Ocean & Coastal Management 103 (2015) 109–122

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Ocean & Coastal Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ocecoaman

Conflict resolution in coastal resource management: Comparative analysis of case studies from four European countries

Olga Stepanova

School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Box 700, 40530 Gothenburg, Sweden

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 27 May 2014
Received in revised form
21 October 2014
Accepted 26 October 2014
Available online 7 November 2014

Keywords:
Coastal conflicts
Coastal management
Conflict resolution
Knowledge integration
Power relations
Natural resources

ABSTRACT

Coastal resource management requires the resolution of local resource use conflicts. The research on coastal conflict resolution is still scarce despite the progress made in fisheries and marine related conflict studies. Utilizing qualitative methodology this paper makes comparative analyses of strengths and deficits of coastal conflict resolution practices in three conflicts from the Swedish west coast and five conflicts from the United Kingdom, Italy and Belgium, all studied in the context of the European research project SECOA (Solutions to Environmental Contrasts in Coastal Areas). The analyses focus on power relations among the stakeholders and their practices of knowledge use, including knowledge integration and joint learning. The results show deficits of research and practical neglect of these aspects in coastal management. In the discussion the question of how approaches to conflict resolution can be improved and integrated into long-term strategies of sustainable resource management in coastal areas is addressed. It is concluded that complex conflicts over natural resource use require context specific combinations of formal and informal resolution methods. The interconnected components of transformation of power relations, knowledge integration and joint learning are seen as key components of conflict resolution.

1. Introduction – the complexity of natural resource management

Natural resource management and physical planning in urbanized coastal areas are challenged through "complex processes, uncertain understandings, multiple threats, multiple jurisdictions and scales, and multiple stakeholders and perspectives" (Coffey and O'Toole, 2012: 319). These processes include the matching of manifold and competing interests and the resolution of local resource use conflicts (Kojima et al., 2013; Nobre, 2011; Smith et al., 2009; Weinstein et al., 2007; Young, 2009). Such conflicts are rarely analysed in the literature on natural resource management. Here coastal conflicts are broadly defined as resource conflicts that develop within a coastal zone. This basic definition serves as a delimitation criterion, without neglecting the direct and indirect multi-scale implications of such conflicts, which may stretch long beyond coastal zones. Analyses of coastal conflicts vanish in the great diversity of other environmental and resource use conflicts studied in general conflict research (see a review by Stepanova and Bruckmeier, 2013a,b). Research on conflicts of coastal resource use is not yet a developed field of investigation, with the exception of fishery and aquaculture related conflicts, as recent fisheries related (Chang et al., 2012; Lopes et al., 2011; Murshed-e-Jahan et al., 2014; Trimble and Berkes, 2013) and aquaculture related studies (Tiller et al., 2012, 2013) show.

With regard to the scarce research on conflicts in coastal resource use, this paper aims to analyse critically the strengths and deficits of strategies and practices of coastal conflict resolution and proceeds from:

(1) presenting an in-depth comparative analysis of cases from the Swedish west coast and from other European countries in the SECOA (Solutions to Environmental Contrasts in Coastal Areas) project, and
(2) discussing ways to improve coastal conflict resolution by comparing different approaches to the problem.

Attention is paid to forms of knowledge used, procedures for knowledge integration and power relations among actors involved since these themes were often neglected in earlier researches on water and land-related coastal conflicts. An exemplary study of a land use conflict where the above deficits are highlighted is that by Arnold et al. (2012), who also stress the need to study power relations for conflict resolution in the perspective of adaptive co-management.

E-mail address: olga.stepanova@globalstudies.gu.se.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2014.10.017
0964-5691/

Conflict resolution can be understood as part of the process of transforming conflicts into cooperation – through dialogue, reconciliation, negotiation and participation of stakeholders in conflict with their interests, needs and values taken into account (Dudouet, 2006; Kriesberg, 2011; Mason and Muller, 2007; Ostrom and Ahn, 2009; Sandole et al., 2008; Stepanova and Bruckmeier, 2013b; Wittmer et al., 2006). Transformation strategies are effective not only for conflict resolution, but also for the development and improvement of integrated and long-term strategies for sustainable coastal management (Bruckmeier, 2012; Dale and Armitage, 2011; Koontz, 2013; Martín-Cantarino, 2010; Schwilch et al., 2012).

The paper is structured as follows: first the difficulties and deficits of conflict resolution identified in research on environmental and coastal conflict are reviewed; then a critical comparative analysis of conflict resolution practices from the Swedish West coast and from the UK, Italy and Belgium is presented. This analysis is done in two parts: first the forms of conflict resolution are analysed with empirical data from the case studies (Section 3); thereafter successes and failures of conflict resolution are discussed more critically, based on comparative analysis (Section 4). The discussion addresses the question of how to approach, improve and integrate conflict analysis into overarching strategies of sustainable resource management in coastal areas.

