A magazine with the MSP Challenge tutorials
Role-playing is a time-honored proven method of strengthening understanding of each other’s work and insights. Before you realize it, you’re suddenly an advocate for clean energy, artisanal fisheries or you’re suddenly employed as a marine spatial planner.
INTRODUCTION

Participating in the MSP Challenge is an exercise in dealing with uncertainties. Decision-making for sustaining ocean health and a sustainable blue economy requires orientation to the short and longer term, to specific areas within a wider connected picture, and taking into account changes in condition of the marine ecosystem and new functionalities. The uncertainties in ecosystem marine/maritime planning (MSP) make decision-making so fascinating but also complicated. Dealing with uncertainty, there is never enough one can learn!

An important function of the MSP Challenge is also to eliminate misunderstandings. Maritime (spatial) planning requires razor-sharp communication and is pre-eminently about multidisciplinary work. It is never easy to look both ways, at one’s own field of expertise and at that of another, especially when it comes to the sea.

The value of role-playing
Role-playing is a time-honored proven method of strengthening understanding of each other’s work and insights. Before you realize it, you’re suddenly an advocate for clean energy, artisanal fisheries or you’re suddenly employed as a marine spatial planner. Through role-playing, participants learn to step into each other’s shoes, to play with perspectives.

Popular in universities, the MSP Challenge is a valuable addition to existing educational programs. When it comes to the sea, continued learning is a lifelong challenge.

The serious game is also actively used during meetings with policy makers, interest groups and local communities. In this way we are strengthening the awareness of ecosystem-based maritime spatial planning. This is truly a profession in which many disciplines come together. Being recognized as an effective training and engagement by IOC-UNESCO and DG MARE for their MSP global effort feels like a “crown on our work”.

Two hours or whole days!
Participants can keep it short and play for, say, two hours. It is also possible to dress it up in such a way, with presentations and debate in between, that everyone is busy for three days. As a part of an in-depth training course on MSP global for instance. The latter also happens from time to time. Whether it’s long or short, making the MSP theory real is what it’s all about.

Take, for example, the role of the maritime spatial planner. It is possible to read on paper what such a planner must or must not do. But those who experience the emotion of being fooled from time to time - in the game - understand much better what the planner role represents, and what it takes to make it work. Each stakeholder gives their own interpretation to the available marine and terrestrial space. In a short time they make their own plans, which sometimes go against each other. A shipping lane or certain types of fishing is not always compatible with proposals for renewable energy or nature. As a planner, you just have to try to reconcile all this. In such a way that stakeholders and politician can agree. Such a contradiction and the political-societal realm puts pressure on the kettle and makes the MSP Challenge exciting!

Lodewijk Abspoel
Linda van Veen
The first times I came into contact with the MSP Challenge and played them myself, I noticed how exceptionally effective it was. But also that it still lacked something. For example, there was little to be found about tropical situations, we - the MSP global team at IOC-UNESCO - decided to adapt the available material somewhat.

Inspired by IOC-UNESCO guidance on MSP, which highlights the relevance of a pre-planning phase to designing the MSP process, we also realized that ‘vision comes before action’. You can just start playing the game, but it is better to first ask participants to think about their short- and long-term wishes and demands. We applied this and it proved effective.

It pays to build in a whole program next to the game. Think for example of a training in good negotiation, that fits perfectly with it. It really is a serious game in development, also because more and more languages are added. We play the MSP Challenge now with policy professionals - who by the way are asked not to choose their own (day-to-day) specialization - but also with other stakeholders. Serious gaming is really important and I am curious to see what the game will look like in a while. In the next future we will organize meetings with all kinds of players to exchange experiences, that’s how we build a global community on Marine Spatial Planning too.

Michele Quesada da Silva Marine Spatial Planning Consultant Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, UNESCO
When it comes to a type of game like this, there are mainly two flavors. Design a generic variant that is relatively easy to play in many places. This is what was chosen in the MSP Challenge board edition, with a fictional though probable sea and three equally fictional countries. Of course, it is also possible to choose a more customized and real data driven solution, which can act as a more-or-less decision support tool. The team around Prof. Igor Mayer from Breda University of Applied Science/Tilburg University develops such with the MSP Challenge simulation platform. With this it is even possible to make realistic policy scenarios, and calculate the effects of maritime spatial plans on ecology, shipping and energy.
PLAY THE GAME

Meet Linda van Veen and Lodewijk Abspoel for a moment. They are carrying an easily manageable game suitcase, just light enough to cross any border at an airport. The suitcase contains all the attributes needed to play the MSP Challenge.

