

# MARKETING AND BRANDING STRATEGY FOR THE BLUE GROWTH IN THE SOUTH BALTIC SEA REGION IN THE AGE OF TRANSFORMATION

WP3.4 Strategic Guideline incl. Practical Recommendations  
for Blue Economy SMEs and related stakeholders to  
boost Innovation & Blue Growth

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The views expressed in this strategic roadmap as well as information included in it do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the funding institutions (South Baltic Programme 2014-2020 and respective Managing and Monitoring Bodies), nor the opinion of the European Commission and thus the European Union.

Dr. Laima Gerlitz and Christopher Meyer, Hochschule Wismar

## Abbreviations, Acronyms and Definitions

BSR – Baltic Sea Region

EC – European Commission

EDP – Entrepreneurial Discovery Process

EU – European Union

EUSBSR – EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

IoT – Internet of Things

KETs – Key Enabling Technologies

KIBS – Knowledge Intensive Business Services

NACE – Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community

NFBS – Non-Financial Business Sectors

NUTS – Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics

RIS – Regional Innovation Strategy

RIS3 – Smart Specialisation or Regional Innovation on Smart Specialisation Strategies

SBSR – South Baltic Sea Region

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

SMEs – Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

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## On the Way Towards Better SBSR: Promising Approaches and Regional Account

*“Success is 20% skills and 80% strategy. You might know how to succeed, but more importantly, what’s your plan to succeed?”*

*(Jim Rohn)*

The present paper is intended to support the ongoing policy incentives on the macro-regional and European level aiming at strengthening regional development, by increasing regional innovation capacity and providing regional ecosystems with methods and tools that facilitate competitiveness and open up new growth perspectives. This is especially crucial for those regions that are not listed as the most innovative or competitive ones in terms of the existing EU and global rankings as well as do not enjoy strong geographical location advantages – remote regions.

In this light, “InterMarE South Baltic” – part-financed EU INTERREG project in the frame of the South Baltic Programme 2014-2020 (July 2017 – June 2021) sets out to contribute towards innovation strengthening in the South Baltic Sea Region (SBSR) by increasing human capital and networking resources, strengthening capacity building in marketing and branding activities of the SBSR – mainly, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) sector, which is the backbone of the regional and EU economy. Since the SBSR represents a marine coastal region, expansion of marine and coastal activities in a sustainable way, long-term perspective and with conservation, the so-called “Blue Growth” and use of sea and coastal resources for businesses and economic activities, the so-called “Blue Economy”, are at the heart of the project.

Respectively, the present research aimed at delivery of InterMarE South Baltic Marketing Strategy, which serves as a guide with specific regionally tailored made actions designed in light of new policy regulations, changes in social, economic and environmental dimensions and a rapid pace of transformation, both in digital and physical worlds.

## 1.1 Motivation Drivers and Strategy Journey

The main motivation driver behind the strategy delivery is ***that the South Baltic Sea Region does not have any specific Marketing strategy***. Browsing of the resource pool, there was located only one marketing strategy that pinpoint the export of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the region (Treder & Kulawczuk, 2012). Yet, this study shows specific export related marketing strategies for individual businesses and organisations. Further similar sources found only touches upon the issue of the marketing slightly, by paying attention mainly to tourism sector, e.g. destination and marine & coastal tourism (Hacia & Lapko, 2017; Lapko & Müller, 2018; Manniche, et al., 2017; Swacha et al., 2018) or food and agriculture related marketing (Olsson, 2015; Petrenko et al., 2014).

However, the SBSR's identity is much more than only tourism or food destination. The access to the Baltic Sea and marine resources brings more potential to be fertilised. As the Blue Growth Strategy of the European Commission (EC) COM(2012) 0494 final and related policies highlight, e.g. Report on the Blue Growth Strategy SWD(2017) 128 final or European Green Deal COM(2019a) 640 final, there are further value adding sectors and areas within the established and emerging industries that build up the EU Blue Economy (EC, 2018), in particular when it comes to investment incentives for SMEs contributing towards Blue Economy growth, e.g. aquaculture, renewable energy, seabed mining etc.

In addition, reflecting the bigger counterpart – Baltic Sea Region (BSR) – it has so far achieved better recognition on international and global level, by addressing e.g. tourism related and place branding or regional identity building issues (Andersson, 2007; Routes 4U, 2017; Policy Area Tourism of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, 2016). Indeed, the BSR is recognised as a strong touristic destination. Furthermore, strategic positioning of the BSR is underpinned through the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and EUSBSR Action Plan 2020, as approved by the National Coordinators Group in 2020 and by the European Commission in 2021 (EC, 2021). Yet, within the BSR ecosystem and without specific place-based marketing



and branding, the SBSR is not capable to differentiate itself from the macro-region, which already has done work in place branding.

Against this background, the “InterMarE South Baltic” goes a step further and aims at designing the network and cluster-based strategy that promotes the region with its strong Blue Economy performance instead of individual businesses. Indeed, the scientific community acknowledges that clustering and networking presupposes better recognition and market penetration opportunities (Costa & Verissimo, 2020). Furthermore, it is highlighted in the literature that networks and clusters should put in place not only marketing, but also branding, which is again crucial for the cross-border regional development (Alberti et al., 2016; Knippschild, 2011, Pasquinelli, 2013).


This is highly relevant for the SBSR, which is rather small region in the macro-regional perspective. For this, building up strong institutional framework, involving stakeholders, formulating shared goals and thus delivering the value is at the core of the concerned initiative and the strategy. A shared vision with shared goals is crucial for success in marketing and branding, as one cluster and network organisation such as “InterMarE South Baltic” is a necessity for strategy implementation, brand identity and brand image generation. By echoing Hess (2011), the main effort remains of synchronising individual marketing efforts of sub-regions and nations in order to develop common understanding followed by joint marketing and branding actions. As a result, the present work aims also at reducing both **research and policy gaps** in delivering Marketing & Branding Strategy for the SBSR Blue Economy Growth.




## 1.2 Strategy Objectives and its Agenda

As noticed above, Marketing & Branding Strategy for SBSR serves a specific region-based purpose – to increase internationalisation of the region. Internationalisation presupposes a setting of specific measurable objectives. It also needs to undertake situation analysis, identify target groups, marshal marketing measures, postulate brand creation, its organisation and architecture as well as to stipulate specific actions facilitating regional marketing & branding. Taking this into account, the present

Marketing & Branding Strategy sets out the following objectives that cover the displayed target groups representing the key Blue Growth driving economy sectors:

Table 1: Objectives for SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy and Target Groups

Marketing & Strategy Objective	Target Group Anchorage
 <p>The overall objective is to provide the SBSR with a macro-regional corporate, sustainable, value-driven and shared marketing &amp; branding strategy reinforcing innovation, growth and competitiveness in the core Blue Economy sectors of the region in the short (up to 2025) and long-term (up to 2030 / 2035)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Blue Economy SMEs (staff headcount; turnover):                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Micro-businesses (&lt; 10 / ≤ € 2 m)</li> <li>○ Small businesses (&lt; 50 / ≤ € 10 m)</li> <li>○ Medium-sized businesses (&lt; 250 / ≤ € 50 m)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Freelancers</li> <li>▪ Start-ups</li> <li>▪ Local / regional authorities</li> <li>▪ Regional planners</li> <li>▪ Regional managers</li> <li>▪ Intermediaries (technology parks, business incubators, business development agencies)</li> <li>▪ Regional trade associations and chambers of commerce)</li> <li>▪ Labour market organisations</li> <li>▪ Marine spatial planning institutions</li> <li>▪ Tourist information centres</li> <li>▪ Higher education and research institutions</li> <li>▪ Individual customers</li> <li>▪ Financial institutions (banks, insurance)</li> <li>▪ Real estate developers and agents</li> <li>▪ Recreation and retail industries (</li> <li>▪ Blue economy industries</li> <li>▪ Interreg South Baltic community</li> <li>▪ Media</li> </ul>

Marketing & Strategy Objective	Target Group Anchorage
 <p>1<sup>st</sup> specific objective is to enhance and facilitate the promotion of top-quality and sustainable SBSR innovations (products, services, processes, networks, brands) inside and outside the SBSR in the short- and long-run</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Blue Economy SMEs</li> <li>▪ Consumers (residents and visitors)</li> <li>▪ Customers</li> <li>▪ Suppliers</li> <li>▪ Investors</li> <li>▪ Tourists and travellers</li> <li>▪ Exhibitors</li> <li>▪ Networks and clusters</li> </ul>
 <p>2<sup>nd</sup> specific objective is to provide actors contributing to Blue Economy of the SBSR with practical tools and recommendations for hands-on work (framework conditions, business opportunities, compliance standardisation &amp; control mechanisms) reinforcing internationalisation in a short-term</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Blue Economy SMEs</li> <li>▪ Higher education and research institutions</li> <li>▪ Local / regional authorities</li> <li>▪ Regional planners</li> <li>▪ Regional managers</li> <li>▪ Intermediaries (technology parks, business incubators, business development agencies)</li> <li>▪ Regional trade associations and chambers of commerce)</li> </ul>
 <p>3<sup>rd</sup> specific objective is to institutionalise and operationalise “InterMarE South Baltic” network and cluster within the regional SBSR setting through placed-based institutional arrangements on a short-term (2021) (regional contacts as SBSR innovation marketing &amp; branding excellence centres for knowledge absorption, spill-overs) as well as regular horizontal and multi-level institutional interactions on the long-run starting from 2021 onwards (yearly SBSR Blue Economy Marketing &amp; Branding events)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ InterMarE South Baltic consortium</li> <li>▪ Local and regional authorities</li> <li>▪ Macro-regional networks and clusters</li> <li>▪ Exhibitors</li> <li>▪ Interreg South Baltic community</li> </ul>

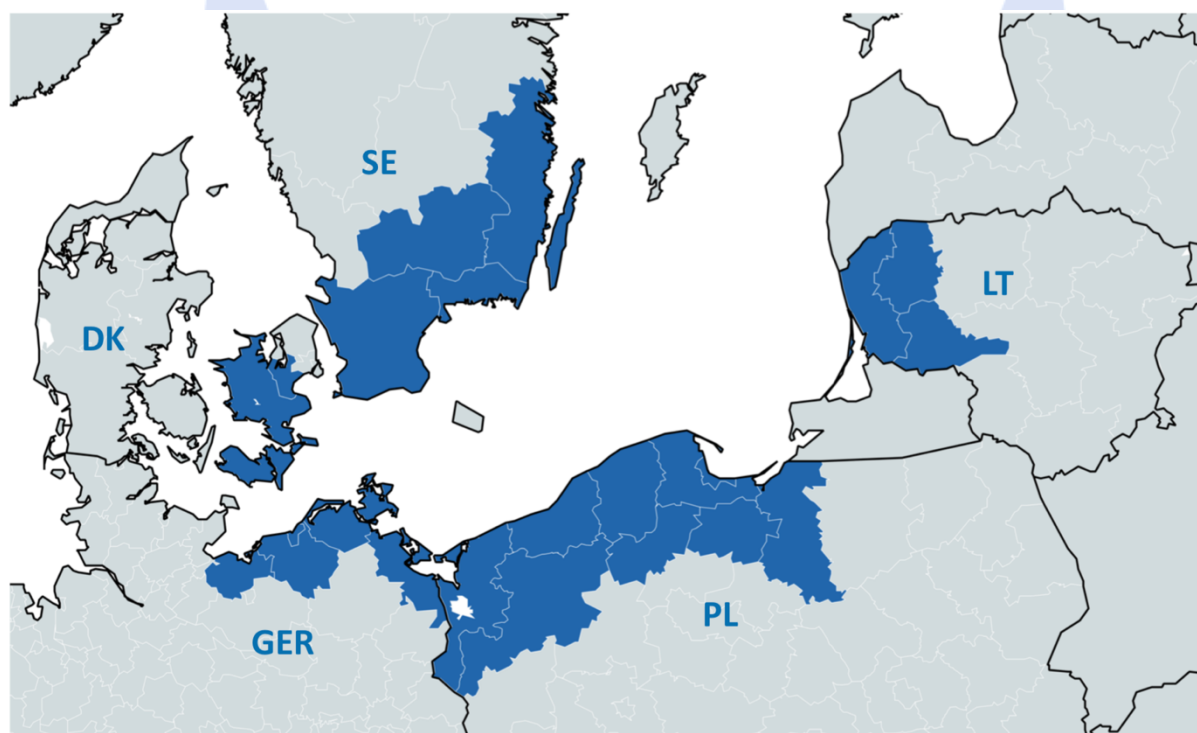
Marketing & Strategy Objective	Target Group Anchorage
 <p>4<sup>th</sup> specific objective is to develop new shared value creation and capturing partnerships in the next future via establishing and anchoring “InterMarE South Baltic” network and cluster brand on a long-term as a marketing &amp; branding service, Blue Economy SMEs’ representation as well as geographical and event brand with strong bargaining and penetration power</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Blue Economy SMEs</li> <li>▪ InterMarE South Baltic consortium</li> <li>▪ Inland Blue Economy Markets</li> <li>▪ Export markets</li> <li>▪ Local / regional authorities</li> <li>▪ Regional planners</li> <li>▪ Regional managers</li> <li>▪ Intermediaries (technology parks, business incubators, business development agencies)</li> <li>▪ Regional trade associations and chambers of commerce)</li> <li>▪ National policy actors</li> <li>▪ Investment agencies</li> </ul>

