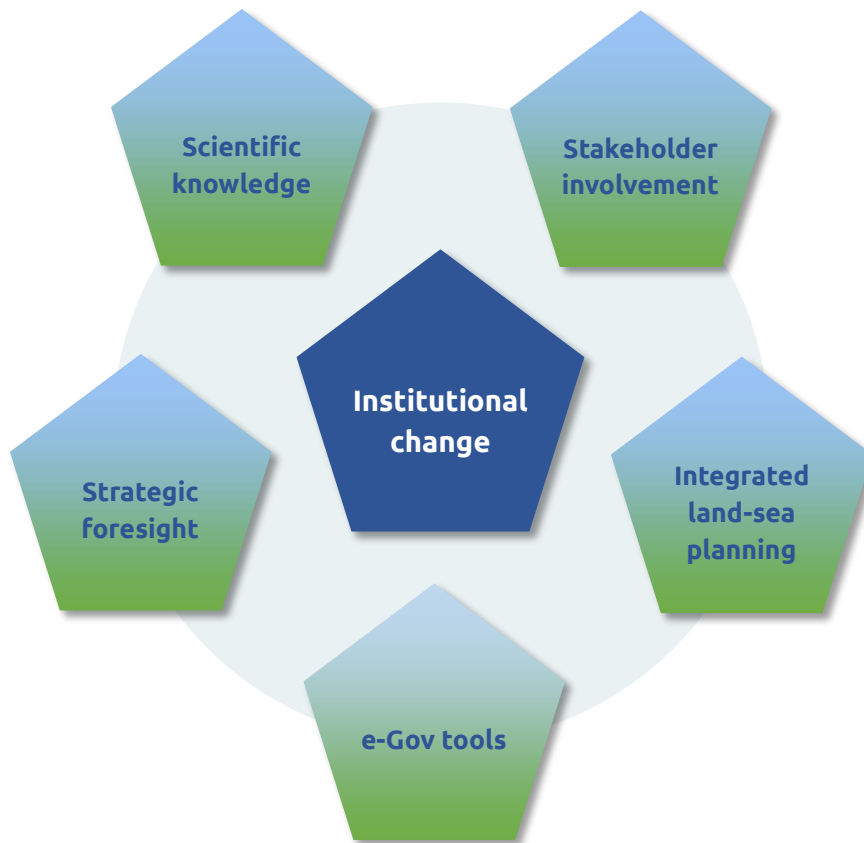
The need to achieve institutional change is essential for advancing coastal and marine governance in Europe and lies at the heart of the Horizon BlueGreen Governance (BGG) project. After all, European coastal regions face many social and environmental challenges and problems, including biodiversity loss, pollution, vulnerability to extreme weather events, decline of natural resources, and poorly planned developments. Some of these issues have been on the agenda for decades, which suggests that finding and realizing solutions is anything but easy.

- › **This policy brief offers a short overview of the most prevalent (sets of) institutional barriers and enablers for change in marine and coastal governance and is based on the BGG Deliverable ‘Policy Report on Institutional Barriers and Enablers’ (Fobé et al., 2024a) that focuses on five dimensions relevant to achieve adaptive, innovative, integrated and informed forms of coastal and marine governance.**

Taken together, these five governance dimensions shape the capacity of governance systems to respond to challenges relating to the complexities caused by their multi-level, multi-actor and multi-sector nature. BGG identifies the barriers and enablers impacting on these dimensions. The starting point for the analysis is that governance systems are currently not equipped to tackle complex issues. Barriers or enablers within the dimensions affect the achievement of policy goals, lead to differences between policy intent and outcomes, or result in inefficiencies and inconsistencies in policy implementation, coordination and integration. Identifying enablers for change along the five dimensions facilitates their exploitation, which is key to strengthening governance systems. Similarly, identifying the barriers to change is of relevance because by knowing them one can also avoid them. In addition, we highlight additional aspects of institutional change related to the unique historical path (Van Assche et al., 2024) of each governance system.

