



Marine-space assemblages: Towards a different praxis of fisheries policy and management



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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we discuss the intent and purpose of Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act/National Standard 8 and examine how it reinforces problematized conceptualizations of marine-space(s). We then discuss shifts in sensibilities around marine-space, especially with concern to notions of fishing communities and their inclusion in planning and management processes. Through this, we underscore a problematic pervasive in conceptual models used to account for relations between humans and marine-spaces and how this contributes to failures to fulfill regulatory responsibilities to fishing communities. We then draw on new materialist insights into assemblages and affect and emotion to offer alternative ways to think about, research, approach, and manage marine-spaces through more nuanced and informed considerations of their broad, complex, and ever-present human and socio-cultural components.

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Introduction

In recent years, geographic sensibilities around the qualities and nature of marine-space(s) have shifted. Where geographers once treated marine-space largely as a means of mobility and travel, essentially an “unregulated transport surface” (Steinberg, 1999, p. 16) that served as a mode for linking terrestrial spaces, today conceptual shifts account for more complex human-marine dynamics and relations by approaching marine-spaces as components of “linked social and ecological systems” (Berkes, Folke, & Colding, 2000). In this context, and over the last decade and a half, there has been growing interest among geographers in developing pragmatic ways to confront the management challenges posed by marine-spaces and associated coastal ecosystems (Steinberg, 1999). These challenges are particularly acute as they relate to fisheries, where:

[o]ver the course of its development, much of fisheries-management science, both in theory and in practice, has had a misplaced emphasis. Whereas its first concerns should have been the human beings who utilize fisheries resources, its

cornerstones were instead ... the conservation of important marine-biological species ... [and] allocating fisheries resources and maximizing the economic benefits from them (McGoodwin, 2001, p. 1).

In working towards correctives to this “misplaced emphasis,” there has been the vital recognition that socio-cultural considerations and concerns must be conceptually understood as fundamental components of both marine-space(s) and practiced as part of marine management policies and conservation programs (Lundquist & Granek, 2005). Those working in these arenas have attempted to move beyond a strictly ecological focus that concentrates on baselines and a return to them in very applied and politically inclusive ways (Symes & Phillipson, 2009).

Such political inclusion is particularly important in fulfilling the mandates of National Standard 8 (NS8) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act (MSFCMA) and associated local initiatives and mandates concerned with fishery management and conservation. In attempts to fulfill regulatory responsibilities, many researchers and fishery managers have called for necessary engagements with “fishing communities” to provide correctives to the lack of human concern or consideration (Helvey, 2004). It is our position, however, that dominant notions of “fishing communities”

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and their “inclusion,” and what they imply in and through the MSFCMA/NS8, do not offer adequate recourse – in part because the inherent and fundamental human and socio-cultural dimensions of marine-space(s) are still conceptually lacking and, as a consequence, pragmatically neglected. Sarah Whatmore (2002, p. 161) has explained how there are tendencies to create false demarcations between “human/subjects and nonhuman/objects,” resulting in an “exclusive preserve of a ‘Society’ from which everything but the universal human subject has been expunged.” In dominant characterizations of marine-space(s), the inverse is true. With the inherently spatial nature of fishery management plans and regulations—they are, after all, connected to specific locales and the associated (time and space) dynamics that influence them—the need for both new conceptualizations and management practices of marine-spaces are especially urgent at this time.

In what follows, we approach the conceptual problematics flowing through MSFCMA, and specifically NS8, by providing an overview of its intent and purpose to illustrate common policy-related conceptualizations of marine-space(s) and associated deficient definitions and discussions of “fishing communities.” We then discuss how management shifts and sensibilities around human components of marine-space(s) are practiced with concern to these communities. Through this, we explain how conceptual models used to account for the relations between humans and marine-space(s) contribute to failures to fulfill associated regulatory responsibilities. We then draw on new materialist insights into *assemblages* and *affect* and *emotion* to offer alternative and pragmatically productive ways to conceptualize, research, approach, and manage marine-spaces and better consider and account for their broad, complex, and always-present human and socio-cultural dynamics and conditions. As part of these discussions, we offer initial steps that can be taken to enhance the capacities (e.g., resilience, knowledge, efficacy, etc.) of marine-space environments and associated management regimes, with particular attention to fishing community inclusivity and empowerment. While calls to shift focus to sociocultural components are not new (see Martin, McCay, Murray, & Johnson, 2007), and agency efforts have been increasingly attempting to account for such components (see Abbott-Jamieson & Clay, 2010), it is our goal with this paper to contribute to and enhance these efforts and facilitate a more inclusive lens through which planning and management take place by nuancing the idea of “fishing communities” and offering pragmatic views of the always-assembling nature of socio-cultural components and marine-space(s).

