How can the AspBAN vision be replicated in Islands?

*Follow-up of the joint workshop of December 9, 2021*

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1. What is AspBAN?

1.1. The Concept

The Atlantic Smart Ports Blue Acceleration Network (AspBAN) is an EMFF-funded project which started in May 2021 for two-year duration. The project aims at launching the building blocks that will foster a dynamic acceleration services platform for EU Atlantic ports to function as an open innovation networked ecosystem of blue economy hubs, based on smart and green infrastructures, in deep connection with the EEA, transatlantic and other relevant EU and non-EU maritime basins. It will leverage the existing ecosystem elements (ports, blue accelerators & clusters, corporate & industry, finance & private funds, and policy entities), structuring and connecting them, and bringing in private investors. The project supports the implementation of Pillar I “Ports as Gateways and hubs for the Blue Economy” of the revised Atlantic Action Plan of the Atlantic Strategy.

For Ports, the project represents an opportunity to go beyond their current services by working as blue economy hubs and being an active part of an ecosystem for the development of new blue businesses and of a sustainable ocean economy, and thus diversifying their activities.

Have look at the brochure of the project!

1.2. Ambitious Goals

The project is driven by the achievements of 6 main goals:

1. Identify 10 common blue economy challenges in the Ports community
2. Attract 450 startups for the Acceleration program
3. Achieve a final pool of 30 innovative start-up solutions that will develop pilots in 30 Atlantic ports (22 of Atlantic Strategy Group member countries and 8 from other Atlantic maritime basins)
4. Attract 6M€ in direct private investment for the final pool of startups
5. Mobilize 5billion€ of potential private investment (among the 15 investment funds, Dubai Ports World (the world’s largest port operator) is an AspBAN’s strategic partner, which has a private fund of 4,58 USO for investing in ports and maritime infrastructures)
6. Achieve a reduction of at least 1000 tons of CO2 in the operations of the 30 ports
1.3. A strong international network of Strategic Partners

In addition to the 13 partners from Portugal, Spain, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and the US, AspBAN benefits from an important support of a large and representative pool of 123 strategic partners and a total universe of 391 ports, from EU Atlantic, Norway, USA, Canada, Colombia, Morocco, Mauritania, India (Goa) and China (Macau):

- 41 ports and 5 ports associations - 23 belonging to the 4 Atlantic Strategy Group member countries - AspBAN also has Port of Rotterdam as strategic partner as well as International Port and Harbours Association, the world’s largest port association
- 15 investment funds and finance entities
- 27 companies
- 18 blue accelerators & clusters
- 6 business associations
- 11 policy entities

1.4 Concrete activities to achieve the goals

AspBAN partners have agreed to perform the following activities in a timeframe of two years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mapping and analysis of Blue Accelerators in the Atlantic Area</th>
<th>Creation of an Atlantic network of smart ports for blue economy acceleration</th>
<th>Development of a service package and network scheme for Atlantic Blue Innovation investors</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Final report “Mapping and analysis of Blue Accelerators in the Atlantic Area”</td>
<td>- Database of ports and its ecosystem</td>
<td>- Creation of blue investment network</td>
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<td>- Final report “Demand and Market Segmentation for Blue Accelerators in the Atlantic Area”</td>
<td>- Networking events</td>
<td>- Creation of Blue Investment Events</td>
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<td>- Workshops - test reports’ findings</td>
<td>- Development of specific material to enhance the innovation readiness of Atlantic Ports</td>
<td>- Development of a service package for blue investors</td>
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<td>- White Paper titled “Policy research and recommendations for an Atlantic Smart Port Blue Acceleration Network” (D2.5)</td>
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<th>Acceleration Services for Blue Innovation Cluster</th>
<th>Deployment of Acceleration Scheme for Blue Innovation</th>
<th>Business Plan</th>
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<tr>
<td>- International mentors and experts network</td>
<td>- Creation of Finance Platform for Atlantic Smart Ports Blue Economy Acceleration</td>
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<td>- Concept of the Acceleration Services</td>
<td>- Open Call Acceleration</td>
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<td>- Acceleration Services Report: Report with summary of activities, insights and main results from the Acceleration Services</td>
<td>- Evaluation &amp; selection and bootcamp Acceleration</td>
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<td>- Pilots Development and Demo Day Acceleration</td>
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1.4 What is the role of the CPMR?