Source: compiled by the authors

When it comes to the geographical place-based positioning, the Marketing & Branding Strategy aims at supporting cohesion and economic development within the regional setting, i.e. macro-region of South Baltic, whereby the region is referred to as more or less bounded area possessing some sort of unity or organising principles that distinguish it from other regions (Johnston, 2000, p. 687), as a territorially determined unit differing from its surroundings and possessing some form of identity (Tägil, 1983, p. 18). Next to the territorial categorisation, social perception plays in the given context a crucial role, since the present study deals with marketing & branding which found their conceptual meanings in the social domain of interactions. As a result, the region, and thus the South Baltic Sea Region (SBSR), is determined via social dimension maintaining relations between people, nature and society within the scope of regional formation, underpinned by cultural dimension pinpointing region as an identity of cultural relationships between a group and respective places as well as underpinned by awareness of common cultural similarities among the regional population, e.g. historical trade routes (amber trading) across the SBSR or participation in the

Hanseatic League. As a result, marketing & branding of the region concerns interactions and practices reflected through political, economic, cultural administrative, institutional and power relations (Paasi, 2001, p. 16), reinforced by networks, practices and processes spanning beyond the borders of the region (Paasi, 2009, p. 467). Finally, the SBSR stands for a region within the European dimension, a cross-border region, facilitating cohesion and integration of the EU through gathered together administrative territorial units of the Member States of the EU determined on the basis of NUTS classification as individual NUTS-2 regions.






Figure 1: South Baltic Sea Region as A European Cross-Border Region



Source: compiled by the authors from open source map

Bearing in mind the given regional setting, the SBSR gathers together historically, socially, culturally, economically and politically intertwined following NUTS-2 regions from the EU Member States as Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden, as showed in Figure 1 above:

Table 2: Participating NUTS-2 Regions in the South Baltic Sea Region

EU Member State	Participating Regions in the South Baltic Sea Region
	Regional Municipality of Bornholm and Region Zealand (Østsjælland, Vest- og Sydsjælland)
	Districts (Landkreise) of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern: Nordwestmecklenburg, Rostock, Vorpommern-Rügen, Vorpommern-Greifswald and district-free city (kreisfreie Stadt) of Rostock
	Counties of Klaipėda, Tauragė and Telšiai
	Subregions of: Miasto Szczecin, Szczeciński, Szczecinecko-pyrzycki, Koszaliński, Słupski, Starogardzki, Chojnicki, Gdański, Trójmiejski and Elbląski
	Counties of: Kalmar, Blekinge, Skåne and Kronober







Source: compiled by the authors

Next to the strategic (objectives' formulation) and territorial positioning, the SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy sets out to support and enhance innovation capacity and its internationalisation in the regional Blue Economy, i.e. marine driven activities and interactions, performance, outputs and outcomes. Therefore, the strategy is mainly addressing (yet no limited to) the core Blue Economy sectors, which are divided in the EU into Established and Emerging Sectors Industries.









In the same vein, by deploying the existing EC classification from the Annual Economic Report of the EU Blue Economy (2018) and the EU Blue Economy Report 2020 (EC, 2020a), overlapping sectors are merged and / or their naming adopted for an easier tracking for the purpose of this research. This is done, as at the core of the study is not specific measurement that requires keeping the same sectoral names to enable statistical evaluation according to the NACE indicators in the Eurostat database. When

it comes to output measures in individual Blue Economy sectors, then provided harmonised NACE indicator names shall be used by regional / national authorities for performance mapping. As a result, the following Blue Economy industries and sectors are targeted by the strategy:

Table 3: Sectoral Focus of the SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy

Blue Economy Sectors / Industries	
Established Sectors	Emerging Sectors
 <p>Coastal tourism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hotels and accommodation</li> <li>Recreation infrastructure and actors</li> <li>Mobility and transportation</li> </ul>	 <p>Blue biotechnology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biofuels (algae)</li> <li>Pharmaceuticals, chemicals</li> <li>Health</li> <li>Genetics</li> </ul>
 <p>Marine living resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aquaculture</li> <li>Processing, retail and wholesale of fish, crustaceans and molluscs</li> <li>Extraction of marine living resources</li> </ul>	 <p>Coastal and environmental protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carbon capture and storage</li> <li>Coastal and habitat protection</li> </ul>
 <p>Marine transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sea and coastal passenger water transport</li> <li>Sea and coastal freight water transport</li> <li>Inland passenger water transport</li> <li>Inland freight water transport</li> </ul>	 <p>Desalination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fresh water supply</li> </ul>

## Blue Economy Sectors / Industries

Established Sectors	Emerging Sectors
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Renting and leasing of water transport equipment</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marine defence and security                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marine surveillance</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offshore oil and gas                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extraction of crude petroleum</li> <li>Extraction of natural gas</li> <li>Extraction support activities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marine research and education</li> </ul>
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Port activities                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cargo handling</li> <li>Warehousing and storage</li> <li>Construction of water projects</li> <li>Water transportation related activities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ocean energy                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offshore wind</li> <li>Ocean wave and tidal energy</li> </ul> </li> <li>Submarine cables</li> </ul>
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shipbuilding and repair                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building of ships and floating structures</li> <li>Building of pleasure and sporting boats</li> <li>Repair and maintenance of ships, floating structures and boats</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seabed mining                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aggregates</li> <li>Marine minerals</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Source: compiled by the authors



### 1.3 Results, Value Generation and Value Capturing

The available Marketing & Branding Strategy aims at fostering Blue Growth in the SBSR by reinforcing innovation capacity in primary target groups – SMEs and other businesses that are intertwined within existing social, cultural, economic and environmental domains of the entire ecosystem. By providing key insights and tools for target groups, thus enabling them not just to react ex-poste but, much more importantly, to act within the increasing pace of transformation und under uncertain, volatile, ambiguous and risky conditions with prevailing overwhelming and dispensable information flows or asymmetric and scarce information availability ex-ante, the Strategy answers key fundamental questions. These questions, in turn, are deemed to facilitate and smooth decision-making process for innovation and growth in Blue Economy of the SBSR in all three decision-making domains (penetration levels): a) macro-level (SBSR interaction and interplay in macro-regional perspective, e.g. BSR or beyond, e.g. national, global forces, market loci & flows, interactions, transactions); b) meso-level (SBSR as a network and cluster, governance structure and institutional arrangements, regional scope and scale in social, cultural, economic, environmental, technological dimensions; and c) micro-level (organisation / firm – internal and external performance, i.e. resource pooling, processes, marketing, organisational performance:

Table 4: Overview of Key Guiding Questions for Target Groups Allocation

Penetration Level	Key Fundamental Question
Macro-level	How can SBSR improve Blue Economy marketing & branding?
Macro- / meso- / micro-level	What are the most important steps in SBSR marketing & branding?
Macro- / meso- / micro-level	What ecosystem framework conditions I need to deal with in order to innovate?

Penetration Level	Key Fundamental Question
Micro-level	How can I improve my marketing & branding performance?
Macro-, meso-, micro-level	What are key drivers, enablers, challenges and constraints for Blue Growth in the region?
Macro-, meso-, micro-level	What are key partners and shared value creators for SBSR innovative Blue Economy?
Micro-level	How can I improve my innovation capacity?
Macro-, meso-, micro-level	How to create value for customers and affected stakeholders?
Micro-level	How can I benefit from the EU Blue Growth policy?

Source: compiled by the authors

Considering the overall Strategy journey, research questions were addressed and different levels of cooperation and intertwining considered throughout the entire research journey. The SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy has its fundamental genesis in using sound supportive data from preceding topical empirical research and data gathered for the purpose of a) SBSR Blue Economy cluster benchmarking; b) demand for the SBSR Blue Economy; c) supply of the SBSR Blue Economy.

After having mapped the SBSR Blue Economy ecosystem (region-wide and place-based), supply and demand forces analysed and key future potentials identified, the Strategy formulation journey proceeded with key postulation of key Strategy objectives, roadmaps for Strategy implementation and essential tools and methods enabling capitalization and sustainability from the anticipated SBSR Marketing & Branding activities. In this regard, the Strategy envisages opportunities for SBSR Blue Economy to innovate – differentiate, compete and growth.

Finally, in order to sustain SBSR Marketing & Branding efficiency and effectiveness, a path dependency approach is adopted, where the developed strategic tools and mechanisms are intended to be streamlined by means of gathered experiences in a form of utilised tools in innovation development projects, evaluation and monitoring measures, revision and reusing of optimised tools. The overall consideration of the SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy is depicted in the figure below.

Figure 2: SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy Journey and Its Key Building Blocks



Source: own draft, compiled by the authors

As a result, by providing answers to the displayed guiding questions, the study in hand aims at delivering values, insights and practical recommendations that are applicable to all above mentioned target groups starting from individuals involved in SBSR Blue Economy and ending up with macro-regional initiatives and mechanisms reinforcing Blue Economy and Blue Growth. In particular, the following benefits as shown in Table 5 can be expected with the deployment of the SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy.

In sum, the anticipated SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy implies key success factors, such as:

- Developing *regional added value* through regional differentiation and making use of regional similarities, geographical, social, cultural, environmental and institutional proximity for innovations in Blue Economy sectors;
- Facilitating and reinforcing *sustainable regional development* through focus on environmental-friendly, zero-emission innovations in Blue Economy sectors;
- Providing a range of possibilities for marketing & branding of regional innovations through “InterMarE South Baltic” network and cluster service brand.

Table 5: Benefits Portfolio of the SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy

Benefits of SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy	
	Providing a common and shared vision for all affected SBSR stakeholders on key building blocks and tools to facilitate joint macro-regional Blue Economy marketing & branding.
	Providing ecosystem perspective and key domains of performance that affect innovation generation, its marketing & branding on organisational, interregional and macro-level.
	Providing innovation developers (SMEs, businesses, start-ups, etc.) with guidelines and recommendations to utilise innovation generation tools for own business purposes.
	Envisaging methodologies and tools to establish and maintain value creating partnerships across the entire SBSR in different performance domains, thus strengthening supply and value chains of SBSR Blue Economy.
	Providing institutional arrangements and action plan for SBSR Blue Economy marketing & branding

Source: compiled by the authors

Looping the envisaged value of the present strategic paper into the overall SBSR, the Marketing & Branding Strategy aims at creating shared value by, first, addressing not only economic needs, but also societal and environmental aspects. The focus is placed on streamlining and strengthening local clustering power of SMEs, suppliers, multi-governance actors (institutions) including customers and users (society in large). As a result, this enables to increase efficiency, return, quality and sustainability on societal, environmental and economic level.

