

OOS2025-1204, updated on 03 Sep 2025

<https://doi.org/10.5194/oos2025-1204>

One Ocean Science Congress 2025

© Author(s) 2025. This work is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License.



Rethinking the Blue Economy: Integrating Social Science for Equitable and Sustainable Outcomes

Jerneja Penca¹, Irmak Ertör², Marta Ballesteros³, Birgit Pauksztat⁴, Maciej Kowalewski⁵, Dražen Cepić⁶, Sebastian Villasante⁷, Michael Briguglio⁸, Natasa Vaidianu⁹, Cristina Piñeiro-Corbeira¹⁰, and José J. Pascual-Fernández¹¹

¹Science and Research Centre Koper, Koper, Slovenia (jerneja.penca@zrs-kp.si)

²Bogazici University

³Spanish Institute of Oceanography IEO-CSIC

⁴Nordland Research Institute

⁵University of Szczecin

⁶Institute for Social Research in Zagreb

⁷University of Santiago de Compostela

⁸University of Malta

⁹Ovidius University of Constanta

¹⁰University of A Coruña

¹¹University of La Laguna

In 2024, the innovative, emancipatory and ecosystem-based potential of the original Blue Economy concept remains largely unrealized. The Blue Economy's implementation measures, outputs and outcomes have often produced negative impacts on natural resources and social equity. While the Blue Economy discourse offers a platform for bridging the persistent science-policy divide, effective decision-making requires an enhanced approach to producing and communicating scientific knowledge. This paper outlines the reasons for a stronger integration of social science perspectives in Blue Economy research and policy engagement, showcasing how to do so, using the example of COST-funded network RethinkBlue. We argue that social sciences are essential for (a) holistically and critically comprehending the existing Blue Economy; (b) designing integrative decisions in a dynamic social, economic, political, technological and environmental context, through both advance planning and response measures, and (c) generating artefacts and boundary objects to support knowledge production and the science-policy interface. Achieving these goals demands: a) interdisciplinarity collaboration across diverse scientific fields, particularly among social scientists, organized around thematic issues rather than sectors; b) co-creation through cross-sector partnerships on topical and emerging issues; c) active knowledge translation and boundary-spanning efforts, d) knowledge sharing and capacity building to enhance collaboration between social scientists and policymakers; and e) a commitment to transparency to ensure ethical, equitable, and accountable operation of the network. In the mid-term, we expect such efforts to gradually transform how we conceptualize and implement marine and coastal activities, specifically through a redefinition of priorities beyond profit maximization to emphasize

well-being, equity, resilience, ecological sustainability, and the development of new governance models that are more inclusive, participatory, and adaptive, and a science-policy interface that informs policy in ways that are more nuanced and sensitive to social context. A greater integration among social sciences is a pre-requisite to a truly interdisciplinary framework, drawing on social and natural sciences, and a development of the economic agenda of Blue Economy into a hybrid field that fosters trust in marine and maritime policies and enhances their legitimacy. The findings are relevant to the broader debate on ocean governance, supporting reflective thinking on how to effectively contribute to the Ocean Decade vision 2030.