*8th IMP-MED Project Technical Regional Workshop*
*(Brussels, 21 October 2014)*

*7th Meeting of the Working Group on IMP in the Mediterranean*
*(Brussels, 21-22 October 2014)*

# VIRTUAL KNOWLEDGE CENTRE (VKC) [1]

## Overall background & Objectives

Following the results of a "Feasibility Study for the Mediterranean Sea Maritime Development Cooperation"[2], and the outcomes of the 12th FEMIP Conference that took place in Athens on April 2013[3], the European Commission (EC), European Investment Bank (EIB) and International Maritime Organization (IMO) have proposed the development of a "Virtual Knowledge Centre (VKC) on marine and maritime affairs in the Mediterranean" allowing for the consolidation and sharing of all relevant available general, technical and sectorial information in the region.

The IMP-MED project has been given a mandate to develop the VKC concept through a feasibility study in two phases.

## Phase 1

The first phase of the feasibility study was completed in October 2013 and consisted of an **inventory of on-line Knowledge Management Systems (KMS) providing information on marine and maritime data in the Mediterranean region**[4]. The inventory provides a mechanism to understand the current situation, identify potential synergies with existing systems and learn from various approaches.

Phase 1 culminated in a Final Report containing a description and analysis of selected KMS already available on-line and specific recommendations for the future definition of an IMP Virtual Knowledge Centre. The results were presented at the 6th Meeting of the Working

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[1] This document has been prepared as part of the EU-funded Project - Integrated Maritime Policy for the Mediterranean (IMP-MED), led by WS Atkins International Limited and cannot be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

[2] More information about the results of the feasibility study:
http://www.amiando.com/eventResources/S/S/JrzRv15gDNofp0/EIB_Study_on_Mediterranean_Sea_Maritime_Development.pdf

[3] More information about the 12th FEMIP Conference:
http://www.amiando.com/12thFEMIP_Conference.html?page=906832 and
http://www.amiando.com/eventResources/1/q/F1SU1gXzfuV5Qb/JOINT_WORKING_DOCUMENT_EN.pdf

[4] In this context, the Knowledge Management System is defined as any IT system that has compiled information collated from multiple sources in different formats and provided a gateway to search for and have access to this information in an organized and structured manner.
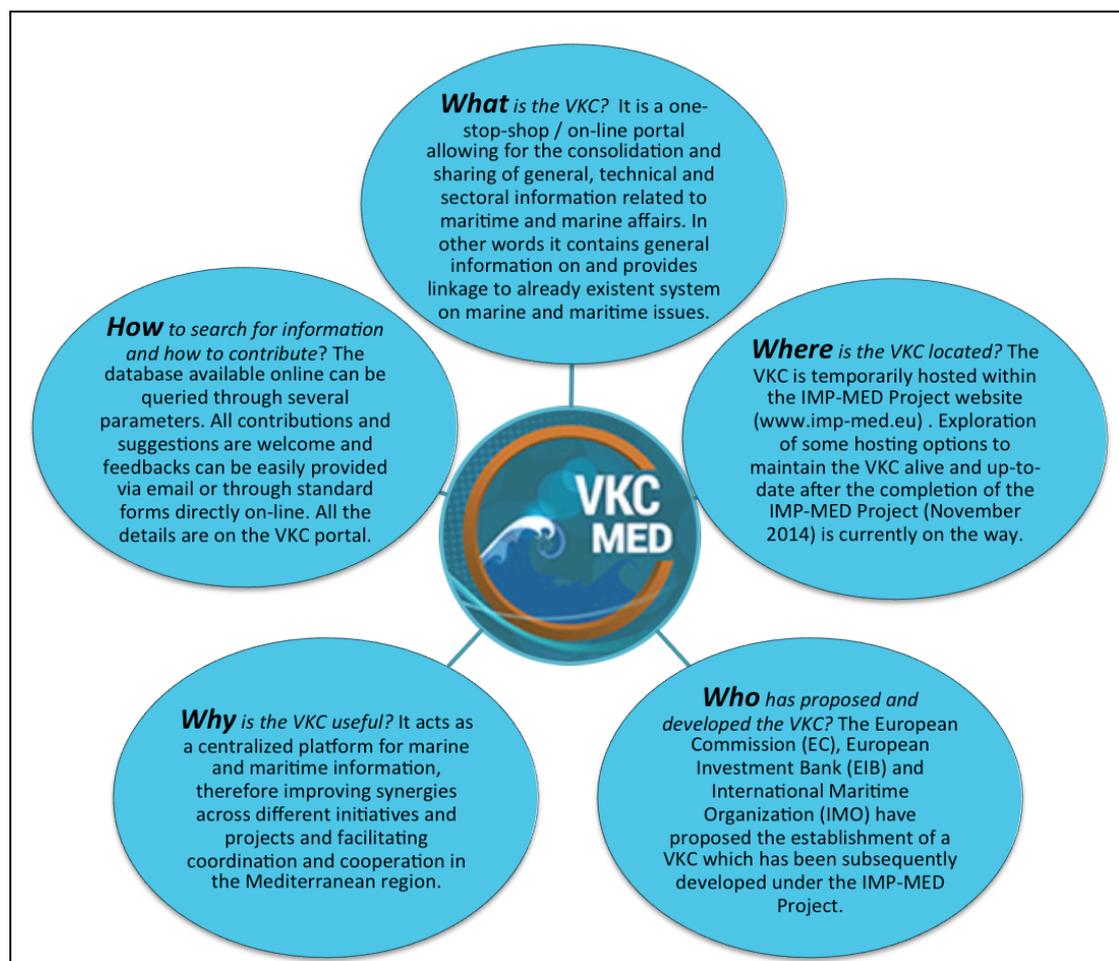
Group on Integrated Maritime Policy in the Mediterranean and at the 6th Technical Regional Workshop of the IMP-MED Project at the end of October 2013[5].

