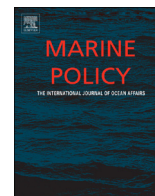




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Organizing coordination in a public marine research and management advice organization: The case of the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research

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ABSTRACT

Public organizations involved in marine management are increasingly confronted with coordination challenges in marine governance. This study examines why and how the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research (IMR) reorganized its formal coordination structures between the areas of fisheries management and marine environmental management. The findings indicate that organizing efficient and, at the same time, legitimate coordination structures between different areas of marine governance is a "wicked" organizational problem with no ultimate and single optimal solution. In contrast to the assumptions of classical organization and management theory, the study finds that the reorganization of formal coordination structures is not necessarily driven for reasons of efficiency and perceived coordination problems. Instead, public marine management organizations also change their organizational structures to live up to external expectations to adopt modern management concepts, such as the Ecosystem Approach to Management (EAM). However, the study indicates that the adoption of the EAM has stimulated coordination and integration efforts in the research and advisory activities of the IMR.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, an increasing number of public organizations involved in marine management in Europe have changed their formal organizational structures. Examples of such organizational changes include the 1998–2009 reorganization of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the 2008 reorganization of DG FISH of the European Commission, and the 2011 establishment of the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM). In the course of these reorganization processes, all of these organizations newly aligned their formal coordination structures and the organizational relationship between the areas of fisheries management and marine environmental management. In 2002, the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research (IMR) also initiated a reorganization process and reformed its formal organizational structure. The sectoral organization of the institute with separate centers for research and advice on fisheries management and marine environmental management was reorganized into a matrix structure by 2004.

Coordination problems and the challenges 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 [27,33,47,54]. However, explanations of coordination efforts at the organizational level and how public organizations cope with coordination challenges in marine governance have been widely neglected so far. Against this background, this study is interested in *why and how public marine management organizations organize formal coordination structures between the areas of fisheries management and marine environmental management*.

To address these questions in the case of the IMR, the study draws on two different theoretical perspectives in organization theory as lenses for analysis, namely an instrumental perspective and an institutional perspective. While the instrumental perspective is based upon classical organization and management theory, sociological institutionalism is the theoretical foundation of the institutional perspective. These theoretical approaches provide different explanations for how organizations deal with issues of formal organizational structure and coordination.

The aim of the study is to illustrate the reaction of a public marine research and management advisory organization to changing environments and coordination challenges in marine governance. The IMR was one of the first public organizations

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involved in marine management in Europe that reorganized its formal organizational structure along with the emergence and diffusion of the Ecosystem Approach to Management (EAM) as a new paradigm in marine governance. This makes the case of the IMR crucial in studying the drivers and the process of the reorganization, and to examine the potential repercussions of the EAM on the formal organizational structures and the efforts of making the EAM operational. The purpose of the study is to elucidate whether the reorganization of formal organizational structures aims at increasing the coordination capacity of the organization, or primarily follows paradigms in marine governance and modern recipes for organizational design.

2. Methodology

This study is based on a single-case study design making use of different theoretical approaches in organization theory, namely classical organizational and management theory and sociological institutionalism, to explain the organization of coordination efforts of the IMR.

To evaluate the explanatory relevance or relative strength of each of these theoretical perspectives in explaining the organization of coordination efforts, a case study approach based on *congruence analysis* [1,2] was applied. By making use of the congruence analysis approach, a systematic comparison of the empirical data collected with the theoretical expectations of sociological institutionalism and classical organizational and management theory was conducted.

The collection of the empirical data on the case under investigation is based on two sources of information. Firstly, *document analyses* have been conducted on the basis of official reports on the organizational reform process of the IMR as well as on analyses of organizational charts and their change over time. Secondly, a total of nine *semi-structured interviews* were conducted with officials involved in the organizational reform processes of the IMR in Bergen, Norway. The interview questionnaires were structured to collect relevant information on the drivers, the process, and the effects of the reorganization process.

3. The organization of coordination structures of public marine management organizations as a wicked problem

Coordination is a persistent issue in public organization research and there are various definitions of the concept (see for example, [31: 361,16: 459, 28: 23]). For Bouckaert et al. [3: 16], coordination is meant to enhance the voluntary or forced alignment of tasks and efforts of organizations. Furthermore, coordination is understood to create greater coherence and to reduce redundancy, lacunae and contradictions within and between policies, implementation or management.

In this study, the focus is on the process of organizing coordination through the formal organizational structure of the IMR as a public marine research and management advisory organization. Formal organizational structure, in the sense of Weber's bureaucratic organizational form, refers to *hierarchy* (vertical specialization), *division of labor* (horizontal specialization), and *routines* (rules and procedures for who carries out tasks and how they should be accomplished) [57]. The study focuses on horizontal coordination structures between the areas of fisheries management and marine environmental management. This includes coordination efforts that are carried out through reorganization or change of the formal organizational structure, for example, by reorganizing internal organizational divisions.

Organizing coordination structures of public marine

management organizations can be described as a “wicked problem” [20,21,26,46]. “Wicked problems” differ from “tame” or “benign” problems in that they are characterised by a combination of simultaneously high levels of complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity. They are “wicked” in the sense of being “tricky” with no definite solution ([46]: 160).

The wickedness of organizing coordination structures between fisheries management and marine environmental management arises from how interdependencies between the use of marine resources and marine ecosystem protection are to be handled. That is, how sectoral problem perceptions and diverging interests of policy subsystems and administrative actors are to be organized and coordinated. Fishing is still one of the main negative pressures that harm the marine ecosystems of the North-East Atlantic and Baltic Sea areas. It contributes to their increased vulnerability and ongoing decline in biodiversity through overfishing, high by-catch levels of non-target species, and damage to seabed habitats [42,48,49]. However, long-term sustainable fisheries and the use of living marine resources depend on intact marine ecosystems and, thus, on the consideration and integration of marine ecosystem protection objectives into sectoral policies [47].

The challenge for public marine management organizations, therefore, is to find appropriate organizational structures that enable them to coordinate different areas such as fisheries management and marine environmental management effectively and that, at the same time, are accepted and legitimized by the affected stakeholders. However, according to Rittel and Webber [46], the problem with wicked problems is that there are no unambiguous right-or-wrong criteria for deciding on ultimate solutions. The assessments of proposed or assumed organizational solutions to coordination problems are rather likely to differ based on the organizational position and problem perception of the involved planners. Moreover, proposed organizational solutions, after being implemented, may generate unintended negative consequences that outweigh the intended advantages and one would have been better off if the changes had never been carried out. Thus, proposed organizational solutions may be considered to be a symptom of other problems for which again organizational solutions may be proposed and implemented.

4. The diffusion of the ecosystem approach to management as paradigm for organizational integration and coordination in sustainable marine governance

In the past decades, the institutional environment of public organizations involved in marine management in Europe has undergone considerable development and change. The emergence and diffusion of the Ecosystem Approach to Management (EAM) concept has led to a paradigm shift ([41]: 683) and to an increased focus on integration and coordination in international and regional marine governance.

Since the early 1990s, the EAM has become pervasive in international environmental governance and many definitions of the EAM concept have emerged. There is no universally accepted definition of the EAM and existing definitions of the concept vary in their focus and scope ([17]: 77, [29]: 54). One of the most recognized descriptions of the EAM dates back to the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Nairobi in 2000. It defines the EAM as a strategy for the integrated management of land, water, and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way, while also emphasizing the economic and social aspects of the human system [6]. The EAM is seen as a response to the ongoing decline in biodiversity, and comprises a broad holistic approach aiming to go beyond conventional management based on

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