In the beginning, the shared value creation might require more sources – time and investment, but the return seems to be greater economic value and broader strategic benefits for all stakeholders involved. The key strength of the shared value concept is that it postulates the power to unveil global growth, by considering simultaneously sustainable development – connections between societal and economic progress (corporate performance).

In order to enable share value and create suitable opportunities, companies should reconceive their products and markets; redefine productivity in the value chain as well as enable local cluster development. A shared value is created when in the process there is also involved value creation for society, which addresses its needs and challenges. It is, nevertheless, not connected with social responsibility, philanthropy and sustainability only in order to achieve an economic success. Yet, compliance with law, policies, standards imposed by governments and authorities might contribute to shared value creation.

By providing key building blocks of the SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy, the following chapter dives into the mapping and provides a reader tailor-made synopsis (simplified and structured consolidation) of fundamental forces and developments that influence marketing & branding from the past, over presence towards the future as well as marshals essential drivers, enablers and constraints having consequential effects on the succeeding actions.

## 2 Setting the Scene: Rationale for the SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy

In order to prepare a viable SBR Marketing & Branding Strategy, it is necessary to understand what framework conditions, trends, constraints, challenges and opportunities shape future projection. For this purpose, the present Strategy aims at scrutinising SBSR development paradigm by pointing out main prevalent SBSR Blue Economy successes resulting from path dependency practices, distilling crucial present challenges prevailing in the SBSR Blue Economy as well as delineating future needs the region will cope with. The combination of past, present and future dimensions is crucial for both sustainable as well as competitive regional development adopting three tenets of diversification, differentiation and innovation. Having done this, the chapter proceeds with the array of SBSR ecosystem by focusing on the interplay of four key ecosystem provinces that, once systematically dovetailed, serve as a mainstay for the SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy formulation and yields promising prospects.

### 2.1 Past Successes, Current Challenges and Future Needs

To start with, the following strategic orientation is built upon a) key past success that frame path dependency activities and enable SBSR Blue Economy to gain and sustain competitive advantages especially over the established Blue Economy sectors; b) current challenges that hamper innovation in SBSR Blue Economy; and c) future needs that emerge from key trends and paradigm shifts on global, European, national, macro-regional and regional levels.

#### ***Past Successes – Path Dependency?***

SBSR frames an integral part of the bigger counterpart macro-region, the Euroregion – the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). As it is claimed that the BSR has sustained its competitive position over the last years among other Euroregions in terms of

sustainable marine-driven development and therefore is coined as a flagship marine region in Europe with prevalent good economic, social and environmental performance indicators (Gerlitz et al., 2017; Ketels & Pedersen, 2016; Metzger & Schmit, 2012; Stiller & Wedemeier, 2012; Vitola, 2015), it is therefore clear that SBSR also takes a stake of this outstanding performance. Following the latest issue of the “State of the Region Report” (Ketels et al., 2017), the BSR generated in 2015 an annual GDP of about 2.000 billion EUR, which is equivalent to 12.5% of the EU-28 economy. The performance strength is linked with outputs in two key clusters; a) forestry, furniture and fishing; and b) water transportation including oil and gas and metal mining.

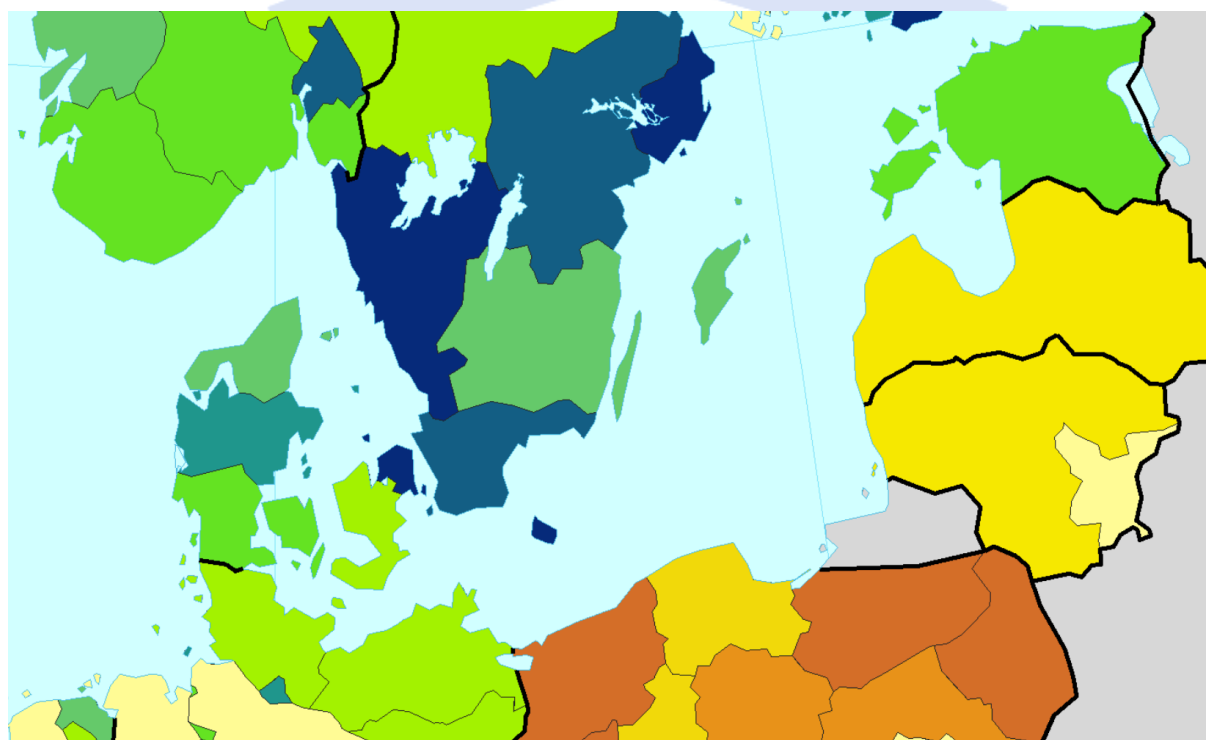
When it comes to innovation performance, the BSR and thus the SBSR is among the top in terms of innovation generation and value creation, e.g. Global Competitiveness Report 2019 and Global Innovation Index 2020, where most of the BSR Member States show good innovation performance results. Despite this fact, when downscaling to individual regional performance within the macro-regional (BSR) or cross-border regional (SBSR) perspective, there are crucial disparities prevailing between “old” and “new” Member States, thus leading to asymmetrical development within the BSR and also the SBSR and posing crucial constraints to sustainable regional development driven by innovation as well as macro-regional social, economic and institutional integration.

### ***Current Challenges – How is the Region Doing Today?***

Yet, when it comes to the key regional development performance indicator – innovation – on the macro-regional and regional individual level, the SBSR region is moulded by different performance trends. As it is visible in Figure 2 below, the SBSR Swedish regions are performing as Innovation Leaders or Strong innovators (blue colour). Strong innovators are also SBSR regions in Denmark and Germany (green), whereas the SBSR in the East-South SBSR area belong to the group of moderate (Lithuanian and Polish regions) or even worse – modest innovators (yellow colour), like the Polish

SBSR regions at the German border (orange colour)<sup>1</sup>. Bearing in mind this situation, it becomes clear that despite good incentives and mechanisms in place, there is much more need to spur and leverage innovation performance in the entire SBSR, by providing region-wide and tailored tools and mechanisms that help out innovation actors in easier deployment and capitalisation (Meyer et al., 2021).

Figure 3: Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2019 Showing SBSR Innovation Performance



Source: compiled by the authors, adopted from the Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2019b, p. 5

In particular, analysing the innovation index development from 2011 to 2019, it shall be highlighted that only Lithuania region (without Vilnius – LT02) possesses a remarkable increase of innovation capacities: +37% compared to 2011 according to

<sup>1</sup> Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2019,

[https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/policy/innovation/regional\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/policy/innovation/regional_en), accessed on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020.



the index. Another positive development can be mentioned for the region of Zachodniopomorskie (PL42): + 21%. However, both regions are classified as Moderate Innovators compared to European average only. Despite the two positive examples, several SBSR regions recognise a stagnation or decrease of their innovation capabilities and performances according to the scoreboard, e.g. Sydsverige (SE22) -8%, Mecklenburg Vorpommern (DE80) +3%, Sjaelland (DK02) -18% or Warminsko-Mazurskie (PL62) -11%. Danish, German and Swedish regions might still be mentioned as Strong Innovators or Innovation Leaders, but without any intervention or external support, it is questionable how the current negative trend can be stopped and turned into a positive on which is necessary to reach the policy-driven future targets. Rather, the data suggest that regions become “land-locked” in terms of their pathways (as a result of path dependency) and need new innovative, open minded and creative inputs to break through the stagnating and / or locked situation.

In the same vein, performance of the concerned EU Member States participating in this regional cooperation programme is also varying. When it comes to the so-called eco-innovation performance, the data is available only on the national level. Yet, the overview of the eco innovation performance in 2019 yields great disparities among countries like Denmark (2<sup>nd</sup> rank in the EU), Sweden (4<sup>th</sup> rank), Germany (6<sup>th</sup> rank) and Lithuania (19<sup>th</sup> rank) and Poland (25<sup>th</sup> rank). While Denmark and Sweden are eco-leaders with high outperformance in the EU in eco-innovation outputs (eco-innovation related academic publications and patents) and resource efficiency outcomes (water and energy productivity including GHG emissions intensity), Denmark is below EU average in terms of eco-innovation activities (in particular, implementation of resource efficiency actions among SMEs and introduction of sustainable products among SMEs), but generates above EU average positive socio-economic outcomes (employment in eco-industries and respective turnover)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Eco-Innovation, Country Profile Denmark, [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/denmark\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/denmark_en), accessed on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

By contrast, Sweden is performing as forerunner in eco-innovation inputs (total value of green early stage investments and total R&D personnel and researchers) and is in front of Denmark in eco-innovation activities (ISO 14001 registered organisations and implementation of sustainable products among SMEs<sup>3</sup>). Germany has similar development patterns with high outperformance in resource efficiency outcomes (water productivity), good socio-economic outputs (exports of products from eco-industries) as well as high positive records above the EU average in eco-innovation outputs (eco-innovation related patents) and eco-innovation inputs (total value of green early stage investments per capita and governments environmental and energy R&D appropriations and outlays<sup>4</sup>).

Finally, Lithuania performs above the EU average only in one area – socio-economic outputs (employment in eco-industries and turnover in eco-industries), while having very low performance level in eco-innovation outputs and eco-innovation activities (eco-innovation related patents) and implementation of sustainable products among SMEs<sup>5</sup>. By contrast, Poland yields the lowest performance levels in the areas of resource-efficiency outcomes (material productivity) and eco-innovation inputs (total value of green early stage investments<sup>6</sup>).

As a result, it can be claimed from the data available here that most prevailing challenges in all SBSR countries refer to process-level of innovation, i.e. missing

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<sup>3</sup> Eco-Innovation, Country Profile Sweden, [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/sweden\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/sweden_en), accessed on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Eco-Innovation, Country Profile Germany, [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/germany\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/germany_en), accessed on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Eco-Innovation, Country Profile Lithuania, [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/lithuania\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/lithuania_en), accessed on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Eco-Innovation, Country Profile Poland, [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/poland\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/poland_en), accessed on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

resources efficiency, delivery of sustainable products including missing green investments and R&D personnel available. This makes clear that regional SMEs should therefore strengthen their internal organisational capacity building in terms of greening (sustainable development) processes and organisational performance on human, product, materials and environmental level, leading to sustainable innovations. In turn, sustainable innovations open up avenues for sustainable growth and increase in competitive advantage. Against this background of presented data, it is crucial to focus on and enhance knowledge transfer as well as capacity building using new tools, establish on-going actions, reinforce conceptualisation and capitalisation on Blue Growth Initiatives and Incentives as well as implement joint regional and macro-regional actions supporting regional economy growth and regional development.

