



Identifying culturally significant areas for marine spatial planning



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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing recognition of their importance, immaterial cultural values associated with the sea still tend to be neglected in marine spatial planning (MSP). This socio-cultural evidence gap is due to inherent difficulties in defining and eliciting cultural values, but also to difficulties in linking cultural values to specific places, thus enabling an area-based approach to management. This paper addresses three aspects that are important for including marine cultural values in MSP: Defining cultural values, identifying places of cultural importance, and establishing the relative significance of places of cultural importance. We argue that common classification schemes such as cultural ecosystem services can be a helpful starting point for identifying cultural values, but only go so far in capturing communities' cultural connections with the sea. A method is proposed for structuring a community-based narrative on cultural values and “spatialising” them for MSP purposes, using five criteria that can lead to the definition of “culturally significant areas”. A baseline of culturally significant areas is suggested as an aid to planners to pinpoint places where cultural connections to the sea are particularly strong. Throughout, we emphasise the need for participative processes.

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¹ We use the terms marine and maritime spatial planning interchangeably in this paper, although we are aware of the subtle differences in meaning. The term “marine” is arguably more strongly associated with the marine environment and “maritime” with marine activities and uses, although in planning practice, “marine spatial planning”, “maritime spatial planning” and “marine planning” are all used to describe similar processes. The EU uses “maritime spatial planning” to describe a holistic approach to managing when and where human activities take place at sea to ensure these are as efficient and sustainable as possible; this common practice is what we are referring to here (http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime_spatial_planning/index_en.htm, accessed 27 September 2016).

1. Introduction

Supported by the introduction of the EU MSP Directive in 2014, maritime/marine spatial planning¹ (MSP) is gaining increasing prominence in Europe as an integrated approach to marine management (Douve and Ehler, 2006; Ehler and Douve, 2009; Jay, 2010; Kannen, 2014). As a “process by which the relevant (...) authorities analyse and organise human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives” (EPC, 2014), the overall aim of MSP is to contribute to a more balanced and sustainable use of ocean resources, making use of spatial designations such as priority areas or restricted areas to decide which outputs are to be produced from a marine area over time (UNESCO-IOC, online). The development of a marine plan, and with this the development of spatial priorities, is thus a normative process which

must carefully negotiate potentially competing interests. In doing so, MSP crucially relies on evidence and the ability to express such evidence – and the decisions that result – in a spatially explicit way.

While the ecological and economic evidence base for MSP tends to be relatively well developed, this cannot be said for socio-cultural values associated with the sea, understood here as mainly immaterial values placed on the environment by people.² Their neglect in MSP runs counter to the growing recognition of their importance. Immaterial cultural values have been shown to generate sense of place and identity (MacKinnon and Brennan, 2012; Ratter and Gee, 2012; Gee, 2010), and there is strong evidence that they contribute to delivering high level objectives for the sea, in particular social objectives related to perceived quality of life and human well-being (Busch et al., 2011; Summers et al., 2012; Jobstvogt et al., 2014; Church et al., 2014). At the same time, cultural values and their associated benefits can be threatened by changing marine activities. Disregarding them in MSP therefore restricts the choices available to communities and wider communities of interest and may lead to the irrevocable loss of key marine benefits.

There are several reasons why cultural values have not been more widely included in MSP. The most obvious is that contrary to the land (Van Berkel and Verburg, 2014) many resist spatial delineation in the sea (Guerry et al., 2012), rendering them difficult to link to spatial concepts such as zoning. Some marine plans³ attempt to resolve this by referring to archeological sites, historic assets, seascape character areas or other designated sites as expressions of cultural values. This approach, however, does not account for the fact that non-designated assets may be of equal importance to communities, that designated sites may insufficiently reflect the full range of cultural values; and that merely recognising sites as such gives insufficient consideration to the benefits obtained from them and the spatial implications of these.

But the reasons for the cultural evidence gap in MSP go deeper. There is also an awareness gap with respect to the cultural benefits the sea offers to communities (Fletcher et al., 2011; Jefferson et al., 2015). Marine areas do not commonly “engender the deep cultural, historical and emotional attachment and sense of place that are highly developed in landward environments (...)” (Kidd and Ellis, 2012 p.51); nevertheless, user groups such as fishermen do have a highly intimate relationship and profound knowledge of the sea (MacKinnon and Brennan, 2012). The sea plays a key role in shaping national and regional cultures, and there is a wealth of information indicating the strong cultural role of the sea as a place of heritage, imagination and projection (Gee, 2010; Hooley, 2011).