The CPMR is a full partner of the project and leader of the Work Package 8 “Capitalisation and Communication”. Through the involvement of the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat, it will connect with key policy makers at EU level, ensure the visibility of the project to relevant blue economy stakeholders and explore the transferability of the project to other sea-basins. In order to do so, the CPMR established the “Blue Accelerator Platform” for regional innovation actors in the blue economy to come together and cooperate for the benefit of blue growth industries and the economies of CPMR regions. This network is open to all CPMR member regions, regional maritime clusters from CPMR member regions, and Blue Accelerators within the CPMR geographical scope, with the aim to facilitate access to new funding opportunities in the blue economy and influence the new generation of blue policies being developed by the EU. This work will be done via a series of workshops, a SEARICA seminar, and policy recommendations notably.

For more information about the CPMR activities related to AspBAN, please contact:

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2. Opportunities for Islands to replicate the AspBAN vision

The AspBAN ambitions for ports may echo IC Islands’ priorities related to Blue Economy. From cooperation projects to more specific support to SMEs and startups, we propose a mapping of EU opportunities to monitor in order to encourage similar and/or complementary initiatives.

The Islands Commission has great chances to influence future calls for proposals or harness budgetary opportunities planned by the European Commission. The new EU Sustainable Blue Economy strategy offers indeed strong argument in favour of the replication of AspBAN in other sea-basins, as it gives a priority to the decarbonisation of ports, their contribution to zero pollution and the use of smart digital solutions to optimise traffic flows and cargo handling in and around ports. It is likely to shape next calls for proposals.
It can also count on the CPMR position in the EC expert group on Ports as Hub of the Blue Economy to support a replication of AspBAN in EU islands.

Below is a list of funding programmes which may be used to replicate AspBAN in Islands, providing that a work of influence of the work programme is developed by the Islands Commission.

2.1. EMFAF

In a similar framework than AspBAN, which applied to the EMFF call “Cross-sectoral development of innovative port clusters in the Atlantic: Developing a blue accelerator scheme for Atlantic ports”, funding opportunities shall be monitored through the EMFAF annual programmes. The EMFAF regulation plans the support of the development of a sustainable blue economy through a series of actions, mentioning notably the enhancement of the transfer and uptake of research, innovation and technology in the sustainable blue economy and the development of project pipelines and innovative financing instruments. Though the co-financing rate under shared management is set to 70%, it is to be noted that one exception is made for outermost regions which have the possibility to reach 100% if the action foresees the promotion of level-playing field for fishery and aquaculture products.

Potential for a call that may pave the way for a replication for AspBAN may be found under the EMFAF Priority “Enabling a sustainable blue economy in coastal, island and inland areas, and fostering the development of fishing and aquaculture communities”.

Though no EMFAF calls have been released yet for 2022, the European Commission published the EMFAF Work programme for 2022-2023. For grants under direct management, the work programme underlines the programme’s aim to support the implementation of the new approach to a sustainable blue economy by promoting regional cooperation in the different sea basins around Europe, in line with the regional thematic priorities agreed by the Member States under the different cooperation frameworks, as well as the implementation of blue economy strategies in the Outermost regions. Among the expected results to reach through the upcoming set of calls, we could highlight:

- **Regional Maritime Cooperation**, notably on the transition to more sustainability in specific blue economy value chains (such as aquaculture, green shipping) and Regional networks and partnerships involving various blue economy stakeholders, research institutes and/or citizens.

- **Developing a sustainable blue economy in the Outermost Regions**, to develop and implement a sustainable blue economy in a variety of sectors, according to the priorities identified in their respective blue economy strategies
2.2 Horizon Europe

Horizon Europe actions are divided in three pillars, namely Pillar I “Excellent Science”, Pillar II “Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness” and Pillar III “Innovative Europe”. Funding opportunities shall be monitored especially in the framework of:

- **Pillar II “Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness”**

Cluster 5 “Climate, Energy and Mobility” aims at fighting climate change notably by making transport sectors more climate and environment-friendly, more efficient, competitive, smarter, safer, and resilient, promoting the use of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency, and improving the resilience of the Union to external shocks and adapt social behaviour in view of the SDGs. As promoted through the AspBAN model, which supports initiatives related to sustainable blue economy in a wide variety of sectors and technologies (shipbuilding, fisheries, marine renewable energy, marine and coastal tourism marine pollution, see the full list here), this cluster may offer relevant opportunities to encourage blue and sustainable startups and SMEs in Islands with aligned objectives.

