



Identifying ‘public values’ for marine and coastal planning: Are residents and non-residents really so different?



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ABSTRACT

Planning and management for marine and coastal areas is often contentious, with competing interests claiming their preferences are in the ‘public interest’. Defining the public interest for marine and coastal areas remains a wicked problem, however, resistant to resolution. A focus on more tangible ‘public values’ offers an alternative for policy and planning in specific contexts. However, ambiguity surrounds who or what constitutes the ‘public’, with stakeholder engagement often used as a proxy in marine and coastal research. In this study, the outcomes of participatory processes involving the public from diverse backgrounds and geographical locales were explored. A public participation GIS (PPGIS) survey was undertaken in the remote Kimberley region of Australia to identify the spatial values and management preferences for marine and coastal areas. Similarities and differences between the volunteer public (n = 372) and online panel respondents (n = 206); and for the volunteer public only, differences between residents (n = 118) and non-residents (n = 254) were assessed. Online panelists evidenced lesser quality mapping data and did not provide a reliable means of accessing ‘public’ values. Residents were more likely to map general recreational and recreational fishing values while non-locals were more likely to map biological/conservation and wilderness values. Overall, residents and non-residents were more alike than dissimilar in their mapping of values and management preferences, suggesting that the need to preference local views may be overstated, although there may be differences in policy priorities. Future research should focus on the breadth and representativeness of stakeholder interests to access the views of wider society and hence public values, rather than current approaches where local interests are often the primary focus of participatory stakeholder engagement.

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1. Introduction

Planning for marine and coastal areas is characterised by complexity and conflict, with multiple values and uses involving trade-offs between conservation and human uses. The development of policies for marine and coastal areas may be considered a type of ‘wicked problem’ for which there may be no undisputable public good and no objective definition of equity (Rittel and Webber, 1973). Yet, planning for coastal and marine areas is premised on the protection of public resources, such as fisheries, and

as such should be undertaken in accordance with the public interest (Mikalsen and Jentoft, 2001). ‘Public interest’, however, is an ambiguous ideal that may also be context dependent. Bozeman (2007) links this idealistic nature to the virtual impossibility of exactly determining the ‘public interest’. A focus on public values, which have a specific, identifiable character, offer a more grounded and tangible approach for policy and management. Viewing ‘public interest’ policy issues empirically through a lens of public values is more likely to produce useful outcomes. Such values, which sit within the framework of public interest theory, thus offer a pragmatic means of operationalizing the public interest (Bozeman, 2007).

In the context of public resources such as marine and coastal environments, public values – also referred to as social or community values (cf. Brown, 1984; Lockwood, 1999) – are often operationalized and measured by assessing multiple stakeholder

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perspectives. This includes attention to stakeholder values, attitudes, preferences and opinions (Strickland-Munro et al., 2016). The close involvement of stakeholders in determining public values appears logical and essential for coastal and marine management (Tompkins et al., 2008; Abecasis et al., 2013). Some contend that a stakeholder-driven approach adds “political clout and normative credibility” to decision making for marine environments, assisting management to be cognizant of multiple public interests and concerns (Mikalsen and Jentoft, 2001 p291). Yet, human-environment interactions within and concerning marine and coastal environments are complex (Kittinger et al., 2014), and display the diversity, complexity and conflict typical of linked social-ecological systems. Who participates, and which stakeholder groups are included can have a fundamental influence on the types of public values expressed. Consideration of public values requires inclusion and analysis beyond stakeholder groups.

For marine and coastal environments, stakeholders may be considered as those individuals, groups, or organisations most interested, involved or affected by a given project or action towards resource use. This includes those affected by management decisions or with claims over an area of resources, those dependent on resources, and those whose activities impact on the area or resources (Pomeroy and Rivera-Guieb, 2006). Stakeholders may thus include local residents, Indigenous bodies, government representatives, conservation groups/interests (e.g., marine protected areas), extractive industries (e.g., mining), scientists, commercial and recreational fishing organisations, and other interest groups such as tourism operators. Geographically distant, and more amorphous stakeholder groups such as ‘wider society’ (Grimble and Wellard, 1997) may also be of relevance. This diversity of stakeholder groups requires decision-makers to make trade-offs and mitigate potential conflicts arising from multiple uses and values in the pursuit of ecosystem-based management (Kittinger et al., 2014). Underpinning this is an explicit choice regarding which stakeholder groups are prioritized within specific planning and management processes, with some stakeholders seen as more salient than others (Pomeroy and Douvère, 2008).