Problems also present themselves at the conceptual level, in that cultural values cover a broad range of elements from very specific areas to broader sustainability needs and cultural practices. Ambiguity persists with respect to what should be understood as a cultural value, how these values then relate to geographical scale and management, and how trade-offs among different types of value can be evaluated to inform MSP (e.g. Lester et al., 2013). Problems in working with socio-cultural values in environmental management are well-known, stemming, for example, from

different conceptions of culture, the immateriality of many cultural practices and attributes, or the fact that cultural values such as worldviews may well resist articulation and classification (Satterfield et al., 2013).

Lastly, there has been significant focus on cultural ecosystem services (CES) as a way of expressing, classifying and measuring socio-cultural values (MEA, 2005). The CES concept is not the only way of measuring such values, and various criticisms can be levied at this approach (see Section 3); here we simply point out that CES are not synonymous with cultural values although the two are often conflated (Zoderer et al., 2016).

Specifically in a marine setting, some studies have elicited the non-material benefits people obtain from ecosystems (e.g. Liquete et al., 2013; Jobstvogt et al., 2014; Ruiz-Frau et al., 2013), partly with a view towards making these benefits more tangible to planning processes. The debate surrounding marine CES, however, has rarely been led from a practical MSP perspective (Böhnke-Henrichs et al., 2013; Rees et al., 2010). Consequently, many practical challenges that arise when working with cultural values in an MSP context have not yet been addressed.

2. Aims and structure of the paper

For planners and managers, the key question is how MSP can take account of cultural values in MSP in a way that is commensurate with the recognition already awarded to ecological or economic values. This requires a two-step approach. The first requirement is an ability to define what is meant by cultural values in each specific planning context and why such values are important to communities. A community-based approach is essential here as cultural values are created and assigned by groups and/or communities acting in specific cultural and temporal contexts. This is all the more important as cultural values not only comprise commodities (such as cultural artefacts), but also actions, processes and systems of understanding through which social life is transacted (Winthrop, 2014 p.209) – including the MSP process itself. Rather than pre-conceived criteria, planners and managers – and importantly also the communities affected – therefore require a method that allows them to identify and describe relevant cultural values in a structured and participative way.

Once identified, the second question is how to link these values to specific places and then rate the relative significance of these places so they can become included in spatial management considerations. Spatialisation followed by prioritisation is a common approach in spatial management; a similar rationale is applied when establishing areas of ecological significance, for example. Again, this requires a participative approach. Rather than a set way to calculate significance, a structure is needed that enables managers and communities to think through different options. These options, and their potential conflicts with other values, can then be further addressed as part of the MSP process.

The paper addresses the following three aspects:

1. *Definition of cultural values.* The first part of the paper discusses conceptual issues surrounding cultural values, focusing on the concept of cultural ecosystem services as an example. Recent work establishing links between cultural values and specific places is also discussed.
2. *Identifying places of cultural importance.* We put forward the concept of ‘culturally significant areas’ as a way of translating cultural values into the spatially explicit language required by MSP. Five criteria of cultural significance are proposed to help establish culturally significant areas.
3. *Determining their relative significance.* The third part of the paper argues that transparent criteria and processes are needed so

² We understand cultural values as a type of assigned value, in other words the “relative importance or worth of an object to an individual or group in a given context” (Brown, 1984 p. 233). The ‘object’ that is valued in this context can be a place, a cultural practice, a benefit, an experience, or an ecosystem service; these values are often non-monetary. We use the term ‘cultural value’ synonymous with ‘socio-cultural value’, based on the understanding that cultural values tend to be socially conditioned and are finding expression in particular cultural contexts or through specific cultural practices both at the individual and community level.

³ e.g. the English East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plan (HM Government, 2014), Scotland’s sectoral plans for offshore renewable energy (e.g. Davies et al., 2012) or the Shetland Island’s Marine Spatial Plan (Shucksmith et al., 2014).

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