### ***Future Needs – What Future are We Talking About?***

Through intensifying globalisation and arising global networks, new social and environmental challenges jeopardize innovation and growth opportunities in different markets. Indeed, this is especially true for the SME sector and the performance of individual regions in the EU (Prause et al. 2018). Following the European Commission (2018a), more than 99% of all companies in the EU represent micro and SMEs. In 2018, nearly 25 million SMEs in the EU-28 generated about 56.4% of value added and 66.6% employment in the Non-Financial Business Sector (NFBS).

Therefore, SMEs are regarded as the backbone and driver of regional and national economies. Thus, there is a need to support SMEs and entrepreneurship, since they have a crucial role in generating economic growth, triggering innovations, attracting new investments and businesses, enabling clusters to evolve, ensuring employability and social integration (Prause et al., 2018; EC, 2019c, 2013a, 2013b). Here, SMEs will need to find new ways of operation through the lens of the European Green Deal, in particular, RIS3 and Smart Specialisation concepts' utilisation (EC, 2020b; Gerlitz et al., 2020).

SMEs are regarded as accelerators for innovative products and services of high quality. Yet, in the EU main challenges refer to low SMEs capacity in services' sector

and low exports of EU SMEs. In addition, external financing incentives and venture capital investments should be put on the SME development priority lists.

Next to the SME size and performance related obstacles, key future challenges will be circled around missing capacity and capabilities in environmental and digital transition, regional, EU and international policy compliance as well as burning needs to reduce negative footprints in societal, environmental, governance and economic performance domains. New EU Industrial Policy based on circular economy principles and the European Green Deal (EGD) as the New EU Growth Strategy serve as key roadmaps. Future port business will need to focus on transformation by twinning environmental and digital goals. By doing this, it is believed here, a sustainable socio-economic growth can be grounding, simultaneously benefiting business and society, i.e. providing growth opportunities for businesses and meeting needs and expectations of more environmentally conscious society.

In particular, regional SMEs, policy makers and researchers will need to focus in the next future simultaneously on sustainable development, growth and competitiveness by considering compliance with and contribution to the 17 SDGs of the UN. By now, BSR countries are well on the global level in terms of overall SDG performance, but face challenges in implementation of the 2030 Agenda in most of the SDGs (Beyersdorff & Lanthen, 2018, p. 12; OECD, 2019, p. 12). Specifically, the future actions in the BSR will need to focus on SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities); SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption & Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land). The major challenges are to be expected in the implementation of the SDG12 and SDG 13, since in these two areas all BSR countries perform bad (ibid., p. 12).

In this vein, more potential and proactive approach is needed, increase in cooperation, multi-sectoral and holistic engagement (Ahlgren, 2019, p. 2; Böhme et al., 2016, p. 4; EC, 2021). A special emphasis will be needed for a circular economy, green technology sophistication, increase of ecological footprint (Borges & Topsiduo, 2020, p. 7). Considering scenarios for the BSR for 2030 and 2050 by ESPON, the following

matrix table showcases key driving future needs and how these are addressed within this Marketing & Branding Strategy. Needs, trends and shifts marked with (+) means easy gains and contribution to the strategy, and with (-) stands for challenges and bottlenecks to implement joint cross-border Blue Economy Marketing & Branding Strategy.

Table 6: Future Needs, Trends and Paradigm Shifts Affecting SBSR and BSR

Needs / Trends / Shifts	SBSR Blue Economy Marketing & Branding Strategy			
	Specific Objective 1 Promotion of Sustainable Blue Innovations	Specific Objective 2 Practical Tools & Recommendations for internationalisation	Specific Objective 3 Institutionalisation of InterMarE Network and Cluster	Specific Objective 4 InterMarE Network and Cluster Brand
Ageing society	+	-	+	+
Increasing migration pressures and flows	+	+	+	+
Rising social inequalities and gaps	-	-	-	-
Circular economy	+	+	+	+
Sharing economy	+	+	+	+
Robotics & digitalisation increasing productivity	+	+	+	+
Robotics & digitalisation replacing humans	+	+	+	+
Big data and Internet of Things	+	+	+	+

Needs / Trends / Shifts	SBSR Blue Economy Marketing & Branding Strategy			
	Specific Objective 1 Promotion of Sustainable Blue Innovations	Specific Objective 2 Practical Tools & Recommendations for internationalisation	Specific Objective 3 Institutionalisation of InterMarE Network and Cluster	Specific Objective 4 InterMarE Network and Cluster Brand
Scarcity of natural resources	+	+	+	+
Increasing public debts	-	+	-	-
COVID-19 resilience	+	+	+	+
Alternative energy	+	-	+	+
Cybersecurity failure	+	-	-	-
Human environmental damage	-	-	-	-
IT infrastructure breakdown	-	-	-	-
Strengthening network of Baltic medium-sized cities	+	+	+	+
Supporting cross-border service networks based on new technologies	+	+	+	+
Connecting Baltic infrastructure on regional level	+	+	+	+
Supporting cross-border metropolises	+	+	+	+

Source: compiled by the authors

Shedding the light on the international perspective, among the top risks the world will face in 2021 according to the likelihood and impact will be climate action failure, which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> global risk followed by human environmental damage, biodiversity loss, digital power concentration and digital inequality. The recent study of the International Energy Agency (IEA) on the “Energy Technology Perspectives 2020” claims that innovation is the key to fostering new technologies and advancing existing ones (p. 10). In addition, the authors of the study highlight that in order to make energy innovation, which will be the guiding one in the next years, we must provide, in the first move, sustained resources to research, prototyping, pilots education and skills. And this can be done through support for training, innovation prizes, funding for researchers (ibid., p. 19). As a result, a study endorses that technologies that are at the prototype or demonstration state today contribute to more than one-third of the cumulative emissions reduction in the IEA Sustainable Development Scenario (p. 12). As a result, tackling the challenges and future needs enables to develop potential covering the demands both in technological innovation development and environmental transition.

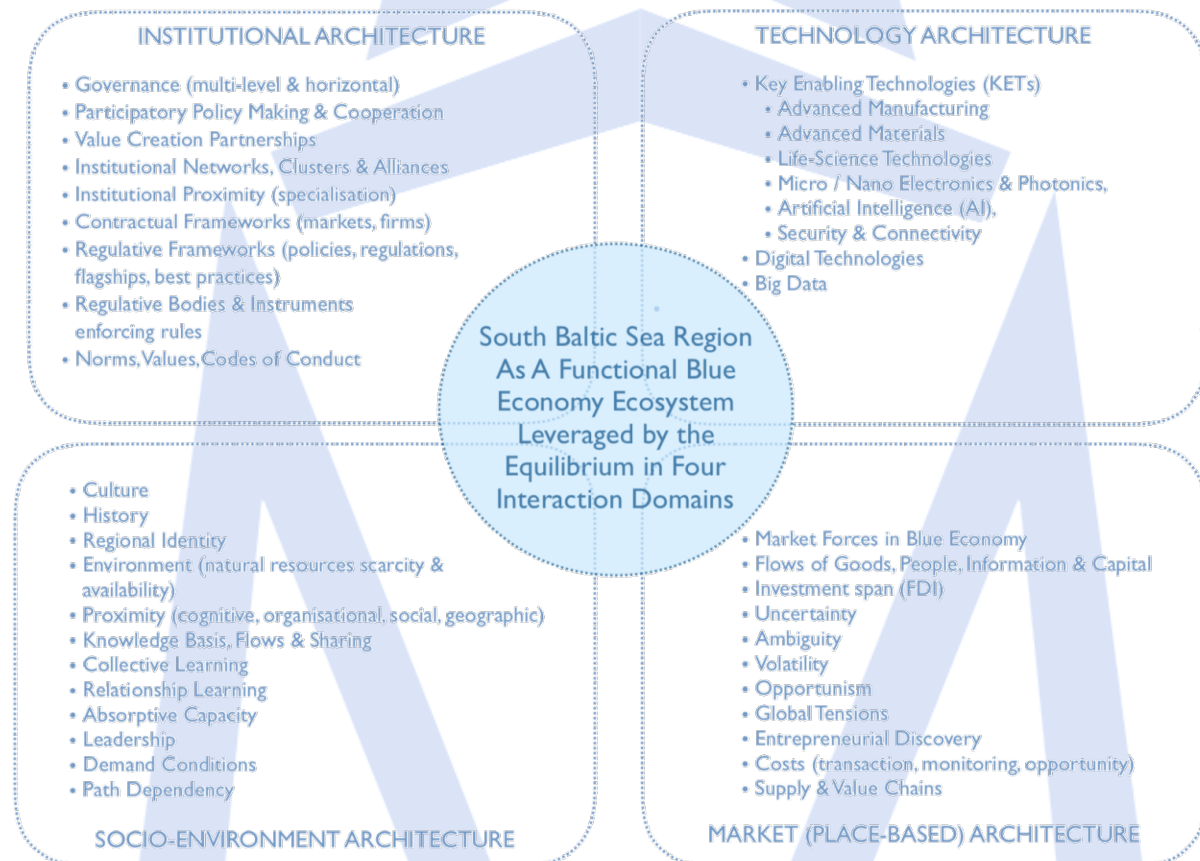
## 2.2 Framework Conditions and Collective Macro-Regional Approaches

SMEs are regarded as backbone and drivers of regional and national economies. Therefore, there is a need to support SMEs and entrepreneurship, since they have a crucial role in generating economic growth, triggering innovations, attracting new investments and businesses, enabling clusters to evolve, ensuring employability and social integration. Hence, SMEs are regarded as accelerators for innovative products and services of high quality.

Having analysed SBSR past successes, understood current challenges and projected future bottlenecks and potentials, for strategists, it is essential to know main players and key performance influencing factors within the SBSR ecosystem and beyond its boundaries. To meet growing requirements to parse volatility, complexity and ambiguity of interactions, the developed SBSR Ecosystem Framework below can help

out regional businesses, planners, governance bodies, decision makers, regional managers and other strategists to easier navigate within Blue Economy system.

Figure 4: SBSR Ecosystem and Key Constructs Driving Ecosystem Interactions



Source: compiled by the authors, adopted from the applicable conceptual foundations

This ecosystem matrix can be principally used by addressing and checking main driving factors in each of the ecosystem domains (institutions, society & environment, technology and market) which were mapped and selected by the strategy development team as the most important in the face of increasing globalisation and transformation. Therefore, it can serve as a first step for businesses in developing their future roadmaps and employed for daily businesses as a compass helping to understand the logic behind certain trends and developments and / or canvassing own blue business strategy development drafts.



### 3 Displaying Marketing Strategy and Putting It into Action

The following sub-chapters provide the SBSR Marketing & Branding Strategy by focusing on its key building blocks and perceiving SBSR Marketing & Branding from an ecosystem and processual perspectives. In this, SBSR Marketing & Branding is driven by a) establishing tools for resource pooling, allocation and (re)combination leading to knowledge excellence and, in turn, innovation development, arriving at sustainable organisational (regional) ecosystem; b) providing key entrepreneurial and creative discovery related tools; and c) transforming the SBSR into a Brand with shared future vision. As a result, these three building blocks frame the core of this chapter.

InterMarE South Baltic Marketing & Branding Strategy follows as a result of thorough analyses and previous empirical research using sound supportive data from the SBSR Blue Economy cluster benchmarking and analysis reports on demand and supply sides for the SBSR Blue Economy. Data was collected from direct beneficiaries SBSR SMEs across the entire region (more than 100 surveyed SMEs), realised expert interviews in the frame of study visits in Busan (South Korea), Valencia (Spain), Rotterdam (the Netherlands) and Oslo (Norway) or individual arrangements on the local and regional level.