Cluster 6 “Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment” may also offer opportunities to encourage an initiative connected to AspBAN, as the area of intervention includes biodiversity and natural resources, seas oceans and inland waters, bio-based innovation systems, circular systems. A more specific project on maritime issues linked to Cluster 6 (e.g. fisheries, protection of the marine and maritime environment via innovative startups, focus on biodiversity erosion) addressing challenges of food and nutrition security for all, transition to a low carbon, resource efficient and circular economy, and sustainable bioeconomy in ports’ activities may fall into the requirements of this Cluster.

The list of calls for the Calls for Cluster 5 2021-2022 is available [here](#), and the list of calls for Cluster 6 2021-2022 is available [here](#).

- **Pillar III “Innovative Europe”**

Pillar III focuses its action in supporting and connecting innovators across Europe, with the aim to accelerate innovation and help the growth of innovative SMEs. This initiative echoes the AspBAN activities, notably on Open Innovation and Acceleration Services. To encourage the development of disruptive and market-creating innovations and enhance European innovation ecosystems, the Pillar foresees the use of three instruments that could help innovative SMEs from Islands to connect and develop their blue sustainable initiatives:

  - The **European Innovation Council (EIC)**, supporting SMEs and startups via financial support in the form of grants and equity investments alongside business acceleration services. It aims to identify and support high-risk innovations with a potential to create new markets or contribute to tackling societal
challenges and support innovative researchers and entrepreneurs in the rapid development of technologies and the scale-up of companies (start-ups, spinouts, SMEs) to bring their ideas to the market. Their offer shows similarities with AspBAN’s on Acceleration Services, as shown below:

- **European innovation ecosystems**, aiming to further connect national and regional innovation actors and supporting the implementation of joint cross-border innovation programmes by Member States, Regions and associated countries, from the exchange of practice and knowledge on innovation regulation to the enhancement of soft skills for innovation to research and innovation activities. This action also foresees mentorship activities and innovation procurement initiatives with the aim of increasing the use of public procurement. This option could be particularly relevant to establish cross-border cooperation between AspBAN partners and Island Regions.

Up to 100% of total eligible costs of an action under the Horizon Europe programme may be reimbursed, with an exception for innovation actions where up to 70% of eligible costs may be reimbursed (except for non-profit legal entities which could still benefit from 100% reimbursement). Open and forthcoming call are regularly announced on the [Funding & Tenders Portal](#).

### 2.3. Interreg

Considering the unique geographical scope of the Islands Commission that considers several different sea-basins, the regions may find funding opportunities for cooperation projects in several Interreg Programmes such as, such as Interreg Atlantic Area, Interreg Mediterranean, Interreg Caribbean or EuroMed.

The use of the Atlantic Area Programme could be particularly relevant for EU Atlantic Islands wishing to cooperate with AspBAN partners. Next calls are not expected before the second semester of 2022.

### 2.4 Interregional Innovation Investments (i3)

In order to boost commercialisation and scaling up of innovation projects for the development of European value chains through interregional cooperation, this ERDF instrument provides funding for mature joint innovation projects and supports stakeholders involved in smart specialisation to develop and set up projects
in value-chain investment portfolios. In 2022, 36.7 million € will be given to Strand 1 calls with a focus on developed regions, while 32.9 million € will be allocated to Strand 2a calls for less developed regions, on the 570 million € total budget 2021-2027. Strand 1 will be dedicated to financial advisory support for Investments in Interregional Innovation projects. Strand 2a will address financial and advisory support for the development of value chains in less developed regions. The projects should cover thematic such as digital transition, green transition, and smart manufacturing. Next applications for projects can be submitted on October 18, 2022, and we may expect a Blue Dimension in these upcoming calls. More information here

