



Stakeholder participation in decision-making processes for marine and coastal protected areas: Case studies of the south-western Gulf of California, Mexico



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ABSTRACT

Marine and coastal protected areas (MCPAs) are complex social-ecological systems. In recent decades, stakeholder participation has been widely encouraged in MCPA design and management strategy to enable these conservation projects to last over time and produce the expected results. This paper will discuss stakeholder participation in three MCPAs in the south-western Gulf of California in Mexico: Cabo Pulmo National Park, Loreto Bay National Park and Archipelago Espíritu Santo National Park. It will use a qualitative approach (such as semi-structured interviews and observations) to analyze MCPA governance, along with a literature review of specialized and official government documents. Three phases will be studied: MCPA design, MCPA management plan creation and MCPA management board meetings. Results suggest that in the early 2010s, these protected areas were assigned a mixture of governance types: governance by government and shared governance. Certain actions show that park authorities, largely supported by environmental non-governmental organizations, have attempted to improve MCPA decision-making processes through a participative approach, but that there is unequal stakeholder participation in such initiatives.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, marine biodiversity loss has meant that Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs) have become an essential part of national and international *in situ* conservation strategies (Dudley, 2008). Typically promoted as a conservation management tool, they are discrete defined geographic areas in which international, national, territorial, tribal or local laws (Claudet, 2011) regulate extractive and non-extractive uses. As complex social institutions (Jentoft et al., 2007), MCPAs cover a diversity of situations with different levels of protection (Christie and White, 2007; Day et al., 2012) and the majority have both ecological and socio-economical goals (Agardy et al., 2003; Christie et al., 2003; Noël and Weigel, 2007). The role of MCPAs has evolved towards opportunities for sustainable development through their multiple objectives (Noël and Weigel, 2007). Currently, 2.8% of the global ocean is protected (IUCN and UNEP-WCM, 2013), but this is far from the

Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 that aims for at least 10% of coastal and marine areas to be protected and managed effectively and equitably by 2020 (UNEP, 2010).

Therefore, a multi- and inter-disciplinary approach is necessary to provide a strong scientific framework (Chaboud et al., 2011; Claudet, 2011; Fraga and Jesus, 2008; Jentoft et al., 2007). Moreover, the role of social science research must not be overlooked in order to avoid a 'social failure' of MCPAs (Christie et al., 2003). Diverse cases underline the lack of broad participation in management, little or no sharing of economic benefits, the absence of conflict resolution mechanisms (Christie et al., 2003) and tension between different sectors (Oracion et al., 2005).

Among social sciences studies on MCPAs, governance studies are emerging and since the mid-1990s, the term governance and/or management is being increasingly used (Thorpe et al., 2011). Governance is a polysemous notion and as such it needs to be precisely defined. It is a social fact and a process that is not specific to our age or a society (Hufty, 2007). As highlighted by Weigel et al. (2011), the governance approach deals with power relations between stakeholders and therefore, any analysis of governance must

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take into account formal and informal decision-making processes (Hufty, 2007) to solve a societal problem and achieve a social goal. In the framework of interactive governance theory (Kooiman et al., 2005), Jentoft et al. (2007) state that the governance of marine and coastal protected areas depends on relationships and interactions between a 'governing system' that is social (institutions and steering mechanisms) and a 'system-to-be-governed' that is both natural (an ecosystem and the resources it contains) and social (a system of users and stakeholders who create coalitions). These two systems and the interactive system are diverse, complex and dynamic (Kooiman et al., 2005).

Therefore, to properly analyze governance, it is essential to correctly identify stakeholders (through creating categories) and their interactions (Brenner, 2010; Hufty, 2007; Jentoft, 2007; Weigel et al., 2011). Additionally, stakeholder representations of MCPAs as institutions and as natural systems must be incorporated into governance research as they have ramifications on the governability and success of protected areas (Jentoft et al., 2012). Despite the fact that human activities outside MCPA boundaries can affect MCPAs, some are managed like 'islands of protection' without an integrated approach (Ehler, 2003; Salm et al., 2000). Failure to consider these interactions could mean that MCPA goals are not achieved (Cicin-Sain and Belfiore, 2005; Ehler, 2005; Salm et al., 2000). Thus, cross-scale and cross-level dynamics analysis is essential to assess social-ecological systems (Cash, 2006; Garmestani and Benson, 2013), including those relating to MCPA governance (McCay and Jones, 2011; Pajaro et al., 2010; Van Trung Ho, T., 2014). As such, the political, historical, social, economic and cultural context should be examined at different spatial levels. In the context of globalization and global environmental change, governance systems must be flexible and quickly adaptable (Swaney et al., 2012).