1.1. Resolution of coastal conflicts – research and practice

A broad range of approaches are described in the scientific literature and applied to the resolution of resource use conflicts in practice: formal and informal, governmental or user based, arbitration and mediation, direct and indirect, legally enforced and voluntary, knowledge based or culture specific, or combinations of these (e.g., Mongruel et al., 2010; Striegnitz, 2006; Steyaert et al., 2007). Concepts and frameworks for conflict resolution include dialogue, participation, collaboration, conflict transformation, negotiation, modelling, capacity building, bridging organizations, and adaptive co-management, among other (e.g., Sidaway, 2005; Morf, 2006; Wittmer et al., 2006; Dudouet, 2006; Schultz et al., 2011; see also references in Bruckmeier, 2005; Stepanova and Bruckmeier, 2013a,b).

In the few available studies on coastal conflicts, resolution is often addressed through Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM: Forst, 2009; Leal Filho et al., 2008; Mongruel et al., 2010) as a framework strategy that implies stakeholder participation, consultation and negotiation (e.g., Scapini and Ciampi, 2010; Striegnitz, 2006). Furthermore, conflict mediation, marine spatial planning and scenarios facilitated, for instance, by modelling and geographic information systems, are applied to resolve coastal conflicts (Mongruel et al., 2010; Paterson et al., 2010; Striegnitz, 2006; Tuda et al., 2014).

While successful in some cases, participatory or deliberative and collaborative approaches have been sometimes criticized as inadequate or simplistic, unable to embrace the complexity of conflicts with multiple spatial and temporal scales (Arnold et al., 2012; Brandt and Svendsen, 2013; Clapp and Mortenson, 2011; Striegnitz, 2006; Tuda et al., 2014), e.g., when they are applied on a one-size-fits-all basis or seen as the only and sufficient principles for conflict resolution. For instance, the ICZM strategy has been criticized for a variety of reasons, primarily for the diffuse principles that are not suited for conflict resolution (for critical analysis of ICZM see Bruckmeier, 2005; Morf, 2005; McFadden, 2007; McKenna et al., 2008; Stepanova and Bruckmeier, 2013a).

Despite the recognized importance of power relations in participatory and collaborative processes in resource management and governance in general (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Adger et al., 2006; Pomeroy et al., 2004) the attention paid to power inequalities in participatory management practices seems insufficient (Arnold et al., 2012).

The interrelationships between power and knowledge in resource management processes have been pointed out repeatedly (e.g., Berkes, 2009; Jentoft, 2005). In co-management research Adger et al. (2006:7) argued: "Knowledge is a key resource in exercises of power: it is used by both dominant parties and by those resisting action". Although the importance of knowledge use is well recognized (Armitage et al., 2011; Blackmore, 2007; Blythe and Dadi, 2012; Fazey et al., 2012; Leys and Vanclay, 2011), the key processes of using, sharing and integrating knowledge and joint learning in conflict resolution and sustainable resource management receive little attention in coastal research. Only a few newer studies highlight the importance of learning, stakeholder involvement and knowledge integration for the resolution of coastal conflicts (O'Toole et al., 2013; Stepanova, 2013; Trimble and Berkes, 2013).

The literature on natural resource management and coastal conflicts as discussed in this section identifies two critical components in conflict resolution: power relations between the actors and their practices of knowledge use, including knowledge integration, sharing, and learning. These factors guide the analysis of the conflicts presented in Section 3 and 4.3. Other concepts described in the literature as essential for conflict resolution include "conflict transformation" as a basic concept that directs the analysis towards conflict resolution; "participation" and "collaboration" of stakeholders as connecting conflict resolution to broader strategies of natural resource management; and "adaptive co-management" and "adaptive governance" as approaches that provide overarching frameworks for natural resource management. These terms and frameworks that gained importance in conflict research and practices of conflict resolution are reviewed in the Appendix.

2. Materials and methods

Strategies for resolving coastal conflicts can be developed from and improved through analysis of present-day practices of conflict resolution. Three resource use conflicts identified in two case studies at the Swedish west coast are analysed in Sections 3 and 4 on the basis of the findings from the research project "Solutions to Environmental Contrasts in Coastal Areas" (SECOA; see www.projectsecoa.eu). The SECOA project with the conflict analysis made within its frames is one of the most recent and comprehensive studies of coastal conflicts in Europe. The three Swedish conflicts are compared with five coastal conflicts from the UK, Italy and Belgium also studied in the SECOA project. These five cases are from a secondary analysis, used for strengthening of the findings reported for the Swedish cases, and to indicate similarities and dissimilarities of conflict resolution in different countries. The five conflicts were chosen based on the similar methodologies applied for conflict analyses. The comparative analysis of these eight conflicts shows how far conflict resolution has advanced and what deficits of resource management need to be addressed further. Proceeding from a comparison of resolution strategies I discuss possible ways for their improvement.

The three Swedish conflicts are:

- Two conflicts in Torsviken, Gothenburg: through the expansion of the Port of Gothenburg the aims and interests of industrial development come into conflict with nature protection and recreation. A minor conflict, not directly related to the port expansion, over wind power installations in Torsviken emerged with a slightly different stakeholder constellation.
- Wind power conflict in Kungsbacka, Gothenburg metropolitan area: the prevailing goals of natural and cultural landscape conservation and recreation are in conflict with a project of locating wind power in the area.