## Phase 2

During the above-mentioned events, the IMP-MED Project Team received the mandate to continue the Feasibility Study into a second phase and in particular to:

1. develop a "basic version" of the VKC by uploading the results of the inventory on a dedicated portal (within the IMP-MED Project website);
2. explore different options to develop the VKC and keep it up-to-date after the completion of the IMP-MED Project (November 2014).

The first on-line version of the VKC (www.imp-med.eu/vkc) was officially launched in the occasion of the European Maritime Day 2014 (Bremen, 19-20th May 2014) and has been constantly updated and improved to integrate comments received and include new KMS discovered afterwards.



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In order to guarantee the maintenance, management and further development of the VKC after the end of the project, the IMP-MED Team has been screening several hosting options aiming at promoting its appropriation by a permanent structure. The organisations contacted include UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention and its Regional Activity Centres (RACs) (namely PAP/RAC and Plan Bleu), REMPEC, and UfM Secretariat:

- PAP/RAC and Plan Bleu confirmed a potential interest but the actual commitment depends on the decision made from the Mother Organisation, namely UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention;
- UNEP/ MAP – Barcelona Convention confirmed a potential interest because of its unique nature as a legally binding regional framework in the Mediterranean (which involves all the Mediterranean countries and the EU as Contracting Parties) and its expertise and capacity on many of the themes that the VKC contains. The UNEP/ MAP – Barcelona Convention highlighted constraints on various types of resources (financial, personnel, expertise) with respect to the maintenance and updating of the VKC;
- UfM Secretariat is currently evaluating the potential benefits, relevance and constraints associated with the potential hosting of the VKC.

As part of the process, the IMP-MED Project prepared and circulated a questionnaire to the above-mentioned organisations. The replies received allowed the Project experts to identify some recommendations to guide the future hosting towards the improvement of the VKC and expanding its scope.

## Future EU Initiatives

The European Commission (DG MARE) intends to support research work for blue economy development and innovation through the VKC.

A specific action will be launched by the end of the year and will provide useful input for the content of the VKC (e.g. mapping of IMP projects at national and regional level, country details on IMP and "blue growth" issues, mapping of co-operation networks (e.g. maritime clusters), identification and promotion of innovative emerging technologies, promotion of marine and maritime activities for which the Mediterranean countries have a comparative advantage, etc.) with a view to support blue economy and innovation in the region. Further on editorial support should be given to ensure the sustainability of the VKC after its launch and to continuously collect and update information, answer users' queries, and liaise with the structure/ body/ organisation in charge of the site hosting.

## Recommendations

### 1. Future VKC Hosting

As mentioned above, to guarantee the maintenance, management and further development of the VKC beyond the life of the project, the IMP-MED Team has been screening several hosting options. It was generally agreed that hosting in a southern Mediterranean country or in EU Members States should be equally avoided and that international organisations active in the Mediterranean would be the most suitable from a governance and sustainability of funding point of view.

Some organisations with these characteristics (UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention, UfM Secretariat, etc.) have expressed potential interest but several elements need to be addressed before a new host can be confirmed:

- **Funding:** Several costs should be accounted and an annual budget set aside for: hardware and software (if necessary), server hosting, personnel expenses, meetings (decision making meetings, technical meetings, etc.), promotion (events, brochures etc);
- **Decision making structure/setup:** what is the possible set up of the decision-making structure and to what extend and how the Mediterranean stakeholders will be involved in the process;
- **Operational maintenance:** who will be devoted to day-to-day maintenance to guarantee the operational functioning (e.g. maintenance of up-to-date information);
- **Integration with existing vision:** how does the VKC fit with the current policies/ strategies/ programmes promoted by the hosting organisation;
- **Development of scope and content:** what is the added value of the hosting organisation and how it can improve the VKC in the future, also in the vision of widening the concept of the VKC from a pure inventory of existing information toward a more exhaustive Virtual Knowledge Centre promoting blue economy and innovation in the region.