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act (MSFCMA) and National Standard 8 (NS8)

Initial interest in rethinking marine-space and the need for it to be “managed” was largely a result of an increased public awareness that oceans are not “endlessly resilient,” as they were once naively believed to be (Steinberg, 1999). During the second half of the twentieth century a new environmental awareness of marine-space(s) arose, largely due to three factors: (1) expanded understandings of how marine biodiversity contributes to the functioning of ecosystems; (2) advances in fishing technologies leading to the noticeable depletion of fish stocks (such as the disappearance of the Newfoundland cod, once believed to be impossible to overfish); and (3) increases in pollution that were now visible along coastlines and marine surfaces (Bolster, 2006; Psuty, Steinberg, & Wright, 2002). Policies and regulations that emerged out of this new awareness and concern for marine-space resulted in considerable impacts to fisheries.

The foremost piece of legislation detailing the management of fisheries in the United States is the MSFCMA (Gehan & Hallowell,

2011). Originally passed in 1976 as the *Fishery Conservation and Management Act*, it has been amended several times. MSFCMA mandates that “[c]onservation and management measures shall prevent overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield from each fishery for the United States fishing industry” (Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act, 1976, p. 39). Although MSFCMA originally focused on the conservation of fish species and maximum economic yield numbers with less consideration for the social or cultural nature of fishing communities, with its amendment through the passage of the Reauthorization Act of 2006, which strengthened the stipulations of NS8 that call for the monitoring and mitigation of socio-economic impacts on groups who depend on fishing and fishery ‘resources’ for their livelihoods, social and cultural concerns gained increased attention (Gehan & Hallowell, 2011). NS8 states:

Conservation and management measures shall, consistent with the conservation requirements of this Act (including the prevention of overfishing and rebuilding of overfished stocks), take into account the importance of fishery resources to *fishing communities* by utilizing economic and social data ... to:

- (a) provide for the *sustained participation* of such communities, and
- (b) to the *extent practicable*, minimize adverse *economic impacts* on such communities (emphasis ours; Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act, 1976, p. 39).

Following the Reauthorization of 2006, economic and social data must now comply with National Standard 2 (NS2), which mandates that “conservation and management measures shall be based upon the best scientific information available” (Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act, 1976, p. 39). This, at least superficially, strengthens the reach of NS8 mandates. However, it also erodes an explicit NS8 stipulation by limiting valid information to a scientific framework, discounting the *multitude of ways* fishing communities can sustain participation in conservation and management measures.

While “community” can be defined in a number of ways, MSFCMA defines a *fishing community* as:

...a community that is substantially dependent on or substantially engaged in the harvest or processing of fishery resources to meet social and economic needs, and includes fishing vessel owners, operators, and crew, and fish processors that are based in such communities. A fishing community is a social or economic group whose members reside in a *specific location* and share a common dependency on commercial, recreational, or subsistence fishing or on directly related fisheries-dependent services and industries (for example, boatyards, ice suppliers, tackle shops) (emphasis ours Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act, 1976, p. 8).

Whereas, on first glance, this definition may appear to be comprehensive, in reality it belies some of the very fundamental elements that render fishing communities, *communities*. It also elides the varying (gender, ethnic/racial, generational, age, etc.) power dynamics and cultural practices that continually inform and negotiate community identities (see Jacob, Farmer, Jepson, & Adams, 2001; Olson, 2005).

Just as problematic as this inattention to the complexities and nuances of community development, formation, and continuation—and central to our discussion here—is NS8’s essentialization of space/place. Olson notes that:

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