The authors of the Marketing & Branding Strategy believe that in order to be competitive on the market (would it be domestically, regionally or macro-regionally), it is essential to adopt innovation-driven transformation concept and to perceive SBSR Marketing & Branding as an on-going continuous and holistic process. It is because:

- Innovation approach and its processual meaning embraces the idea of marketing & branding, as from the processual perspective innovation results from thorough customer and user-engagement (who, where and how), step-by-step approaches (processual perspective) and sound perception of a product / service, organisational process or marketing model (depending on the innovation goal itself) delivering shared monetary and social value for both customers / users and owners (innovators).

- In this, in its nature, innovation concept already includes key elements of the 7 Ps concept (7 elements starting with “P”), i.e. Product, Place, Price, Promotion, People, Processes and Physical Evidence (tangible and intangible features of the innovation, like. shape, design, experience, usability, etc.).
- As a result, with this approach, beneficiaries of this Marketing & Branding Strategy do not need explicitly to focus on 7 Ps, as during the process of innovation, all these 7 aspects are consciously covered – please refer also to Figure 5 below, which showcases practical innovation development step and how you as beneficiaries can combine and dovetail all these issues into one approach – innovation process.
- Further, advocating innovation-driven approach yields further benefits: innovation approach enables to generate changes in an organisation from an ecosystem and holistic perspective, i.e. inside-out (building up innovation competencies and capacities) and outside-in (improving external performance, competitive edge of an organisation through better tailored-made marketing & branding activities). This paves the wave for both development of new managerial competencies (organisational level) to meet transformation needs in the next future on the one hand, and smoothens the shift in the paradigm, e.g. system changes on the market, e.g. new technologies emergence (external market level).
- Innovation approach is proved to be a key to growth, competitiveness and differentiation. As a result, combination of marketing & branding activities for the SBSR and the creation of “InterMarE South Baltic” Brand is a first essential step for the region and regional players to set themselves from other counterparts.

Bearing in mind key domains building up ecosystem approach as displayed in Figure 4 above, namely, Institutional Architecture, Socio-Environmental Architecture, Technological Architecture and Market (Placed-Based) Architecture, which enables system-level analysis and system changes, the SBSR Marketing & Branding is driven by providing strategic actions through the following:

- a) Establishing tools for resource pooling, allocation and (re)combination leading to knowledge excellence and, in turn, innovation development, arriving at sustainable organisational (regional) ecosystem;
- b) Providing key entrepreneurial and creative discovery related tools; and
- c) Transforming the SBSR into a Brand with shared future vision.

As a result, the project proposes the “InterMarE South Baltic” Marketing & Branding Strategy, which follows the rational incentive in, first, utilising existing and or building up new resources, competencies and capacities that will be in high demand in the next future. Second, having built up resources and by enabling competence and capacity capabilities, SMEs and other actors can engage into entrepreneurial discovery and innovation development meeting future market needs and future expectations. Finally, equipped with tools to absorb, transfer knowledge and having engaged into future tailored business activities and / or changing existing approaches into innovative ones, thus enabling to meet future expectations in transformation through innovative products, services, organisational processes or new marketing and business offerings, a new strategic and competitive step can be achieved – developing shared value creation and enabling its capturing in all ecosystem levels – society, ecology (environment), governance, technology and market – the region. In turn, this spurs cohesion across the individual regions belonging to the SBSR and facilitates social and economic integration.

### 3.1 InterMarE South Baltic as A Strong Blue Resource and Competence Cluster

The InterMarE South Baltic brand as a networking and cluster service for blue economies serves as facilitator of businesses and adjusts their individual activities to innovation policies. Thus, the cluster aims at supporting individual blue SMEs by offering knowledge, experiences, contacts and consultancy to strategically match daily business with European, national and regional policies with focus on the Blue

Economy. Hence, it is not the objective to tell companies how to further develop their business in detail, but to provide several insights of Growth Strategies, which should be adapted to individual company demands.

Table 7 introduces some key facts to be fuelled into business by maritime SMEs when considering Blue Economy development and resources' allocation to daily business. The three columns indicate necessary topics to be addressed when developing any business strategies in line with Blue Economy: Resources & Capabilities, Innovation & Strategy and Sustainable Organisation Ecosystem. Furthermore, the matrix provides some key facts or insights, which represent each category and should be reflected in business strategies or at least be discussed and analysed internally, e.g. branding activities on company level to create and establish InterMarE network and cluster. In addition, a differentiation of short- and long-term is offered on a quite general level at this stage. The short-term recommendations mainly refer to identification of own potentials for future development as well as analysing the state of the art for the own business. In the long-term, new technologies and sustainable mechanisms have to be incorporated to the company ecosystem.

In order to capitalise from new knowledge and skills as well as increase deployment of improved capacity on the SME level, SMEs should be aware of available sources on the EU and international level that would grant not only access to information and knowledge about responsible innovation spurring institutions, innovation governance patterns, but also provide entrance to tools of benchmarking, databases and sites of innovation funding. Preliminary the most important institutions on the EU level facilitating innovation performance measurement and future foresight are the following:

- European Innovation Scoreboard / Regional Innovation Scoreboard
- Regional Innovation Monitor Plus
- KETs Observatory
- Virtual Tourism Observatory

- European Cluster Collaboration Platform
- COSME Programme
- Horizon 2020 / Horizon Europe
- European Structural and Investment Funds
- European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund
- SDG Index and Dashboard.

All above listed institutions facilitate responsible innovation development, access to innovation funding and support for innovation. They can be used as initial stepping stone for SMEs in order to start they search and resources' pooling.

Table 7: SBSR Marketing and Branding through Resource Pooling and Innovation

1. Build up Your Resources & Capabilities for Smart and Sustainable Blue Economy	2. Engage into Blue Economy Innovation & Strategy Exploitation	3. Capitalise on Blue Economy from Branding & Engagement in Sustainable Organisation Ecosystem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mobilise your Competitive Resources and Core Competences essential in meeting growing demands for sustainable and smart Blue Economy in the following areas:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Human Capital – increase interactions and collaboration, since SBSR is peripheral and rural areas' comprising region, thus making joint action as a strength</li> <li>○ Social Capital – improve your empathy and understanding of ecosystem and systematic cognition – ecological, economic, financial, institutional; remember that customers / users play crucial role for your success and / or failure through trust, positive experience, shared values</li> <li>○ Knowledge Capital – develop future skills in analytics, innovation, problem solving, Big Data, IoT, micro-electronics, batteries, cybersecurity, STEM subjects, critical thinking and creativity; invest in resilience for uncertain futures; know Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and tools that you can apply on your institutional level</li> <li>○ Cultural Capital – deploy shared leadership principles enabling at shared value creation; build upon Baltic Sea Region cultural and historical identity</li> <li>○ Technological Capital – increase availability and deployment of digital footprint, IT, AI tools, cloud computing, automation, producer-user interaction interfaces</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Utilise available competitive resources and increase share of sustainable resources' use, e.g. marine bioresources; offshore / solar energy; aquaculture; ocean energy</li> <li>▪ Adopt smart and innovative concepts, e.g. waste as a resource and similar business models</li> <li>▪ Know applicable legal frameworks and applicable roadmaps, e.g. European Green Deal, SDGs, Davos Agenda 2030, European Skills Panorama</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Know and consider key future trends &amp; emerging markets:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Clean Technologies in production, transport &amp; logistics, consumption (food, textiles, clothing), tourism, space and automotive</li> <li>○ Resource Efficiency related technologies eco-design production, re-use and recycle (waste-to-energy)</li> <li>○ Digital Transformation (hardware, software, e-commerce, wireless services, online banking, Blockchain)</li> <li>○ Mobility technologies (waterborne freight transportation and passenger mobility)</li> <li>○ Environmental Industries</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Utilise strength of industry cluster within and beyond the region and engage into them – EU Cluster Mapping Tool, EU Regional Ecosystem Scoreboard</li> <li>▪ Innovative through learning – benchmark yourself against others in terms of productivity, innovativeness, social, economic and environmental sustainability, digitalisation, governance and leadership</li> <li>▪ Engage into innovation-driven or accelerating processes:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Investments / Funds – use EU, national and local investments and incentives supporting your environmental and digital transition, e.g. EU Innovation Fund, Just Transition Fund, New European Bauhaus Initiative, Horizon Europe Programme, EU Structural and Regional Funds</li> <li>○ Economic efficiency – design sustainable business models benefitting the entire ecosystem</li> <li>○ Capacity Building – remember that EU sets out to support Europe's twinning lighthouses / leaders – green and digital transition going hand in hand</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build up your Competitive Advantages by means of:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ value creation – use the addressed key future funding areas, trends and markets</li> <li>○ become a game changer through deployment of Smart Specialisation principles and contribution to Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS)</li> <li>○ claim and prove your contribution to the European Green Deal</li> <li>○ claim your contribution to the SDGs and Agenda2030</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Join InterMarE South Baltic Brand by:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Joining the network through the database on <a href="http://intermare-southbaltic.eu">intermare-southbaltic.eu</a></li> <li>○ Join events, exhibitions and trade fairs organised or promoted by the InterMarE South Baltic brand and network</li> <li>○ Get revenues from the joint commercial activities (promotion campaigns) through placement on your logo on the InterMarE South Baltic brand and network</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	1. Build up Your Resources & Capabilities for Smart and Sustainable Blue Economy	2. Engage into Blue Economy Innovation & Strategy Exploitation	3. Capitalise on Blue Economy from Branding & Engagement in Sustainable Organisation Ecosystem
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Deploy tools for making your tailored-made analysis: SWOT, PESTLE, STEEP, DPSIR; Life Cycle Approach, Scenario Development, Customer Journey, Persona Method, Shadowing, etc.</li> <li>▪ Develop your one marketing concept with the steps:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ use regional identity (water, health, environment, history) for your marketing purposes;</li> <li>○ analyse your products or services in terms of societal, environmental and economic sustainability principles; resource efficiency; circular economy; aesthetics, desirability (appealing) and durability;</li> <li>○ analyse your target groups on local, regional and international level</li> <li>○ plan specific tailored-made marketing measures – communication and distribution</li> <li>○ use collaborative and branding platforms – InterMarE South Baltic, topical exhibitions and fair trades</li> <li>○ ensure institutional, financial sustainability of your marketing strategy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Boost and make use of cross-border cooperation:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Exchange knowledge through projects, events and resources that are free of charge, thus saving own resources, but building networking, knowledge capacity</li> <li>○ Learn on and from best practices from innovation leaders in the region (Sweden, Denmark, Finland) through cooperation across borders</li> <li>○ Create synergies that enable boosting your performance and marketing activities – joint market performance and penetration, public awareness raising, solidarity in the region</li> <li>○ Attract EU funds for any projects you need to implement through engagement in topical networks or finding your local contact points, e.g. Enterprise Europe Network (EEN); Interreg, Horizon Europe Contact Points</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reduce your investment costs for marketing and branding activities through InterMarE South Baltic brand and network standing for maritime cluster, as clusters have proven higher productivity</li> <li>○ Increase your visibility and attractiveness by joining the IntermarE brand and network – maritime SMEs are dispersed and bound mainly to periphery of economic interactions</li> <li>○ Improve orientation, facilitate reliability and decision making</li> </ul>
<b>Short-term</b>	Future Resource / Competence Identification & Development	Identification of Future Profitable Performance Areas and Actions Improving Environmental and Digital Transition	Positioning in the Market through Collaborative Brand
<b>Long-term</b>	Skills, Capacity and Competence Building Meeting Future Demand and Reducing Bottlenecks	Competitive Advantage Sustainable Growth Perspectives	Sustained Competitive Advantage Shared Value Creation Customer / User Binding

Source: compiled by the authors

### 3.2 InterMarE South Baltic as A Learning Region with Entrepreneurial Discovery & Smart Specialisation

In order to capitalise from gathered knowledge, built up competencies and capacities as well as to engage into entrepreneurial discovery process, which, in turn, follows combination and integration of knowledge from different domains and under inclusion of different across academia & research, policy makers, businesses and society at large, SMEs are given sound capabilities to engage into innovation – creation and discovery process. Another crucial policy approach, which needs to be implemented on business level as well is Smart Specialisation or Regional Innovation on Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3). The Smart Specialisation approach is one of the key pillars of the Europe 2020 Strategy in terms of economic development and growth policy thinking (McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2011) as well as an approach to avoid dissipation of European Union (EU) funds among regions (Rusu, 2013). The basic idea can be traced back to the rising productivity gap between Europe and the USA in mid 90's, when European policy makers had to look for alternative policies to impede further economic back path. After announcing the Smart Specialisation initiative on European level, all NUTS-2 regions were in a position to develop individual strategies according to this top-down policy and include sufficient monitoring systems. With the ending of the funding period 2014-2020, the strategies will be monitored on successful policy implementation deriving recommendations to amend the regional Smart Specialisation Strategies for the upcoming funding period 2021-2027.