While on the last point (Development of scope) the IMP-MED Team was able to make some concrete proposals described below, the other elements need protracted discussion with the potential hosting organisations and are likely to require some time before they can be defined. The European Commission (DG MARE) initiative on the VKC that will be launched shortly (see above) can support this process and facilitate transition of the VKC to the new hosting organisation.

*2. VKC development*

As a result of the work undertaken by the IMP-MED on the development of the VKC it seems possible to **define and expand the scope of the functions that the VKC should fulfil** in the future. The functions briefly described below have been identified by the IMP-MED Team taking into account all the suggestions received from the stakeholders concerned (European Commission Services (DG MARE, DG DEVCO), all the countries bordering on the Mediterranean and regional organisations, the EU Member States, the Knowledge Management System managers and common users). Nevertheless, more functions can be proposed in the future as a result of the development of the VKC.

| | Proposed Functions | Potential related activities |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | **Keep alive valuable systems which have (or would) run out of funding** and are being (or are likely to be) abandoned. | • Establish bilateral agreements between the VKC and on-going donor or EU programmes funded projects in all the countries bordering the Mediterranean (EU MSs, IPA counties, ENPI south countries) to ensure that the final outputs deliverables of these projects are made available to the VKC once funding is over.<br>• Promote integration of expiring KMS into existing ones addressing related themes. |

| 2 | Extend the scope of the information provided to **best practices and case studies supporting the development of IMP and blue economy** (from any country). | • This could be easily achieved starting from the IMP-MED Project experience with Technical Assistance (TAs) projects in beneficiary countries and extended later on through focused research and interviews with key players in partner countries.<br>• Include a list of national authorities provided by each country to show how cross-sectorial and sectorial competences on marine and maritime affairs are organised at national level and facilitate communication between the countries in the region. |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | **Promote and facilitate the inclusion of information coming from non-EU countries** within the already existing systems. | Southern Mediterranean countries often have difficulties in providing information to the required standard, as they lack the human resources and skills which are often not available. Therefore, possible actions in this area include (in order of increasing complexity) :<br>• Include within a separate webpage in the VKC a searchable list of web-links provided by each country to show the more interesting and useful national sources of information (organisations, authorities, projects, etc.).<br>• Promote the establishment of national VKCs (even simply as an inventory of existing information) so that they can be included as KMS in the Regional VKC.<br>• Provide tailored TA to ENPI South countries to collect and make available specific sets of data (e.g. bathymetric, hydrographical, biological, economic, etc.) and allow them to be represented and contribute to the completeness of the information provided by the existing KMS. |
| 4 | **Extend information content to themes not adequately covered by the existing systems** (e.g. tourism). | • Analysis of gaps in marine and maritime information (knowledge gaps) based on a qualitative assessment of the information available in the KMS included in the VKC.<br>• Fill the gaps through purposely-financed projects/studies proposing the necessity of establishing new systems (with a view to support blue economy and innovation in the region)<br>• Support existing KMS to extend their coverage or improve the information provided. |
| 5 | **Improve coordination and cooperation between existing systems** to reduce gaps and duplication. In particular EU funded systems that could promote maritime integration. | Establish the VKC as coordinator and mediator between different systems to improve governance. This could be achieved through different means:<br>• Create a forum to facilitate discussion and enhance exchange of information and ideas on how to improve coverage of maritime knowledge and the VKC role.<br>• Enlarge the decision-making framework of the VKC through the active involvement of KMS managers and other concerned actors.<br>• Agree on responsibilities and establish simple and transparent coordination practices and quality control procedures. |
| 6 | Encourage the redesign of the information provided in the KMS to make it more **tailored to the needs of final users**. | Conduct a focused needs assessment exercise (e.g. through a questionnaire to be sent) on some categories of users (e.g. decision-makers) to clearly determine what kind of information they would like to see and how it should be presented. |
| 7 | **Improve technical functions to facilitate promotion and dissemination of information** at different levels. | • Improve the user's interface of the VKC through tutorials, users guides, FAQs and specific tools (such as advanced search, pop-ups supporting the user etc.).<br>• Translation of the VKC contents into French and Arabic.<br>• Make the online VKC responsive to other support devices (Smartphones and tablets) or design specific applications.<br>• Create a link to the VKC in all the EU projects and programmes related to Mediterranean and/or marine and maritime issues |

| | | • Create a newsletter and inform users on news through subscription. |
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The figure below proposes a summary of the potential new functions of the VKC (beyond the basic maintenance and updating of the existing on-line inventory) and how these functions should be activated under different development scenarios. The different scenarios are not intended as alternative and mutually exclusive options but as a series of modules to be added to the basic functions towards the development of a VKC acting as a catalyst of maritime knowledge (Scenario D). As a result the scenarios entail an increasing degree of commitment and cost ranging from approximately 20-30,000 Euros per year (Scenario A) to over 250,000 euros per year (Scenario D).

**Figure - VKC Development Scenarios**