



Fixing marine governance in Fiji? The new scalar narrative of ecosystem-based management

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ABSTRACT

Although there is widespread concern over degrading marine environments, there is debate within the global marine conservation agenda about the nature of the problem and appropriate solutions. At the center of this debate lie questions about the appropriate scale at which to plan and implement marine resource management. In the late 1990s, Fiji became recognized as one of the most successful examples of community-based marine resource management in the world. Recently, there has been a move to manage human–environment interactions at larger “natural” scales. We draw from the political ecology and “politics of scale” literatures, and a critical realist understanding of nature and politics, to explain the emergence of large-scale management and conservation in Fiji. We contribute to a “political ecology of scale” by developing the concept of a scalar narrative to show how social and ecological scales are reworked in the development of an ecosystem-based approach to marine management in Fiji. In doing so, we consider implications of the struggle to define the appropriate scale of marine management, which is closely bound to debates about the role of science and local participation. Our findings suggest that the struggle to define the scale at which marine management should be planned and implemented is inseparable from the struggle over who should define, inform, and conduct the governance process. We aim to clarify marine policy debates as policy actors worldwide move forward to implement ecosystem-based management, increase marine protected area coverage, and pursue sustainable development.

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“Man is the measure of all things...” (Protagoras, c. 481–420 BC)

1. “Where man is not the measure of all things” (WWF 2010)

In the late 1990s, Fiji, along with the rest of Oceania, experienced a “renaissance of community-based marine resource management” (Johannes, 2002). This shift corresponded with a global trend toward community-based approaches to management, in a variety of guises, in the 1980s and 1990s (Western et al., 1994; Brown, 2002) under rubrics such as community conservation, collaborative management, and community-based management (Adams and Hulme, 2001). In place of top-down models, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies directed attention to the local or community level and helped to promote Fiji in the global imagination as an example of marine management at this scale. As of 2009, over 200

villages across the 14 provinces in Fiji had established community-based management (CBM) in some form under Fiji’s locally managed marine area (FLMMA) network (for a total area of 10,816 km²) (Govan et al., 2009b).

A decade later, international conservation NGOs are attempting to institutionalize another scale of marine management; a scale based on ecological criteria under the rubrics of spatially delineated “ecoregions.” The move to plan and manage at ecoregional scales in Fiji is part of a broader trend among conservation NGOs and donors, and backed by resource managers and scientists in response to their concerns about a global marine biodiversity crisis (Adger et al., 2001; Gray, 2010). One common explanation for marine crises more generally is the mismatch between scales at which ecological processes operate and problems emerge, and those at which they are managed (e.g., Berkes, 2006; Cash et al., 2006). The marine science and conservation community has argued that management is often at too small a scale for the processes at stake (e.g., Roberts et al., 2001). In Fiji, this movement to scale up management is reflected in government commitments to place 30% of marine areas in “ecologically representative networks of marine protected areas” by 2020 (Govan et al., 2009b, p. 11).

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Although there may be ecological arguments in support of large-scale marine management, the move to scale up planning and management to ecological scales has also been interpreted as a backlash against CBM (Wilshusen et al., 2002; Brosius and Russell, 2003) and efforts to integrate conservation and development. For many conservationists, the results of integration attempts have been poor in terms of conservation returns (e.g., Ferraro and Kiss, 2002; Kiss, 2004). As a result, a return to strictly protected areas has been promoted by some (e.g., Terborgh, 1999), though often with new kinds of incentives for would-be resource users; for example, direct payments for people to forgo resource use under terms set in “conservation contracts” is one way that old style protectionism is being repackaged (e.g., Gjertsen and Nietsen, 2010). The “back to the barriers” paradigm has also been linked to the return of a strong U.S.-led vision of conservation (Hutton et al., 2005).

While many have written in a general sense about how these scalar shifts correspond with changes in conservation ideology and policy, there is little understanding about how and why new scales of marine management are constructed, negotiated, and legitimized in particular places (Brosius, 2006). The trend to radically shift the scale at which marine nature is planned and managed for away from the “community scale” and toward the “ecoregional scale” has led us to question how a new scale of marine management is negotiated in a place with a pre-existing dominant scalar management practice, and with what consequences. In Fiji, marine management at the community scale has been on-going and even celebrated as a model. Thus, Fiji provides an illustrative case through which to examine how and why larger management scales are established in a context where the state and its partners have already institutionalized the community scale as the appropriate one for management. In this paper, we suggest that conservationists in Fiji are using a third and most recent approach to marine conservation, ecosystem-based management (EBM), to attempt to ‘fix’ the scalar tensions between ecoregional and community-based approaches by appealing to the logic, language, and practices of both. EBM is adapted differently in different countries, contexts, and professional communities. In Fiji, EBM has been driven by conservation organizations and focuses on spatial planning and management.