To continue sustainable development in Europe, the European Green Deal was announced as the new Growth Strategy for the EU towards a more sustainable economic and society (EC, 2019). This strategy aims to cover all economic sectors by introducing new growth opportunities and activities. However, new strategic governance capacities are required for successful implementation (Larosse et. al., 2020). The Smart Specialisation approach follows the same idea to identify and use regional potentials to support innovative and competitive development. Therefore, Smart Specialisation policy can be a key pillar in the European governance



transformation to reach the objectives of the European Green Deal until 2050. Thus, a specialisation by the regions using Key Enabling Technologies (KETs) or Knowledge Intensive Business Services (KIBs) to particular fields or priorities is unavoidable.

The strategic matrix on SBSR Marketing & Branding by means of Collective Learning and Entrepreneurial Discovery on individual SME level as shown in Table 8 below proposes key fundamental actions that are necessary across the entire Regional Ecosystem Interaction Domains to enable blue SMEs to build up innovation capacity starting from:

- a) resources pooling and generation,
- b) over deployment of resources for innovation,
- c) towards improving strategic positioning and competitiveness through rare, non-imitable, and non-substitutable as well as valuable resources, competencies and capacities, and
- d) arriving at holistic perception of an organisation and the entire region as a sustainable and smart one.

These four fundamental steps empower regional SMEs to develop their own strategies and / or improve existing ones in a step-by-step approach addressing challenges, needs and expectations from the entire social and economic system. Considering given European policies for business strategy development, SMEs shall parse that innovation in the EU, and especially in the SBSR, which due to its natural position is bound to environmental compliance, as a policy-driven approach, where most of business interactions under the given new transformative conditions, such as high resource efficiency and sustainability, environmental compliance, social inclusion and growing integration, require new (re)combination of strategic actions and adaptations. Only by doing this, the BSSR and its main business players will be able to break through the peripheral position the region has occupied and to excel itself as the region with strong knowledge, sound learning & discovery potentials and placement of

customers and users into the centre, thus leading towards shared value creation, which, in turn, is at the heart of the brand.

The Table below merges the four introduced Interaction Domains of blue SMEs (columns) and four key areas to be considered for participation in the RIS3 from a business perspective. As argued in the earlier sub-chapter considering European policies for business strategy development creates direct and indirect benefits for SMEs. The same idea applies for Smart Specialisation and the regionally identified priorities. From the business perspective the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) is a crucial component to implement this innovation policy. Such processes are based on Open Innovation as well as interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches. Nevertheless, detailed “planning” of an EDP is not possible, but can be fostered and accelerated through business activities and strategies.

Within the table, key facts and areas are listed to classify the four introduced interaction domains to the Smart Specialisation concept. In addition, branding is included as main objective of this conducted strategy. Again, this table aims at revealing key points that should be reflected in business strategies for future business development in line with RIS3 and of course Blue Economy.

Table 8: SBSR Marketing and Branding through Collective Learning & Discovery

	Technology Architecture	Institutional Architecture	Socio- Environment Architecture	Market (Place-based) Architecture
<b>Resources &amp; Competence Portfolio</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build-up resources and competences needed for Key Enabling Technologies (KETs):                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Advanced Manufacturing Technologies</li> <li>○ Industrial Biotechnology</li> <li>○ Nanotechnology</li> <li>○ Advanced Materials</li> <li>○ Micro- / Nanoelectronics</li> <li>○ Photonics</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Use Advanced Technologies that will guide future transition:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Internet of Things (IoT) for mobility</li> <li>○ Blockchain</li> <li>○ Robotics</li> <li>○ Artificial Intelligence</li> <li>○ Virtual Reality (VR)</li> <li>○ Big Data</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Align your next years' strategy, business plans and business modelling in line with the key EU priorities on structural and regional levels:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 6 political priorities of the EC for 2019 – 2024: protecting citizens and freedoms; developing a strong and vibrant economic base; building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe; promoting European interests and values on the global stage</li> <li>○ Align your activities on regional level with the EU regional development and cohesion policy: smart Europe, greener and carbon free Europe, connected Europe, social Europe and Europe closer to citizens</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Consider the European Green Deal priorities and targets for 2030 and 2050</li> <li>▪ Ensure your business performance and future actions in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus on intertwined domains of social interactions:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Human Capital</li> <li>○ Cultural Capital (Regional Identity)</li> <li>○ Knowledge Capital</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Strengthen interpersonal communication skills in and outside your business</li> <li>▪ Focus on multicultural competence building</li> <li>▪ Strengthen multilingual competence base</li> <li>▪ Improve your emotional intelligence: empathy, leadership, shared responsibility, cooperation, stress tolerance</li> <li>▪ Be open for new things and engage into learning avenues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Know cost structure of your own and your competitors' offers on the market</li> <li>▪ Consider existing and projected market share of offerings</li> <li>▪ Strengthen positioning on the market through entire ecosystem integration</li> <li>▪ Accept customer / user integration into new offering development</li> <li>▪ Comply with sustainability principles enabling social equity, environmental responsibility and economic efficiency</li> <li>▪ Focus on Knowledge-Intensive Business Services (KIBS) in your offering portfolio</li> </ul>

	Technology Architecture	Institutional Architecture	Socio- Environment Architecture	Market (Place-based) Architecture
<b>Innovation (Processes) &amp; Strategic Positioning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider diversification of your offering portfolio by moving rather from sole product offering towards product-as-a-service offerings, thus enabling entering of niche markets</li> <li>Develop your innovative offerings using processual and holistic innovation canvas</li> <li>Engage more in tangible piloting and demonstration actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make your offerings: products, services processes or marketing solutions compliant with EU policies and governance</li> <li>Utilise innovation driving EU tools and incentives or your business acceleration</li> <li>Strengthen your marketing &amp; positioning through customer / user engagement and more interactions</li> <li>Develop supportive business models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mind sustainability principals once offering something to the market</li> <li>Ensure that any of your offerings is in line with the environmental policy and regulations</li> <li>Focus on natural resources reduction for your trade offerings</li> <li>Think of waste as a resource</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage into Entrepreneurial Discovery Processes</li> <li>Apply for available Research &amp; Development Funds on local, national and EU level</li> <li>Utilise Growth Strategies for your own business purposes</li> </ul>
<b>Branding &amp; Brand Positioning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Become a lighthouse in Digital Transformation in Blue Economy</li> <li>Differentiate yourself as first-mover</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage into Smart Specialisation with areas of energy, biodiversity, circular economy, maritime tourism, aquaculture and thus ensure public governance support for your business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Position yourself as agents in Social and Environmental Compliance</li> <li>Use credentials of Circular Economy and promote yourself as care-taker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider different marketing activities for different markets you are operating in</li> <li>Uphold sustainable transformation through new learning cycles</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainable Competitive Organisation &amp; Ecosystem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve and boost your operational and technological capacity</li> <li>Established infrastructure that will meet future production or servitisation requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build up your future business around pillars of resource efficiency, differentiation and strategic Flexibility</li> <li>Capitalise on build up trust and customer satisfaction, thus enabling sustainable growth through customer / user bonding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Benefit from state-of-the-art knowledge and competences</li> <li>Build up competitive and dynamic capabilities</li> <li>Benefit from social mindset, thus increasing your visibility and reliability in public and non-profit sectors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Become strong partner in sustainable supply chains</li> <li>Establish yourself as sustainable business offering green products and services</li> </ul>

Source: compiled by the authors

### 3.3 InterMarE South Baltic as A Brand with Shared Vision for the Future

The last strategic matrix of layer delivers key strategic actions placed in the time axis. In this, specific short- and long-term actions are proposed that enable regional SMEs and the entire region to smoothly move towards digital transformation, smart specialisation and thus strengthen competitive position and branding of the region and SMEs innovation outputs. The previous two sub-chapters already mentioned two important innovation policies for future European and SBSR development. Hence, from the SMEs perspective not all activities may fit into this kind of policies. Nevertheless, the uncertainty of failing will strongly decrease for all businesses being able to adapt future visions for the own strategy development in line with mentioned policies. Therefore, the following Table provides some actions, which should be part of any companies' strategy and future orientation of the own business under the three identified future visions of Digital Transformation, Smart Specialisation and Branding. Activities are divided into short-term and long-term perspective and are shortly justified from the present point of view.

Future Visions are a selection of currently discussed obstacles for blue companies in the SBSR and could be enlarged on individual basis with further visions such as Green Technologies or Sustainable / Regional Supply Chains. Nevertheless, following previous argumentation and the character of this Marketing & Branding Strategy on macro-level, the three proposed future visions should be identified by every SME of the SBSR and therefore add value to this strategy document. The proposed actions need to be adapted and further developed into clear actions by each company depending on the individual needs and obstacles, which means to transform this theoretical strategy into practical actions in daily business of the respective SME. Chapter 5 provides some tools, which help and support this task. However, the Table below offers a first approach as a framework to develop individual growth and marketing strategies within the companies by presenting key issues to be analysed and elaborated for the short- and long-term perspective of blue SMEs in the SBSR.

Table 9: SBSR Marketing and Branding through Shared Vision and Value Creation

Future Vision	Short-Term (2025)		Long-Term (2030 – 2035)	
	Why	What	Why	What
<b>Digital Transformation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ COVID-19 pandemic hit global, national and regional economies, in particular remote peripheral regions like SBSR is</li> <li>▪ Modern business requires shared value creation through increased customer / user engagement</li> <li>▪ Increase competitiveness</li> <li>▪ Design efficient enterprise processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Implement continuous and tailored made competence building in future industry, technology and demanded skills areas</li> <li>⇒ Upgrade your digital infrastructure in due course</li> <li>⇒ Automate your physical infrastructure</li> <li>⇒ Engage into networks and clusters enabling to overcome isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Emergence and intertwining of markets through digitalisation</li> <li>▪ Increase of security and safety on markets through, e.g. Smart Contracts</li> <li>▪ Increase in horizontal collaboration and cross-cutting issues (e.g. environment + society + education + smart specialisation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Make a switch to IoT and Blockchain</li> <li>⇒ Increase utilisation of digital tools</li> <li>⇒ Maintain data security</li> <li>⇒ Develop digital products and services</li> <li>⇒ Become a mind changer and focus rather on customer through services and business models of product-as-a-service</li> </ul>
<b>Smart Specialisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to funds on regional level will be bound to compliance to Eu cohesion policy and regional development policies</li> <li>▪ Competition over EU funds for innovation will increase</li> <li>▪ EU will guide future industry development through prioritisation of specific highly competitive sectors and areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Check if your business plans are in line with regional, national or EU priorities</li> <li>⇒ Check market structure and market conditions in markets in which you operate</li> <li>⇒ Foster inter- and intra- Entrepreneurial Discovery Processes</li> <li>⇒ Ensure your innovation security through patent applications</li> <li>⇒ Focus on cross-sectoral collaboration</li> <li>⇒ Concentrate on Emerging Industries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Transition to uncertain future markets with volatile, complex and ambiguous environment</li> <li>▪ Increase of Future and Emerging Technologies through dedicated funding (e.g. Horizon Europe Programme)</li> <li>▪ Increased global competition with new emerging world regions</li> <li>▪ Regional resource vulnerability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Ensure on-time access to global resource &amp; competence pool</li> <li>⇒ Regularly upgrade competitive edge of your business and your smartness</li> <li>⇒ Attract and sustain talents in your business and in the region</li> <li>⇒ Focus on competitive strength's sources – creative tools and design needed for integrative and complex problem solving, (eco)system thinking and acting</li> </ul>

Future Vision	Short-Term (2025)		Long-Term (2030 – 2035)	
	Why	What	Why	What
<b>Branding &amp; Competitive Edge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Synergy and scale effects</li> <li>▪ Increase in intersectoral cooperation</li> <li>▪ Call for knowledge exchange</li> <li>▪ Increase in interregional cooperation across world regions</li> <li>▪ Increase of intertwined market and moral economies with multicultural offerings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Enter specialised InterMarE South Baltic network and brand your business together with other – acting together makes you stronger</li> <li>⇒ Participate in growing networks and clusters</li> <li>⇒ Increase utilisation of public-private partnerships and value generation for public / social purposes</li> <li>⇒ Establishing your brand policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Growth of world brands and customer bonding</li> <li>▪ Increase in emotional and behavioural marketing through more visualised and emotional appealing</li> <li>▪ Increase in competition about customer / user data</li> <li>▪ Increase focus on servitisation rather on pure product offering on the market, thus making customer / user a central offering element</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Engage in global value chains</li> <li>⇒ Increase your customer / user interactions</li> <li>⇒ Sustain utilisation of InterMarE South Baltic brand for your regular internationalisation activities</li> <li>⇒ Participate in regular branding and strategic positioning events</li> <li>⇒ Benchmark your marketing and branding activities with global leaders and learn from them</li> </ul>

Source: compiled by the authors.

