

The Coastal Atlas as a communication and policy support tool - BE

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- ADAPTATION TO RISK: Integrating coherent strategies covering the risk-dimension (prevention to response) into planning and investment
- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Knowledge-based
- Technical

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

An on-line communication tool collecting diverse and complex information about the coast from a wide range of sectors, and presenting it in an attractive and easy to use way. By including analysis and visualisation tools and policy information it can be used as a simple policy supporting tool.

4. Overview of the case

The 'Kustatlas' (coastal atlas, www.kustatlas.be) is a digital atlas which contains information and map material on different coastal aspects. It provides online access to unique maps which are downloadable as PDF-documents and underlying data is available in Excel format. Sustainability indicators for the coast are linked to each chapter.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

The atlas was published in 2004 as a book (Dutch and English). Its production was triggered by the reporting obligations to the European Commission about the state of the Belgian coast related to the ICZM Recommendation (2002/413/EC). In 2005, the on-line atlas was launched in 4 languages (Dutch, English, German and French), making the information digitally available and establishing links with additional information (sustainability indicators).

b) Objectives

The objectives were to present a general and synthesised overview of the main characteristics of the Belgian coast for the reporting on ICZM by Belgium. The option was taken to give clear, synthesized and scientifically sound information, and to provide information on the coast and to communicate about the coast to different target groups. These were defined as a wide audience, ranging from scientists, civil servants, politicians, fishermen and other sectors that use the sea to the public at large.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

The Coastal Atlas is an initiative of the Coordination Centre for Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Belgium. This centre is also responsible for the maintenance of the atlas and updating the information (foreseen in 2009). The book and the on-line version were financed by the partners of the Coordination Centre: the province of West-Flanders (provincial level) and the two main Flemish 'coastal' administrations (regional authority). Fifty percent co-financing was received from the European Fund for Regional Development within the objective 2 programme for the Belgian coast. The data underlying the maps in the atlas were obtained from the responsible government departments and agencies. The atlas is part of the International Coastal Atlas Network (ICAN).

b) ICZM tools

The 'Kustatlas' (coastal atlas, www.kustatlas.be) is a digital atlas which contains information and map material on different coastal aspects (such as geography and spatial structure, the physical environment, integrated coastal zone management, use of sea areas, nature and environment, tourism and recreation, industry and companies, fisheries and agriculture, architectural patrimony and culture, living at the coast, coastal defence). It is seen as a portal site to information, an outreach tool, and a policy supporting instrument. It provides online access to unique maps, covering both land and sea, with a limited degree of interactivity. The maps are downloadable as PDF-documents and underlying data is available in Excel format. Sustainability indicators for the coast are linked to each chapter.

The atlas is a communication, information and policy supporting tool. All data used in the atlas is "open source" data, mostly provided by public authorities and their administrations. These authorities gather the information themselves, within their objectives and policies, or the data is generated by universities, consultants or other institutions commissioned by the authorities. The atlas contains a limited set of aggregated data, but by linking the atlas to the databases of the sustainability indicators for the coast, a rich set of supplementary data is added. The indicators allow interpretation of information and provide useful information and trends about sustainable coastal management. The indicators can refer to one data set or can be the results of aggregated data. They give an insight about the state-of-the coast and whether the coast is moving towards or away from sustainability. All the data is interpreted in a sustainability framework. A special characteristic of the Belgian coastal atlas is that it contains information on both the land and the sea side of the coast.

7. Cost and resources

Cost for the development of the printed atlas: €46,381. Cost for the development of the on-line atlas: Development on-line version: €25,073, Development/translation German and French version: € 5,855. The cost of updating the atlas is not known. The development of the atlas was supported by a working group of 6 persons.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

The printed version of the atlas was very popular. One thousand three hundred Dutch copies and five hundred English copies of the atlas were produced and distributed. The Dutch version of the atlas was made available in the bookshops along the Belgian Coast, and was sold out within months. The digital atlas has an average number of 2000+ unique visitors per month since the launch in mid-November 2005. The feedback is unanimously positive. Especially the lay-out and the ease of navigating through the website pleases the visitors. Also, the simplicity and the fact that visitors are not overwhelmed by information to choose from is appreciated. The objectives were clearly achieved, within the set time frame. A pit fall however is the updating and maintenance of the atlas. Funding is not easily available.

9. Success and Fail factors

Success factors: funding available for development; ICZM Recommendation as driver, co-ordinating role clearly defined. Also good co-operation of network and partners to deliver data.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

The Belgian atlas served as an example to develop similar atlases in Vietnam and Spain (Catalonia). The atlas was presented at a Coastal Atlas meeting in Cork. After this meeting the “International Coastal Atlas Network” (ICAN) was established. The Coordination centre is now a member of ICAN.

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13. Sources

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- De Kustatlas <http://www.kustatlas.be/>
- EU COM (2002) 413. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2002 concerning the implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Belgium, 2002/413/EC.