In this paper, we use the term marine management to describe any interventions by states, NGOs, and communities to manage marine resources to a wide variety of ends (including conservation). We use the term marine conservation to describe efforts tied to the global marine conservation agenda driven by scientists, NGOs, donors, and some states, with the goal of increased protection of marine biodiversity through expanded networks of marine protected areas, often with extensive no-take zones (see Agardy et al., 2003; Gray, 2010). In doing so, we do not mean to imply there are always clear and strict divisions between marine management and conservation, or the people and institutions promoting them (Jeanrenaud, 2002). The lines are often blurred, as we will illustrate in the case of Fiji. We make the distinction between the two mainly for the sake of clarity in writing.

Drawing from the “politics of scale” and political ecology literatures, we examine the construction of a new scalar narrative, that of EBM, as a potential successor to pre-existing community-based and ecoregional approaches and associated narratives. We argue that community, ecoregional, and ecosystem scales are not just descriptors of spatial extent and/or location, but also tools of a scalar politics invoked in negotiations over what marine management should be. We develop the concept of the “scalar narrative” to shed light on how management scales are established and contested in Fiji. Our analysis of scalar narratives as tools for the conduct of scalar politics reveals that the struggle to define the scale at which marine management should be planned and

implemented is inseparable from the struggle over who should define, inform, and conduct the governance process. We show that debates over marine management approaches in Fiji are not expressed in terms of pro-people versus pro-nature, a general dichotomy noted in the literature (Redford et al., 2006), but rather in terms of preferences over the appropriate scale at which to plan and implement management.

2. Methods

This study is part of a larger research project that is examining how EBM transitions from theory to practice, in Fiji as well as five other sites in different parts of the world. Data for this paper were collected by Sievanen and Gruby through semi-structured interviews with key informants, and direct observation of planning meetings during one month of fieldwork in Fiji in February 2010, and through additional document analysis. Each component was intended to elicit an understanding of how key actors associated with three high-profile initiatives – the community-based FLMMMA initiative, the ecoregional initiative, and the EBM initiative – and formulated positions regarding these approaches. We conducted 25 interviews, ranging from 45 min to 2 h and sometimes spanning several meetings, with scientists and practitioners. A total of 3 academic affiliates, 5 government (fisheries, forestry, and environment) employees, and 17 NGO (conservation and development) employees were interviewed.

We complemented these interviews with direct observations of five meetings related to the implementation of marine management in Fiji. Observation provided the opportunity to view how alternative scalar narratives interacted during negotiations over practice. We also obtained documents related to environmental planning policy in Fiji during the 1990s and 2000s. Key sources were donor documents, reports, and other materials produced by project implementers. The purpose of this research component was to develop a contextual understanding of contemporary debates pertaining to scale in marine management.

3. Political ecology of scale

A “political ecology of scale” has not yet been well theorized (though see Neumann, 2009). However, political ecology work on scale has engaged with debates in human geography on the ontological existence of scale (see Marston, 2000 for an overview of the scale debates), to argue that scale is co-produced by social and biophysical processes (Sneddon, 2003; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Brown and Purcell, 2005; McCarthy, 2005). Thus, while human geographers treat scale as a sociopolitical construct that must be “understood in the context of the processes and power relations that create it” (Silver, 2008, p. 925), political ecology scholarship calls for a “symmetrical approach” (Sneddon, 2003, p. 2245) that takes seriously the role of social and biophysical forces in the “socioecological process” through which scales are constituted (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003).

More recently, Campbell and Godfrey (2010) and Campbell (2007) have problematized our understanding of ecological scale and shown how scales defined using natural criteria can be constructed in support of scalar politics (Campbell and Godfrey, 2010). Building on Campbell and Godfrey (2010), we undertake a political ecology approach to scale that recognizes that the identification and depiction of human and non-human activities is an inherently political process (Forsyth, 2003). In so doing, we direct attention to the “scalar practices of social actors” (Moore, 2008, p. 212) in the sociopolitical process of rescaling, i.e., the politics around competing representations of the scale of human and nonhuman activities and their interactions. Associated with the idea of rescaling is that of a “scalar fix” (Smith, 1995; Brenner,

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