## 4 What's Next? Increasing Blue Economy Capacity in Small Steps. A Practical Roadmap for Beneficiaries

As shortly mentioned in chapter four, this strategy document serves as framework or initiating paper to adopt presented key insights and information to an own strategy for marketing and business development within the blue SMEs of the SBSR. Hence, the authors recommend to use this systematic approach for individual strategy development. This also means to analyse and adopt methods and tools from innovation and organisational culture as well as strategic and regional ecosystems. In other words, the recommendation is to adopt and implement cross-disciplinary, multi-level and holistic approaches into daily business and strategy development.

### 4.1 Established practical tools for SMEs Driving Innovation Capacity Building

In the following, this Strategy presents some creative tools that might help blue SMEs to elaborate own marketing strategy actions. The basic idea behind is to utilise specific creative (design-driven) tools and capitalise on results (sustainability through branding).

Peter Drucker's<sup>7</sup> celebrated quote "Culture eats strategy for breakfast" doesn't undermine the power of a well-crafted business strategy, but rather implies that the successful execution of any strategy is closely linked to an accepting organisational culture. In short, you need your people to back you up – organisational culture. Another well-known quote underlining the necessity to include creative tools and methods was

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<sup>7</sup> Peter F. Drucker (1909 to 2005) is regarded as one of the pioneers of modern management theory, the most important business mastermind of the 20th century, and an original and independent thinker. Born in Vienna, he was Professor of Management at New York University, has advised governments, public authorities and numerous large companies, and has written numerous books, including the management classic "The Effective Executive".



stated by Marty Neumeier<sup>8</sup>: “Branding is the process of connecting good strategy with good creativity”.

The following Figure illustrates such a creative tool for step-by-step innovation development designed as auditing process to think out of the box, which can be used and adopted for any product or service development as well as an elaboration of SME (marketing) strategies (Gerlitz, 2016, 2017; Prause et al. 2018). The process is divided into seven Key Steps, which need to be taken for any entrepreneurial innovative development. For each step the corresponding processes to be implemented in the individual SME chain and connected methods are listed. This of course is an excerpt and proposal of potential processes and methods, which should be defined according to the company’s needs and obstacles. However, presented methods foster the entrepreneurial discovery and innovation capacities in blue SMEs of the SBSR. Also, this Figure may serve as a checklist or framework for in-house innovation development.

Adopting the presented Figure including the key steps for innovation development to the purpose of a (joint) marketing strategy for blue SMEs of the SBSR, the following conclusions can be emphasised:

- The successful development of cross-border collaborative marketing concepts or strategies need to pass through the presented key steps.
- Individual marketing campaign and strategies of blue SMEs of the SBSR shall be based on this auditing tool.
- Sub-national or regional collaborative approaches for marketing activities require a conceptual framework as proposed to coordinate all actors and foster cooperation in the SBSR.

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<sup>8</sup> Marty Neumeier is an American author and speaker who writes on the topics of brand, design, innovation, and creativity. He currently serves as Director of CEO Branding for Liquid Agency, a branding agency headquartered in San Jose, California.

As a result, this Marketing & Branding Strategy strongly believes in creativity and open innovation as drivers for innovation and growth.

Figure 5: Innovation Development Canvas Fostering Innovation in SMEs



Source: Laima Gerlitz (Creative Traditionalisation Companies Cooperation, South Baltic Programme)

Hence, the provided framework for innovation development serves as a helpful tool and can be used on each cooperation level and for different entrepreneurial and innovative processes in blue SMEs – ideation, problem / challenge solving, development of new potentials or for marketing purposes. In this regard, the “InterMarE South Baltic” cluster and brand provides a step-by-step tool for delivering innovation. This approach can be applied throughout entire SBSR Ecosystem, within each of the layer as well as for short- and long-term perspectives.

## 4.2 Recommendation for SMEs – Reducing Current Challenges and Meeting Future Needs

Recommended activities to increase marketing impact and capabilities are listed in Table 9 under column “What” for the short-term and long-term based on the identified Future Visions to overcome well-known blue SMEs’ challenges. As mentioned earlier, it is in the hands of SMEs to adapt the recommended activities and transfer them into clearly defined actions adjusted to their individual business ecosystem using proposed tools. For an easier access to the individual transformation, the present Marketing & Branding Strategy calls SMEs for the following key four actions, which will be essential in meeting future demands, increasing and sustaining competitive positioning and become sustainable transformation lighthouses:

⇒ Competence Building (Short-Term Action for Digital Transformation)

SMEs are characterised by small teams of employees and limited resources. Thus, the responsibilities are widely shared within the team requiring the staff to cover several fields of the business as all-rounder. The smaller the staff the more this effect is visible and traceable. Therefore, human capital is a key success factor for SMEs. Hence, increasing Human Capital by on-going education / training the employees is a crucial recommendation. Workshops / Online Course / Trainings recently mushroomed for all kind of business fields, which allows easy access for SMEs’ staff. As a result, this strategy clearly pinpoints (Table 7), which key skills and competencies will be demanded in order to enable environmental and digital transition.

⇒ Upgrading Infrastructure (Short-Term Action for Digital Transformation)

Digital Transformation is mainly a change of the mindset. However, the infrastructure behind needs to ensure SMEs to follow and foster the transformation. When it comes to marketing activities or campaigns, the digital transformation allows easy exposure to the target groups, but also needs to compete with campaigns of any other company worldwide requiring a professional and up to date capabilities in the digital area – soft- and hardware besides the people behind (Human Capital).

## ⇒ Fostering Entrepreneurial Discovery Processes (Short-Term Action for Smart Specialisation)

An Entrepreneurial Discovery Process cannot be forced by a SME, but the required business environment allows to foster the process and increase the chance to succeed. Furthermore, key concepts such as Open Innovation and cross-sectoral innovation processes (see Figure 5) should be used as main methods for innovative business activities. Especially, marketing requires new and creative approaches to receive the necessary attention of SMEs' target groups. Therefore, it is highly recommended to utilise from the creative industries / sector or Creative Broker and open up the own processes for creative innovation on marketing.

## ⇒ Implementing Brand Policy (Short-Term Action for Branding & Competitive Edge)

Successful branding requires way more than picking up a fancy name and using it for SME products or slogans. As this Strategy proposes, a joint branding strategy for blue SMEs in the SBSR creates positive spill-overs for all participating SMEs through collaborative marketing. Also, the brand needs to be developed on the customer demands and transmit positive path-dependencies. Reaching this goal requires a consequent policy defined on what, when, how and where marketing activities are implemented and published to the target groups and how interaction with customers and users maintained and sustained.

### 4.3 Portfolio of Marketing & Branding Measures for Regional SMEs

Considering the suggested tools for Blue Economy SMEs on capacity level (resources, competencies and capabilities), over operational (innovation process level), towards strategic level (positioning via marketing and branding), thus enabling sustaining of competitive advantage, customer / user bonding and paving the way towards sustainable development, environmental and digital transition refer to a strong toolbox portfolio the InterMarE South Baltic network and brand provides with. Yet, on a daily

basis, Blue Economy SMEs need specific marketing & branding measures that should be deployed in order to achieve short-term (2025) and long-term (2030-2035) strategic goals supporting competitiveness and growth of Blue Economy SMEs in remote and peripheral regions (SBSR) belonging to the competitive and role model macro-region – BSR. For this, the table below showcases a proposal of measures that each Blue Economy SME could utilise or adopt on local, regional, macro-regional, EU or international level. This portfolio is however to be understood as a stepping stone. A tailored made approaches shall be made by SMEs themselves, since each of the SME is differing in terms of market offerings (products, services, systems), culture in which SME is operating, differing legal, environmental, economic and social conditions.

Table 10: Proposed Marketing & Branding Measures for Blue Economy SMEs

Purpose of Marketing & Branding Measure	Marketing & Branding Measure	Geographical Proximity			
		Local	Regional (SBSR)	Macro-regional (BSR)	EU / global
<b>Blue Product / Service Market Launch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>User engagement for pretesting / product / service design appealing via surveys, online interactive sessions – try before you buy</li> <li>Test product delivery / service offering to customers</li> <li>Marketing campaigns in designated areas (e.g. local / regional festivals, yearly events)</li> <li>Visual / vocabular advertisement (posters, TV, radio, flyers, brochures, press releases)</li> <li>Virtual reality campaigns on product / service testing on company's website, cluster pages</li> <li>Opening of product / service demonstration sites (movable stands)</li> </ul>	+	+		

Purpose of Marketing & Branding Measure	Marketing & Branding Measure	Geographical Proximity			
		Local	Regional (SBSR)	Macro-regional (BSR)	EU / global
<b>Blue Product / Service Market Penetration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stands at regional / macro-regional / EU / international exhibitions (InterMarE South Baltic, Amber Expo, SMM, Nor Shipping, Kormarine)</li> <li>Publication of success stories (product / service contribution to local / regional and EU growth; participation in EU competitions; greening labels acquisition from e.g. reducing resource consumption, recycle and re-use)</li> <li>Engagement in public-private partnerships serving sustainable development, in particular to support SDGs in sustainable Cities and Communities, Climate Action, Responsible Consumption and Production</li> </ul>		+	+	+
<b>Direct Customer Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital advertisements (TV, social media, press releases)</li> <li>Regular news lettering</li> <li>Advertisements on fixed / moving items (e.g. public busses, stops and stations, advertising banners)</li> <li>Establishment of social media groups for blue product / service</li> <li>Product presentation events (festivals, hackathons, competitions)</li> <li>Free product sampling / free of charge service promotion days – temporary offerings</li> </ul>	+	+		

Purpose of Marketing & Branding Measure	Marketing & Branding Measure	Geographical Proximity			
		Local	Regional (SBSR)	Macro-regional (BSR)	EU / global
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Company's engagement into good will local / regional actions with product advertisement in, e.g. social inclusion, education, health, environment protection or youth support actions</li> <li>▪ Launch of competition in Blue Growth topics and award to winners with a monetary award / internship (mainly to youth, young entrepreneurs)</li> <li>▪ Flyer / brochure distribution</li> <li>▪ Exhibiting product via local networks, e.g. Chamber of Commerce, Maritime Clusters, Technology Parks</li> <li>▪ Customer / user engagement on company's website (testing report, sharing own experience)</li> <li>▪ Virtual product / service shop toures</li> <li>▪ Loyalty offerings and discounts for multiple product / service purchase without any negative environmental effects</li> </ul>				
<b>Network Expansion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Presentation at regional / national EU / International industry events:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Regional and national Exhibitions</li> <li>○ South Baltic Annual Conference</li> <li>○ Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region</li> <li>○ EU Maritime Day, EU Regiostar</li> <li>○ European Green Week</li> <li>○ European SME Week</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	+	+	+	+