Within the marine and coastal literature, local community or residents are often privileged as a key stakeholder group (e.g., Pajaro et al., 2010; Abecasis et al., 2013). Several factors underpin this. One; the acknowledged importance of integrating local and traditional knowledge (and issues) into marine decision-making to support conservation outcomes (Charles and Wilson, 2009; Jarvis et al., 2015). Two; assumptions of, and a research focus on, the close involvement of locals with geographically proximate marine and coastal areas. Three; coastal communities (particularly those with traditional links to fishing) are directly affected by marine conservation efforts (Pita et al., 2013).

The literature has focused on user groups and resource-dependent stakeholders – typically commercial and/or local fishers – as those most impacted by decisions and management regulations associated with marine conservation (Mikalsen and Jentoft, 2001; Charles and Wilson, 2009; Pajaro et al., 2010; Pita et al., 2011). A broader interpretation of resource-dependency may also include local residents involved in recreational fishing and other recreational pursuits, tourism, and extractive industries based on marine environments. Spatial planning that neglects this resource dependency and associated community territoriality, or inadequately recognizes the links between terrestrial communities and adjacent coastal or offshore locations, risks enhancing stakeholder conflict (Pomeroy and Douvère, 2008). The costs and benefits associated with marine conservation are another factor underlying the privileging of local residents. Evidence suggests that user groups/locals are more likely to be disadvantaged by resource and access restrictions associated with marine conservation while

the benefits – e.g., biodiversity conservation – accrue more broadly (Charles and Wilson, 2009).

This has also extended into the tourism literature and studies examining the relationship between residents and visitors in relation to tourism development. While previously it has been shown that residents hold negative perceptions of tourism development, Raymond and Brown (2007) explored the effect of distance from tourism core on attitudes towards tourism. Their spatial data analysis indicated that, rather than a wholesale negative perception of tourism development, residents evidenced place-specific constraints as to where tourism development can occur.

The challenge remains, however, to access and include the values of wider society (Grimble and Wellard, 1997). Widespread stakeholder engagement cognizant of the importance of including the views of today's diverse society can be achieved through the participation of a broad range of stakeholders beyond the local. Given the public nature of many marine resources (Mikalsen and Jentoft, 2001), recognition of the values of wider society is fundamental for effective and long lasting marine conservation (Pomeroy and Douvère, 2008; Charles and Wilson, 2009; Pollnac et al., 2010; Voyer et al., 2012) and capturing and analyzing public values provides a means of doing so. Assessing public values and preferences for policy decisions through this broad engagement can be achieved through multiple methods including surveys, indirect and direct value elicitation, focus groups, and public involvement (Keeney et al., 1990). Within the conservation domain, there is a clear impetus for tools capable of linking ecological data with social data gained through participatory processes in a spatially explicit manner (Pert et al., 2013).

For marine and coastal environments, this need is being met through the advent of marine conservation planning (Douvère and Ehler, 2009). Marine conservation planning involves the development of spatial plans to allocate resource use and management to achieve multiple ecological, economic, and social objectives. Typically conducted at regional scales, conservation planning seeks to minimize conflict among potentially competing uses and user groups. The integration of ecological and human use/other social data is an important aim (Douvère and Ehler, 2009).

The same premise applies to decisions and management regulations arising from marine conservation (Pita et al., 2013). However, given the ‘commons’ nature of regional and global marine areas (see Berkes, 2006), sampling design should also consider more geographically distant interests alongside more proximate concerns. This can help balance the tendency for local respondents to bias mapping towards places they are more familiar with, while also recognizing that people need not be personally familiar with an area to value it and have opinions regarding its use and management (Brown, 2015). Consider, for example, the global importance of marine areas such as the Great Barrier Reef off the eastern coastline of Australia. Collective versus individual, and direct versus indirect interests, are further considerations in sampling (Brown et al., 2014).

The research was guided by an interest in exploring how to determine public values through place-based research and whether there are any similarities and differences between stakeholders. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research question: are there any similarities and/or differences between mapped values and management preferences of i) volunteer public and online panel stakeholders and ii) residents and non-residents? Differences between resident and non-resident perspectives are of particular interest given that policy and planning often privileges local views. The capacity of spatially explicit participatory processes, called public participation GIS (PPGIS), to capture the place-based values and management preferences of wider society, and hence reflecting the public's values for use in

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