⚠️ With special attention to:

» The weight of the suitcase is 23 kilos

» Don’t forget the water bottle

» In the meantime, feel free to take the opportunity to explore, interact and ask questions.

» See if you manage to get everyone in a (very) good mood after five minutes
See if you manage to get everyone in a (very) good mood after five minute.

» Click here to watch the instructional video on: https://on.unesco.org/msp-game
CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Increasingly advanced
We are still learning. The first version was from 2016, the reality of 2022 is really different. In the very first versions we used, the main focus was on MSP and short sea shipping, and the tension/relationship with uses like offshore wind, oil&gas, nature and fisheries. We now have three times as many variables and tokens, think of recreation, the underwater nature and more economic and social features, the game is getting closer to reality. Also the fishing role has been expanded, with various types. The international sustainable development goals for 2030 have been given a more prominent role in the MSPglobal edition, as goes for the interactions between land and sea.

Ten languages
Meanwhile, this serious game is available in no less than ten languages, including Chinese, Portuguese and Mi’kmaw! In addition, thanks to many enthusiastic partners who have become friends of the MSP Challenge, the material has been made suitable for all types of regions in the world. Ice floes, floating fishing villages, mangroves, sea turtles and cucumbers and unfortunately found all over the world: junk in the sea (marine litter of you prefer). The moderator will have to choose which from these tokens have priority in the training, with the learning goal in mind (content, process, which place on the globe/oceanographic area). Especially with complex topics, it is important that
a large number of players communicate around their own language, this will benefit the nuance. In practice, much debate takes place in a language that many people speak, such as English and Spanish. This is unavoidable in international debate.

Now that the game is played in so many languages and in so many places, more and more cultural differences become visible. In different countries and does fishing, economy or recreation sometimes play a totally different role? There is much to learn about this in the years to come!

**Build in voltage**
The trick for the moderator is to build in enough complexity, make it engaging and meaningful. The country-by-country objectives and the overarching sea basin aim already provide for such. We are becoming increasingly adept at providing ‘creative tension’. Think of an IMO shipping route for container and bulk ships that passes through an important area for whaling, for example. Or a wreck on the bottom that is yet to be discovered (to be covered by a question mark token). Building such challenges into the session makes for robust conversations. And helps to further boost participants’ ocean literacy.
‘When you have a coastline of really hundreds of kilometres, this is quite a feat in a couple of hours,’ he said.

‘Just nice, old school. Working with a board. It’s fun for a change.’
'I really enjoyed that collaboration, there are so many ideas to exchange. In our team we quickly made a process agreement, you pay particular attention to this and you to that. If you don't do that, it becomes a lot to do all at once.'
One by one, the materials are taken from the suitcase. It soon becomes clear that this serious game revolves around a fictitious sea and three countries working (together). The task is maritime planning and through a few examples it becomes somewhat clear what is involved. Also explained are the materials which will be used. There are quite a few, but at the same time it is easy to oversee! It is clear from the outset that you must start your preparations for setting up the board challenge on time.

⚠️ With special attention to:

» Allow a minimum of one hour for setting up the board, and make sure to have a break before engaging with your participants.

» There are separate country folders, and a set of materials for the moderators specifically

» Don’t write names on the badges with the roles (so they can be used again)
Allow a minimum of one hour for setting up the board, and make sure to have a break before engaging with your participants.
RESPONSES FROM PARTICIPANTS

INTRODUCTION THROUGH MARINE ANIMALS

‘The personal introduction was enjoyable. Each participant was asked which sea creature they identify with. This team building is important, but it was at the expense of the introduction. But yes, once you’re underway you soon understand what the intention is. I am a salmon, by the way’. 

Asking which sea creature is your favourite is a proven concept. During the session it is possible to have them come back. In the case of this salmon, for example, it might be about where you can aqua-farm salmon and where better not to (where wild salmon migrate in a river). Or it could be about the food that the farmed salmon are given, the antibiotics, the sea lice and how that lice can be controlled with the help of seaweed. And is it also possible to work with other marine animals; sea turtles that mistake plastic bags for jellyfish, you name it!

SETTING LIMITS

‘I find one thing especially difficult, you can literally pin features to a map, but yes, the fish swim everywhere. How am I supposed to solve that?’

We all know it, a fish doesn’t adhere to boundaries very well. Think of the salmon or trout that visit rivers far inland. Fortunately, there is an increasing focus on sea and land interaction as well. Think also about logistic, food or economic chains between sea and land. Maritime planning is about much more than just allocating space.

We all know it, a fish doesn’t adhere to boundaries very well
The learning question here is to what extent the theory approaches the practice. What is the real story about planning in action, how refined is the decision-making practice in various countries.