2.5 Single Market Programme / Invest EU

For 2021-2027 programming period, former COSME activities will mostly be integrated into the Single Market Programme, and also in InvestEU (€2 billion allocated under the InvestEU Fund, in particular through its Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Window which will contribute to the objectives of programme). The Single Market Programme will provide various forms of support to businesses, in particular SMEs, aiming to boost their competitiveness and sustainability. SMEs may look at the different opportunities the programme may offer via:

- Joint cluster initiatives - a new generation of actions involving industrial clusters - groups of specialised enterprises, often SMEs, and other related supporting actors in a location that cooperate closely
- Monitor EISMEA funding calls.

3. Conclusions

Ports - together with airports - represent for islands the only entry and exit routes for passengers and product flows to and from island territories. Therefore, their role is clearly strategic in order to ensure a balanced and competitive development of these territories, and for this reason territorial accessibility and connectivity remain key priorities for the Islands Commission. However, there is still much more to do to exploit the full potential of ports in islands, and this requires specific support and sufficient funding to advance in a sustainable way, which is the only one possible to protect the fragile natural environment in islands. In this sense, AspBAN is certainly an inspiring example and provides valuable input to make further progress in the field.

The project ambitions perfectly meet the Islands Commission priorities, in relation to Blue Economy and transport, as defined in the IC Action Plan for 2022-2023. Indeed, the Islands Commission closely participates in the dialogue with the European Parliament in the context of the adoption of the INI report on Islands and Cohesion Policy, with a focus on the development of a European strategy or a pact for islands, that shall pave the way towards the concrete consideration of islands challenges, and the additional costs of insularity, as well as towards the strengthening of the enabling conditions supporting insular territories in the deployment of Blue Economy activities.
In addition, one of the key Islands Commission goals is to ensure the **effective use of relevant EU instruments and the Green Deal policies** to support islands in their post COVID-19 recovery but also in their transition towards Sustainable Blue Economy, in line with the European Commission approach, the CPMR maritime agenda and the IC Roadmap on Blue Economy, in which modernising island ports to deliver greener infrastructures and services represents a main issue. This Roadmap particularly highlights that - to be competitive at European and global level - islands need ports that can provide enterprises with cheap access to energy efficient innovative services and infrastructures. Furthermore, it calls for a more coordinated approach at EU level to boost mainstream available public and private funds to accelerate the modernisation of Island ports. In this respect, the Islands Commission network seems to represent the ideal environment to identify and promote the replication of best practices, as well as to collect input to draft recommendations for policy measures to boost modernisation of ports in all EU islands.

As such, in line with AspBAN, the Islands Commission works to allow all its regions to be involved in the abovementioned transition, thus contributing to providing opportunities for islands to become **laboratories of Blue Economy**, through innovative solutions and technologies (such as the development of hydrogen in ports and transport in general), ensuring the modernisation and connectivity of insular port infrastructures. In this sense, the Islands Commission is also working on a **note on Green Investments** as a reference document for its members on the state of the art and the potential to advance more towards innovative sustainable solutions, including in the field of maritime transport.

In the upcoming months, the Islands Commission will keep on assessing all future opportunities that could help in this path, while raising awareness at national and EU levels about islands’ needs and challenges in this regard. It plans also to enhance the **synergies with other CPMR’s geographical commissions**, such as the Arc Atlantic Commission, to ensure the **dissemination of relevant good practices** in favour of European islands, such as the ones identifies in the context of AspBAN. Indeed, the Islands Commission will be closely monitoring AspBAN progresses, which could be replicated in other areas, with the necessary adaptation to the specificities to islands. In particular, it will contribute to further promoting the involvement of its regions in the AspBAN Blue Accelerator Platform, supporting cooperation among regional innovation actors.

Lastly, in parallel, the Islands Commission intends to continue working very closely with the CPMR Secretariat on transport and accessibility for joint advocacy actions, with a focus on the revision of the **TEN-T regulation** and the implementation of the **Fit for 55 Package**, with the objective to achieve the targets set by the Green Deal while securing cohesion and a proper consideration of islands specificities in the sector of transport.
coordinator:

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