



Review

Organizing coordination in fisheries and marine environmental management: Patterns of organizational change in Europe



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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, an increasing number of public organizations involved in marine governance in Europe have adapted their formal coordination structures for fisheries and marine environmental management. This study examines why the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), DG FISH of the European Commission, the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research (IMR), and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) have changed their sectoral structures into organizations with a geographical focus on marine ecosystems. The study finds that the gradual convergence of formal coordination structures for fisheries and marine environmental management is driven by coercive, normative and mimetic processes of isomorphism. The structural changes reflect an organizational adaptation to a changing institutional environment and an Ecosystem Approach to Management (EAM) focusing on regional marine areas, cross-sector integration and coordination.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, an increasing number of public organizations involved in marine governance in Europe have changed their formal organizational structures. Reorganizations of formal organizational structures can be observed for public marine management organizations at different levels of governance with different mandates across the policy cycle. Examples of such organizational changes include the 1999–2009 reform of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the 2002–2004 reorganization of the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research (IMR), the 2008 restructuring of the Directorate-General for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs of the European Commission (DG FISH) into DG MARE, and the 2011 establishment of the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM). Alongside these examples, a number of other organizations have been newly established or reorganized, including the 2010 establishment of the Marine Management Organization (MMO) in the United Kingdom (UK) and the streamlining of the organizational structures of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) in 2014.

In the course of the reorganization processes, the formal coordination structures for fisheries and marine environmental management of these organizations have been realigned. This has involved a change in the horizontal specialization of organizational structures i.e., the definition of which tasks and relations should be grouped together and coordinated, and which should be separated (Christensen et al., 2007, p. 25). Structures of bureaucratic organizations may be organized according to different principles of specialization e.g., the *sector principle*, the *process principle*, or the *geographical principle*, each with different implications for the coordination of tasks, policies, or areas of governance (Gulick, 1937). In the course of the reorganizations, the *sector principle* was replaced or supplemented by the *process principle* and the *geographical principle* of coordination.

Coordination problems and the challenge of organizing horizontal (across sectoral policies) and vertical coordination across several hierarchical levels of marine governance in Europe have increasingly been emphasized in several studies (Kern (2011); Markus et al. (2011); Salomon and Dross (2013); van Tatenhove (2013); van Tatenhove et al. (2015)). However, explanations of coordination efforts at the organizational level and how public marine management organizations deal with coordination demands have been widely neglected so far. Against this backdrop, the study is interested in examining why the formal coordination structures for fisheries and marine environmental management have been reorganized in the cases of ICES, DG FISH, the IMR, and the SwAM.

To address this question, different strands of organization theory provide different explanations for how organizations deal with issues of formal organizational structure and coordination. While classical organization theory (Gulick (1937); Weber (1922, 1997)), classical management theory (Taylor, 1911, 1998), and contingency theory (Hatch (1997, 2006); March and Simon (1958); Mintzberg (1979); Thompson (1967, 2003)) emphasize functional efficiency as an explanation for organizational design and coordination structures, the influence of other organizations and institutionalization processes in organization's environments is neglected. From this instrumental perspective, the formal structure of organizations is assumed to be used as a technical-rational tool for maximizing

the efficiency of inter- and intra-organizational coordination processes. Decisions on organizational structures are thus based upon rational calculations of potential consequences, costs, and benefits (Christensen et al., 2007, p. 22f.).

In contrast, sociological institutionalism argues that organizations orientate themselves towards other organizations that face the same set of environmental conditions and that are integrated into common regulatory mechanisms (Scott, 1994, p. 70f.). As a result, forces of isomorphism take effect that lead to a gradual convergence of these organizations with regard to their formal organizational structures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify three mechanisms through which this process takes place: (1) *coercive* isomorphism that stems from political influence and the need for legitimacy, (2) *normative* isomorphism associated with the influence of professional communities, and (3) *mimetic* isomorphism that results from standard responses to uncertainty.

The aim of this study is to examine to what extent isomorphic processes account for the observed organizational changes in ICES, DG FISH, the IMR, and the establishment of the SwAM, and whether these processes led to a gradual convergence of these organizations' formal coordination structures.

In the following two sections, the methodology used for this study is described and the conceptual basis for analyzing isomorphic processes is provided. Based on this, in the sections four, five, and six, the article examines empirically to what extent the reorganizations in the context of ICES, DG FISH, the IMR, and the SwAM were driven by mechanisms of isomorphism and in which way isomorphic processes occurred. As the restructuring of the organizations studied was partially affected by *coercive*, *normative*, and *mimetic* processes of isomorphism and the article is structured along these different processes, the respective organizations are analyzed and occur in different sections, i.e. in section four as well as in section five or six. The theoretical assumptions of sociological institutionalism are then discussed in the light of the empirical findings of this study in section seven of the article.

2. Methodology

In order to evaluate the explanatory relevance of the isomorphism hypothesis - in contrast to functional explanations - a case study approach based on *congruence analysis* has been applied. A *congruence analysis* approach can be described as "a small-N research design in which the researcher uses case studies to provide empirical evidence for the explanatory relevance or relative strength of one theoretical approach in comparison to other theoretical approaches" (Blatter and Haverland, 2012, p. 144).

ICES, DG FISH, the IMR, and the SwAM have been selected as cases for examination as these organizations are integrated into the marine governance system in Europe to varying degrees, at different levels of governance, and with different mandates across the policy cycle. Moreover, fisheries management in Europe is a highly technical policy area and rationalized system of advice production, management and implementation (see e.g. Wilson, 2009, p. 91). The normal expectation would thus be that the organizational structures of organizations like ICES, DG FISH, the IMR, and the SwAM are (re-)designed in a deliberate, technical-rational manner in order to produce management advice and to

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