The five dimensions for institutional change of the governance system are the following:

- › The first dimension on **integrated schemes** for land-sea management and planning is especially relevant for coastal regions as the land and sea are governed in these places by interactions between overlapping or sometimes competing institutions (Platjouw et al., 2023; 2024).
- › The second dimension on a better *use of scientific knowledge* can strengthen the adaptive and integrated nature of the governance system. This dimension is essential for understanding the complex interactions within and between social-ecological systems (Elliott et al., 2023), yet while it is assumed that policies will improve when informed by evidence from research, the connection between scientific evidence and policy-making is not self-evident. w



- › The dimension on *inclusive and participatory approaches* is a necessary condition for effective plans and policies. While strongly promoted, stakeholder participation is difficult to achieve marine and coastal governance since actors located at different scales bring different views, values and knowledge to the table (Li & Jay, 2023).
- › The fourth dimension on *foresight* entails that governance systems should be able to anticipate social, physical and ecological changes instead of merely responding to them. Incorporating a long-term policy horizon and anticipating possible future developments can be an important stepping stone for effective longer-term governance of marine and coastal policies and a sustainable transformation of societies (Krauss, 2020).
- › A final challenge for marine and coastal governance lies in the dimension on *e-governance tools*. Robust e-governance tools can help create innovative and at the same time more efficient, transparent, and participatory approaches (Casiano Flores & Crompvoets, 2023) that align with sustainability goals in key policies and the EU Green Deal.

BGG points to an extra layer that impacts the degree to which institutional change can effectively be achieved. Informed by the Evolutionary Governance Theory (Beunen et al., 2022), this research emphasizes that not all options for change are equally viable within and across the dimensions of the governance system. There are different dependencies, among which path dependencies and interdependencies, unique to each governance system which strongly shape



and influence the evolution and pathways of governance systems (Van Assche et al., 2024). They create rigidities and flexibility for change.

It is relevant to emphasize these additional barriers and enablers to change because they can help us understand why it remains extremely challenging to change the governance system at a fundamental level.

MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our research has identified the main issues (barriers and enablers) that merit attention within each of the dimensions. The elements discerned can be considered quite common across contexts, and strongly relate to the challenges for sustainable and effective coastal and marine governance.

We found in the research that institutional change is particularly difficult because of coordination issues, unclear roles and mandates, fragmented data and knowledge, and power dynamics. One of the main challenges comes from the impossibility of having all beliefs, values, and interests reflected in institutions or taken up in platforms or other structures. Various studies show tensions between sustainability aims and economic interests and between perspectives embedded in national and international policies and those present in local communities. The literature also indicates that institutional change is not always needed and that implementation and enforcement of existing institutions can be an important focus of attention as well. This is particularly true for the various EU directives that set clear goals and frameworks but can only sort their intended effects if their implementation is improved.

- › **We present the main recommendations of our research on the next page**

The recommendations are tied to synthesis of the research in Work Package 1 of the BGG project. That synthesis brings together the main insights on barriers and enablers from the literature.

While our recommendations based on this synthesis should assist in overcoming the main barriers within the five governance dimensions and exploit the main enablers in these dimensions. Two additional considerations should be kept in mind to successfully draw on the recommendations offered from our research:

- › **Since governance systems are shaped differently by the five dimensions and the various dependencies, a key step towards achieving change is to assess them systematically while at the same time identifying the balance between the dimensions.**





An assessment could indicate that some systems are more tailored to integrated planning than others, better equipped for conducting and using strategic foresight or relying on scientific analysis and advice, etc. It is therefore crucial to keep in mind that changes in one dimension may negatively impact developments in another dimension.

- › **The unique configuration of each governance system (and the balance between the five dimensions) implies that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution to achieve successful change.**

Indeed, achieving institutional change necessitates tailored solutions and a context-specific approach that is adjusted to the possibilities and needs of that system. Such an approach should take into account that governance systems are legacies from the past. Coordination challenges and difficulties to achieve change emerge and persist because views and interest on the need for and direction of change diverge among various stakeholders in the governance system. In all, creating openness towards new perspectives from policy-makers and stakeholders alike, as well as gaining broad support, active and sustained engagement are necessary for achieving institutional changes.

We hope to contribute to such developments via the BGG project through this policy brief, as well as via the underlying policy report and scientific review report for WP1.

For more information:

A detailed discussion of barriers and enablers with recommendations on the five dimensions is provided in the **BGG Deliverable ‘Policy Report on Institutional Barriers and Enablers’** (Fobé et al., 2024a).

- › **Chapter 2** in the report deals with integrated land-sea management planning.
- › **Chapter 3** deals with the use of scientific knowledge.
- › **Chapter 4** explains participatory practices and stakeholder involvement.
- › **Chapter 5** treats the development and use of strategic foresight.
- › **Chapter 6** discusses the use of e-government tools.
- › **Chapter 7** covers additional aspects for institutional change relating to dependencies.

The insights offered in the broader policy report as well as in this short policy brief are, in turn, informed by the activities under Work Package 1 of the BGG project, which are presented in the BGG Output ‘Scientific Review Report’ (Fobé et al., 2024b). This scientific report comprises the detailed analytical and methodological framework as well as the results of a thorough review of the scientific and grey literature in marine and coastal governance and data collected from interviews on the Case Studies in the BlueGreen Governance project.



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