Decisions taken at the international level, for example, during Conferences of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, advocate the analysis of protected area governance in each country. Borrini-Feyerabend et al. (2013) identify four broad types of protected area governance: governance by government, shared governance, private governance and governance by indigenous peoples and local communities. Nevertheless, as a complex social-ecological system, it is sometimes difficult to assign a single governance type to a protected area.

This paper aims to contribute to MCPA governance analysis in Mexico and more precisely, in the south-western Gulf of California in the early 2010s.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Context and study areas

2.1.1. Environmental policy and federal MCPAs in Mexico

For a long time, Mexican policies did not take the sea into account, despite the fact that out of the country's 32 federal states, 17 are coastal ones. Mexican territorial sea and the Federal Maritime Land Zone (Zofemat) currently form part of the federal public domain (Ley General de Bienes Nacionales, 2004). The Mexican coastline, which is 11 122 km in length (INEGI, 2010), provides an attractive territory for many activities but it faces various threats, especially pollution caused by urban development (related to tourism or industrial and port activities) and oil extraction (Ortiz-Lozano et al., 2005). Moreover, the population growth in urban coastal zones (CIMARES, 2012; Tovilla et al., 2010) is a major challenge for urban planning and resource management and since the 2000s, the government has been increasing its efforts to tackle marine and coastal biodiversity loss. This involves proposals from the scientific community aimed at implementing integrated coastal

management which are then formulated and gradually integrated into public policies (Tovilla et al., 2010). The most recent example is the National Policy for Oceans and Coasts of Mexico, prepared by the Inter-Ministerial Commission for the Sustainable Management of Oceans and Coasts, created in 2008 (CIMARES, 2012). Nevertheless, Mexican legislation on the use of and access to marine and coastal resources is still highly fragmented, overlapping, occasionally inconsistent and incomplete (Bezaury-Creel, 2005; CIMARES, 2012; Fraga and Jesus, 2008). The Mexican government has not yet promulgated a coastal law and it still takes contradictory actions such as promoting an aggressive national development agenda while simultaneously enforcing environmental regulation (García Frapolli et al., 2009).

The two major environmental management tools in Mexico are ecological zoning programs (to plan land and water use in a context of sustainable use of natural resources) and protected areas. They are both governed by the 1988 General Law of Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection (LGEEPA), which has since been re-examined. This law forced the government to integrate an environmental component into national plans and has given state and municipal authorities more responsibility for environmental tasks (Simonian, 1995). Since 2000, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) have overseen the implementation of environmental zoning programs and protected areas. Protected areas are managed by a decentralized government agency of SEMARNAT, the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP) that was created in 2000. In the same year, LGEEPA regulation on protected natural areas was published in the Official Gazette of the Federation (DOF). Therefore, the year 2000 was marked by a reorganization of the conservation sector, protected areas in particular, that resulted in a more robust legislative and administrative framework. Nevertheless, it was during the 1990s and following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) that Mexican environmental policy underwent the most profound change through the institutionalization of the conservation sector (Dumoulin Kervran, 2009; Soberón Mainero, 1999). Several institutions, such as the Federal Attorney for Environmental Protection (PROFEPA) and the National Commission for Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (CONABIO), were created to participate in the development and implementation of conservation policies. The Fund for Natural Protected Areas (FANP) was established in 1997 as part of the first environmental endowment fund in Mexico: the Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature (FMCN) created in 1994. The FANP was implemented to administer a donation from the Global Environment Facility to protected areas management (FMCN, 2014). In 1996, the National Council of Natural Protected Areas was created as an advisory body for SEMARNAT. In order to overcome the 'paper park' phenomenon, there was increased human and financial investments in protected areas but these resources are still insufficient (CONANP, 2012). Participative processes are also encouraged by CONANP, but despite this support, some researchers have expressed reservations about participative processes in Mexican federal protected areas and highlighted some exclusive practices (Durand et al., 2012a; García-Frapolli, 2009). Two broad forms of exclusion in participatory processes can be observed: external and internal exclusion (Parkins and Mitchell, 2005). The present research will focus on external exclusion, with a particular focus on the (non)participation of some user groups in decision-making processes.

The first official protected area with a marine surface dates from the 1920s, but it is since Luis Echeverría's presidential decree (1970–1976) that federal protected areas with a marine surface have really prospered (INE and SEMARNAP, 2000). During the presidency of Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994–2000), the environmental

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