FROM ABSTRACT TO CONCRETE

‘We realize through the game that we actually talk and think about the sea far too little. It is far away and yet somewhat abstract, this maritime planning’.

REFINEMENT IS A CONSTANT IN THE GAME. DAILY REALITY DEMANDS INSIGHT INTO GROWING COMPLEXITY AND AMBITIONS. THE RICA SEA IS LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY A ‘TOUGH’, BUT LEVEL PLAYING FIELD. THE LEARNING QUESTION HERE IS TO WHAT EXTENT THE THEORY APPROACHES THE PRACTICE. WHAT IS THE REAL STORY ABOUT PLANNING IN ACTION, HOW REFINED IS THE DECISION-MAKING PRACTICE IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES. AND, HOW DO YOU TRANSLATE THAT REALITY TO WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE ROOM? LEAVING THAT NEXT STEP IN LEARNING ASIDE, THE PLANNING, PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE RICA SEA IS NOT JUST ABOUT PLANNING FOR ONE OF THE THREE COUNTRIES, BUT ALSO ABOUT INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION. COORDINATION BETWEEN PLANNERS, BUT ALSO BETWEEN THE INTERESTED STAKEHOLDERS. AFTER ALL, THEY CAN ALSO UNITE, OR HAVE INTERESTS IN THE ENTIRE SEA AREA.

MONEY MATTERS

‘Shouldn’t money play a bigger role in the game?’

POINT OF DISCUSSION WAS THE INTRODUCTION OF MONEY INTO THE GAME. DO WE OR DON’T WE? WE ARE NOT DOING IT SO FAR. THE EMPHASIS IS STILL ON BALANCING FUNCTIONS AND MAKING A PLAN THAT IS LIFE-SAVING FOR SEA, PLANET AND PEOPLE. IS THE ECONOMIC NOT IN IT, THEN? YES, BECAUSE OF COURSE, THE FINANCIAL COMPONENT IS VITAL IN PRACTICE. THE CREATORS SEE THAT THE MONEY COMPONENT TRANSLATES AT SEA INTO TIME, SCARCITY AND DEPTH. SAILING TAKES TIME, RESEARCH VESSELS ARE SCARCE AND WORKING UNDERWATER IS 100 TIMES MORE EXPENSIVE THAN ON LAND. SO WITH THE REAL-LIFE LOGIC THAT COMES FIRST AS A BASIC RULE IN THE SERIOUS GAME, THERE IS PLENTY OF ECONOMIC REALISM.

TWO COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS:

What is it like to participate in the MSP Challenge? Was it educational, how did the game go? Two participants talk about their experiences:

» vimeo.com/723397837
PERFECTLY SUITED FOR EDUCATION

As a teacher of maritime spatial planning, I adapted to it quickly. I already started to included the board game in the teaching curriculum in Oldenburg in 2016. And is very popular among the students. And with me as well. We use it not only in our regular programs, but also during summer school. Thanks to the board game, students see the complexity and interactions in the marine space and start thinking and discussing this topic.

What I encourage is thinking about the multifunctional use of space. Think of multi-use, by combining wind farms with other activities for example. Of course, that idea has not been put into practice everywhere, but the game helps to promote such an approach.

During the covid period, of course, we couldn’t work with the board game, but we continued playing online. I now use both variants in my lectures. The online game also works very well, has a more realistic feel to it, so the players are just a little more serious. The fun online is also no less.

I also see that the game is getting more and more elaborate, in set-up and materials. There is nothing wrong with that, but as far as I am concerned it should remain easy to play and hands-on. A ten minute explanation and then get to work! Sometimes we do it with a bit more preparation, in my lecture series for example. I really like active teaching, and being as innovative as possible!

As a researcher I even research the game and its efficiency, we have several publications on that.

Malena Ripken
Researcher and lecturer on Maritime Spatial Planning
University of Oldenburg, Germany
PLAY THE GAME

The players make the game (they are actors in their own theatre), the moderator provides an enthusiastic start. This instructional video describes the role of the moderator, along with all the tools used to keep the game going and alive. Notable is the globe, which is thrown to participants for a question or comment.

With special attention to:

» The IOC-UNESCO MSP global training material (a step-by-step guidance for the MSP Challenge exercise)

» Please study the rules of the game

» Look at the additional information about the sea and the individual countries
Notable is the globe, which is thrown to participants for a question or comment.
MSP applies integrated management strategies that take into account land-sea interactions in the context of an ecosystem-based approach.

MSP contributes to managing access to markets and resources in a way that benefits all actors, and increases their economic prosperity, particularly in SIDS and LDCs.