Purpose of Marketing & Branding Measure	Marketing & Branding Measure	Geographical Proximity			
		Local	Regional (SBSR)	Macro-regional (BSR)	EU / global
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Europort</li> <li>○ Euromaritime</li> <li>○ EU Industry Days 2021</li> <li>○ Kormarine Exhibition</li> <li>▪ Entering InterMarE South Baltic network and brand cluster, by using brand logo, registering on the InterMarE South Baltic database and participating in brand events</li> </ul>				
<b>Branding Blue Products / Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Label yourself as “made in the region” “made in the South Baltic” by entering InterMarE South Baltic network and brand cluster</li> <li>▪ Take use of joint regional events and exhibitions as well as opportunity to connect with bigger players</li> <li>▪ Use customer engagement for branding by transferring them new additional offering through your product / service with messages pinpointing personal or professional new achievements, new skills, deep knowledge or new experience</li> <li>▪ Facilitate customer / user feel of belonging through common regional attributes, regional identity pursuant messages in your marketing and branding actions</li> <li>▪ Facilitate customer / user engagement through discovery and recognition actions – provide customers / users with interactive</li> </ul>	+	+	+	+



Purpose of Marketing & Branding Measure	Marketing & Branding Measure	Geographical Proximity			
		Local	Regional (SBSR)	Macro-regional (BSR)	EU / global
	and experience sharing enabling means, e.g. community platforms, blogs, commentary and report functions on your online tools (websites, social media, etc.)				

Source: compiled by the authors

The proposed measures are chosen in line with existing and emerging innovation types in two fields – new offering – products and product systems on the one hand and experience on the other, targeting customer engagement via service, channel and branding related actions and outputs.

The list of provided measures can help regional SMEs in strengthening their market penetration related to the next future. It is essential that regional SMEs understand that respective future actions in marketing and branding will require more focus on service and servitisation, which is seen as a next mega trend and wave in the EU. Here, regional SMEs shall develop product-as-a-service offerings increasing customer engagement, targeting integrative and holistic approaches, product bundling. Compliance of SMEs' performance with sustainable development principles, e.g. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), EU Green Deal and demanded transition require SMEs to adopt more cross-selling and integrative performance. In addition, in the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous environment (VUCA), customer binding becomes a key crucial prerequisite enabling SMEs to growth and sustain their competitive edge on the market.

## 5 Outlook and Future Gains of the InterMarE South Baltic Network and Cluster Brand

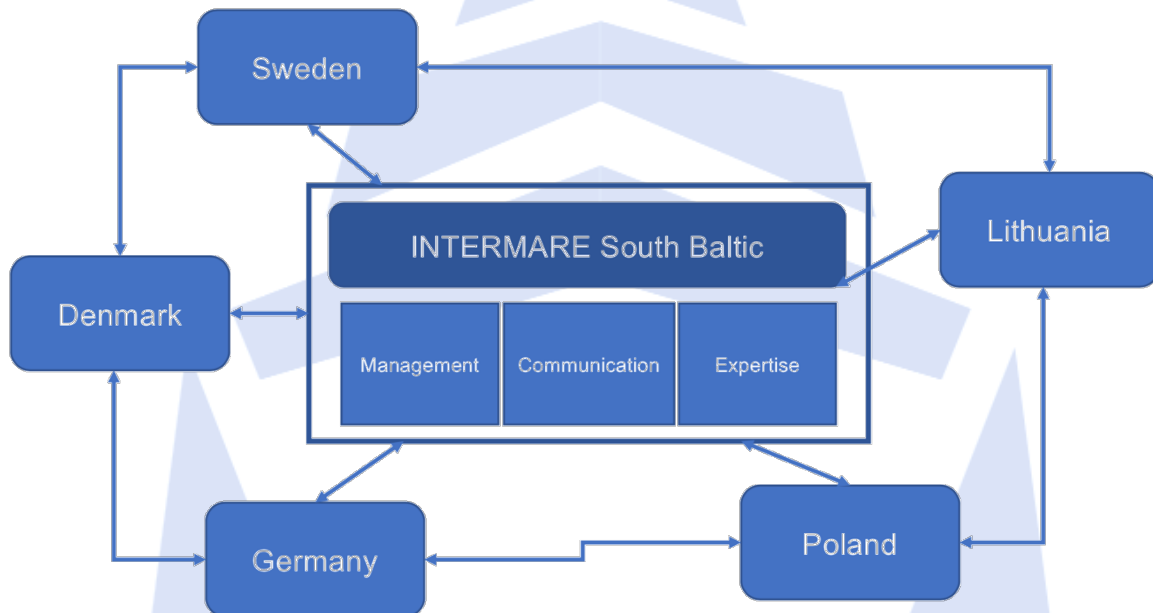
After elaboration of regional potentials for the Blue Economy growth in the SBSR, envisaging innovation and marketing objectives for blue SMEs and providing tools for innovation development for different spheres, this chapter shortly wraps up the proposed steps for future development of “InterMarE South Baltic” as a brand and networking cluster.

The main idea calls for institutionalisation of “InterMarE South Baltic” network and cluster brand. The institutionalisation is necessary to ensure and support a joint Marketing & Branding Strategy for blue SMEs in the SBSR by establishing a responsible observatory under the brand of “InterMarE South Baltic”. This concept is also reflected in cluster theories recommending the establishment of managing bodies and considers institutionalisation on national and macro-level for sufficient marketing and branding activities across the SBSR.

As introduced, “InterMarE South Baltic” shall be established as an observatory for blue SMEs in the SBSR on a macro-level. In addition, each partner country shall enrol one institution acting as national and regional contact point as it is illustrated in the Figure below. Such national contact points serve as national knowledge transfer knots as well as networking facilitators for all blue SMEs in each country. Furthermore, national contact points can assist the respective SMEs in developing and implementing their business strategies. They are also intermediaries to enable cross-border cooperation in between the SMEs, which is a key part of this joint marketing strategy approach to enhance maritime potentials and innovative development for the whole region.

The “InterMarE South Baltic” network and cluster service brand institution – observatory – mainly acts on the macro-regional level, establishing three bodies in order to achieve coordinate and foster all marketing activities in the networking cluster, as shown in Figure 6:

Figure 6: InterMarE South Baltic Marketing & Branding Institutionalisation



Source: compiled by the authors

## **Management**

Implementing a Management Board is a well recommended aspect for strategic leadership and competitiveness (Elenkov et. al., 2005) and a key recommendation for setting up cluster structures. The Management Committee should consist of the representatives from each contact point under the observatory. The main task for this body is the administrative management of all actions in relation with the respective joint marketing strategy for the SBSR region.

## **Communication**

The second body is mainly responsible for the external communication of results, action plans, marketing activities, events, success stories etc. In addition, the internal communication among all contact points and members of the cluster is a crucial task for this body since the success of the emphasised marketing cluster highly relies on a sufficient internal communication. Furthermore, this body is the interlink to European

level as well as to other macro-regional cluster initiatives and responsible to exchange all necessary information, trends and results.

## **Expertise**

The involvement of regional stakeholders and thematic experts is an important requirement to develop sophisticated strategies. This includes academics as well to foster regional development and innovation (Risár et. al., 2018). This body could be seen as consulting unit to enhance a joint discussion on the future vision and action implementation of the InterMarE South Baltic cluster and joint marketing strategy.

In sum, the institutionalisation of the “InterMarE South Baltic” brand will facilitate marketing and branding activities, which are projected to take place on a yearly basis under the brand name. In addition, all interested Blue Economy SMEs are welcome and encouraged to join the “InterMarE South Baltic” network and cluster brand, thus increasing synergy, cooperation and capitalisation capacity and opportunities.

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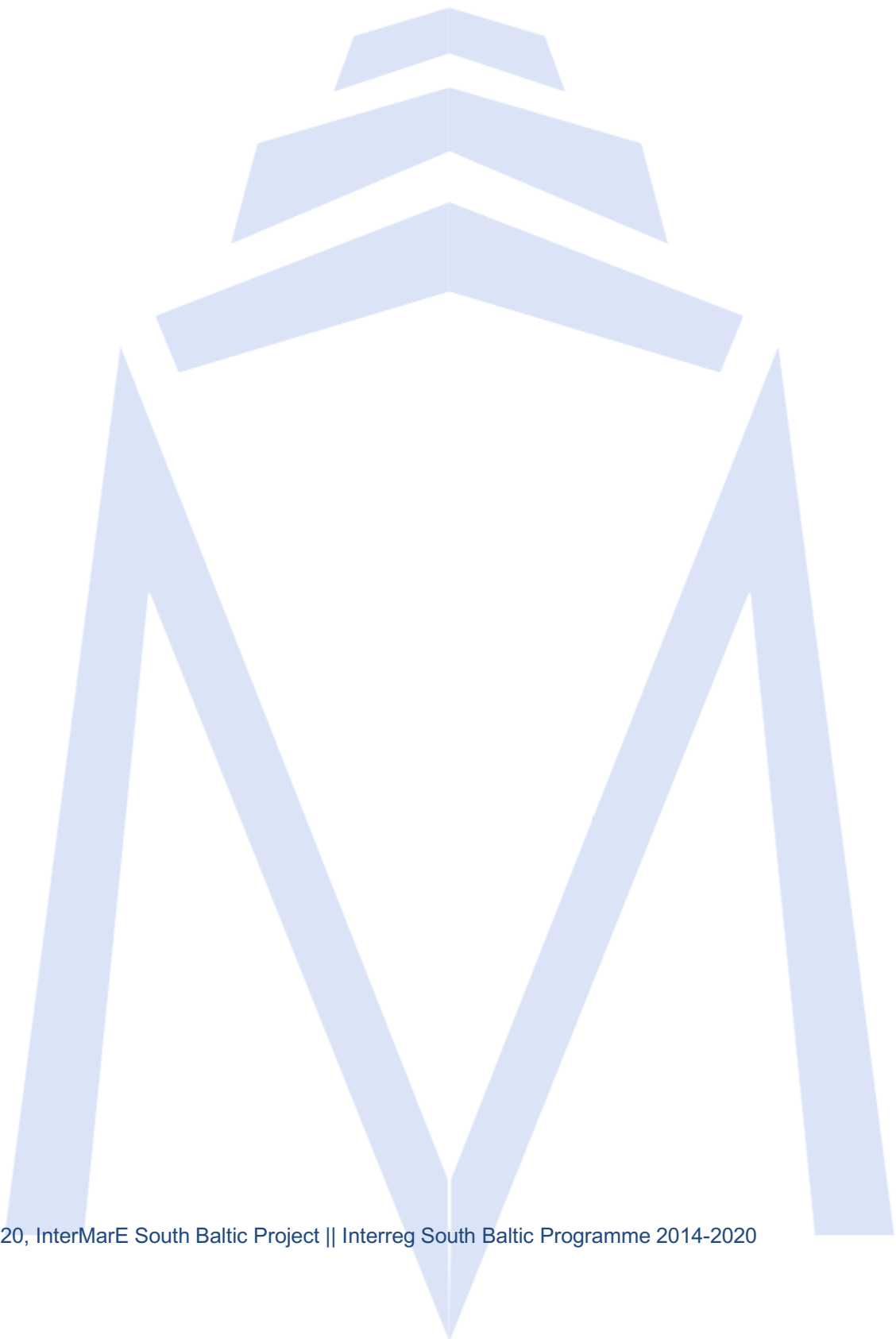
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