

MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING RESEARCH NETWORK

The Emergence of Marine Spatial Planning

Marine spatial planning (MSP) is a newly-expanding approach to marine management. Stakeholder organisations, scientists and policy makers are promoting MSP as a solution to the historic difficulties of marine governance and the deteriorating state of the marine environment. Drawing on conservation-inspired initiatives, notably in Australia and North America, pilot projects and statutory arrangements are moving ahead in a range of national jurisdictions and regional seas, typically with the overriding goal of contributing to sustainable development.

Although not initially at the forefront of this movement, some European nations and the European Union are now embracing the concept of MSP with enthusiasm and promoting MSP systems in European waters - partly with wider marine strategies in mind. However, this is in the context of seas under greater pressures than in many other areas where MSP has been practiced, and wider objectives are being set for the use of the seas, including the promotion of new uses. Moreover, both in Europe and beyond, MSP is being conceptualised and practiced in different ways, partly reflecting different systems of governance and policy priorities. For instance, the European Commission refers to maritime, rather than marine, spatial planning, placing a stronger emphasis on MSP as a tool to support maritime economies. Different national traditions of land-use planning are also introducing diversity into MSP practice. Understandings of the marine world and human interaction with it are also expanding, contributing to new planning approaches, such as the incorporation of temporal considerations. A number of 'marine plannings' are in fact taking shape.

The Need for Academic Research

The emergence of MSP and the divergence of understanding and practice that is arising raise fundamental questions. For example:

1. What part will MSP play in wider coastal and marine policy and governance, and how might it contribute to the achievement of societal goals?
2. What will be the environmental, economic and social outcomes of MSP, and how might these vary in different contexts?
3. How will MSP interact with wider coastal management, administrative, planning, legal etc systems, and how will it shape social engagement with the marine environment?
4. Which stakeholders are likely to engage in MSP, how do they understand the issues involved and how best should they be engaged?
5. What can be learnt from current practices of MSP, and how might good practice be transferred to other contexts?

These are questions that require the engagement of several academic disciplines and also recognition of the multiplicity of approaches developing within the general framework of MSP. (See the Addendum for further examples of possible research questions.)

The development of MSP has been led mainly by marine and coastal science, management and policy communities; academic contributions have usually been associated with policy-making and practitioner-oriented bodies. Much of the debate and literature surrounding MSP has focused on its emergence, establishing definitions and principles and, to some extent, monitoring progress. Although this work is not to be decried, there is scope for wider academic engagement with the development of MSP and a more critical approach to investigation.

This is not for purely academic reasons, but with the purpose of making a progressive contribution to the development of MSP. By developing multi- and trans-disciplinary perspectives, with a particular emphasis on the contribution of the social sciences, and by embarking on rigorous empirical and analytical research, a richer understanding can be reached of the potential of MSP to achieve desired goals. This can feed into the search for solutions to marine problems that MSP seeks to address. A parallel can be drawn with academic studies in terrestrial planning, where a tradition of critical exchange between planning thought and practice is well-established and has assisted significantly in the development and application of new approaches.

Creating a Research Network

In order to create a forum and build up capacity of this kind, an academic network of researchers engaged in the development of MSP is now being established. This network was first proposed at the *People and the Sea* conference at the University of Amsterdam in July 2011. Its overriding purpose is to make a progressive contribution to the development of MSP. The members of the network seek to achieve this by bringing critical reflection and analysis to bear on current trends in MSP and by engaging constructively with MSP practice, thus facilitating knowledge exchange and contributing to education and training programmes.

The network embraces a wide range of disciplines, including natural sciences, but with a strong representation of relevant social sciences. It stresses the importance of interdisciplinary research in bringing about greater understanding. It values the involvement of practitioners and policy-makers in order to make stronger connections with MSP practice, and with research students giving concentrated attention to MSP research. Given the group's provenance, it has a European focus, but wishes to be inclusive of other international members.

The network will engage initially in the following activities:

- hosting a meeting to explore key themes and set out an agenda for action;
- an online discussion platform, possibly via an existing website;
- exploration of funding sources for research, especially at European and transnational levels, and of possible cooperation with relevant regional and international programmes

The working language of the group will be English, though the use of other languages will be encouraged where appropriate. For example, documents, or summaries, could be translated where there is the capacity to do so.

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Addendum: Examples of Potential Research Questions and Topics

1. What objectives should MSP pursue: sustainable development, welfare, economic planning...? Is it possible to define an overarching purpose of MSP, such as upholding the 'public interest'?
2. To what extent are systems of MSP being shaped by the very different national traditions of terrestrial planning, eg. regulatory vs. discretionary systems?
3. Is a distinctive European approach to MSP developing, reflecting the priorities of the EU and its member states, and marking a shift away from the conservation-oriented priorities of MSP elsewhere?
4. What is the impact of the legal framework(s) being used to implement MSP?
5. What planning and decision-making processes are or should be used within MSP? What assessment and decision-support tools are being used to inform MSP?
6. Can a zoning approach to MSP adequately respond to the dynamics of the marine environment and the uncertainties of future sea uses and interests?
7. To what extent are certain interests likely to benefit the most from the application of MSP, and what are the socio-political forces favouring these interests?
8. How might socio-economic, as well as environmental, factors be incorporated into planning and decision-making?
9. How are current developments in terrestrial spatial planning influencing the formation of MSP? What is / should be the relationship between MSP and Integrated Coastal Zone Management?
10. How do the different forms of property and development rights at sea influence patterns of state intervention by means of MSP?
11. Might relational (rather than physically-deterministic) understandings of space be more responsive to attempts to regulate human involvement in dynamic marine environment?
12. What are the information requirements for MSP and how are these being defined?
13. How should uncertainty and limited knowledge be taken into account in MSP? How might environmental capacity be set in the absence of good scientific information?
14. How might communities of interest be defined for marine settings and socially-just forms of involvement be defined? What methods of stakeholder/community engagement/participation might be effective for MSP?
15. How might marine spatial planners be formed, and what is the role of formal education in MSP?
16. Should MSP be based on concepts such as marine ecosystem services and marine social impact analysis, and if so, how?
17. How does the introduction of MSP affect our social and scientific understanding of the seas and oceans?
18. What are the implications of MSP, and its different forms, for transnational marine governance?