MSP encourages the development and diversification of maritime industries and infrastructure as well as the transfer of marine technology to boost innovation.

MSP integrates adaptation and mitigation measures to build the resilience of marine ecosystems, and reduce exposure and vulnerability to climate change.

MSP is a multi-level decision-making process whose successful outcome depends on and strengthens participatory, transparent and effective governance.

The integration of coastal management and MSP promotes a sustainable and climate-resilient transformation of coastal cities that guarantees citizens a safe access to the sea and its cultural and natural wealth.

MSP processes, associated with Sustainable Blue Economy strategies, facilitate opportunities for employment and growth based on ecological, economic and social objectives.

MSP contributes to managing access to markets and resources in a way that benefits all actors, and increases their economic prosperity, particularly in SIDS and LDCs.

MSP encourages the use of marine resources for health research and development, and includes early warning, risk reduction and management of health risks.

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MSP processes, associated with Sustainable Blue Economy strategies, facilitate opportunities for employment and growth based on ecological, economic and social objectives.
We talk a lot about it, the 17 UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Goals that play a central role in ecosystem based maritime spatial planning and hence should be addressed in any session you organize with the MSP Challenge.

But what were they again, and how does SDG 14 Life Below Water relates to the other Goals?

« Take a look at this nice overview from the new flagship MSPglobal International Guide on Marine/Maritime Spatial Planning.»
We are almost ready to start. Participants are assigned or choose their roles and the rules of the pointers for success are explained. In addition, the substantive statement is clarified (each of our three countries Bayland, Peninsuland and Island have a motto/slogan). After some time, the game captain can pause the game-play for a while, asks how it is going and, if requested, gives additional useful tips.

⚠️ With special attention to:

» The connections between activities at sea and land, ecosystem values and preservation targets, the way in which planners of the countries organize their MSP process, plus the liberties certain stakeholders have under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and other policies, transboundary aspects including consultation.

» Start with a warm up - e.g. by asking the participants to introduce themselves and tell which marine species they like and/or identify themselves with the most.

» Explain what is on the RICA Sea board to start with, so the participants familiarize themselves with the materials and scenario options (e.g. a plan proposal indicated with white tokens and coloured symbols, or implemented plans/activities with the coloured side up and the symbol in white).
After some time, the game captain can pause the gameplay for a while, asks how it is going and, if requested, gives additional useful tips.
COLOFON

The instructional videos in this magazine were shot on recorded June 2, 2022 in Breda, Netherlands - as part of the Marine and Urban Development Conference organized by students from BUaS. The photographs were taken during the same meeting. During the meeting there were also interviews with participants. In addition, interviews took place with Lodewijk Abspoel, Linda van Veen, Igor Mayer, Harald Warmelink, Xander Keijser, Michele Quesada da Silva, Malena Ripken and Rhona Fairgrieve. The text is by Eelco Koolhaas (Ministry of Stories) and Lodewijk Abspoel (Ministry of IenW).

The design was done by Machiel Pleijsier, the films were made by Jasper Masthoff.

A Ministry of Stories production, commissioned by the Netherlands Ministry of Infrastructure and Water management.
Dear all,

On behalf of the MSPACE consortium, I would like to thank you for enabling the project to experience a session of the MSP Challenge game.

I wanted to share some of the perspectives from the researchers, after the game, as I thought this may be of use/interest to you. Everyone found that the game was a good way to experience the complexity of planning, given the number of sectors involved, and the difficulty of delivering within sector objectives in the multi-sectoral space. The easiest option initially was to push for each sector’s objectives individually, but as space became more crowded, there was clear advantage in working together, a few sectors pulling together to push for specific, cross-sectoral strategies, including especially co-location options. Sectors that continued to go it alone expressed frustration, and seemed to have a harder time getting their objectives delivered.

Some researchers expressed that the game helped them realise the potential importance of inequity between sectors: that some sectors got more done because they “lobbied” the planner more intensively, and this made us wonder about the resources available for different sectors in real life, and whether they are or are not able to champion their own interests within the planning process. This aspect has spurred an interest to look a little bit into this as part of our stakeholder and process mapping we are doing in the MSPACE project (Marine Spatial Planning Addressing Climate Effects) for 4 UK case-study plans.

Overall, the team felt we knew a little bit more about planning after the session, about responding to change through planning; and it that is was great fun, and a great team bonding experience too.

So thank you again for your support. We look forward to more opportunities to engage! 😊

With my kindest regards,

Ana

Dr Ana M. Queirós

Mum & Senior Benthic Ecologist

Plymouth Marine Laboratory