

## Can Marine Spatial Planning Learn from Community-Based Engagement Practices?



Devon Beach, UK. Credit: P. G. Wells

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**D**id you know that in the moments it takes you to walk from your beach towel, out to where you start feeling cold and second-guessing your decision to go swimming, you are crossing three different governance jurisdictions? Governance in coastal and marine areas is complex and often fragmented. Marine spatial planning (MSP) is a public process that aims to bring together different ocean users to manage human activities more effectively and sustainably. The [federal government of Canada has committed to developing marine spatial plans in five bioregions](#) by March 2024, three of which are in Atlantic Canada: the Scotian Shelf—Bay of Fundy, Gulf of St. Lawrence, and the Newfoundland—Labrador Shelves. [MSP is being adopted all over the world](#), with over 70 countries having implemented some type of MSP, ranging from just beginning, as in Canada, to the stage where plans are being revised in other countries. While the goals associated with MSP are important for Canada to set and achieve, some concerns continue about whether this process will help overcome [a disconnect between users and various levels of government that often exists in the land-sea interface](#). A special issue in

the journal of [Planning Practice and Research](#) recently considered this important topic and shows that Canada is not the only country facing these challenges.

### **Special Issue of *Planning Practice and Research***

The idea for the special issue emerged from discussions held at a [workshop focusing on planning at the land-sea interface](#), i.e., the coast. Held at the University of Hamburg on 11-13 September 2019, participants (a mix of researchers and planning practitioners) sought to take a planning-based approach to understanding the complexities of managing socio-ecological systems in this complex interface area. Coasts bring with them a range of complex planning challenges and opportunities, ranging from logistics, to climate change adaptation, to biodiversity conservation, and preserving cultural heritage assets. Given that you cross various jurisdictions just by heading out for your sea swim, it is notoriously difficult to plan at the coast. Terrestrial and marine planning regimes are at best fully integrated in this zone and/or complement one another, or, at worst, do not join up and/or produce quite contradictory objectives and outcomes. At the workshop in Hamburg some fascinating discussions centred on spatial strategies, governance regimes, theories of space, participation in planning, and ways of integrating planning regimes more successfully (see Walsh, 2020).

This special issue was conceived not only to continue these discussions but, crucially, to bring marine spatial planning into the broader realm of planning debates. It was felt that MSP and terrestrial planning stand to learn much from one another and face many similar challenges. This subject presented an opportunity to address some very important questions: “What understanding of planning underlies MSP practices and shapes planning of sea space? To what extent does MSP incorporate collaborative and participatory planning practices? What are the key stakeholder groups and power distributions within these processes? What challenges does the land-sea interface pose for spatial planning as a whole? How are concepts, such as, seascape values or culturally significant sea space related in MSP? Are new planning paradigms emerging from MSP experience? What are the emergent challenges for practice and implementation? Are there significant divergences or convergences between marine and terrestrial spatial planning? What are the key opportunities for developing shared research agendas?” (Walsh et al., 2022, p. 132).

The response to the call for papers was very positive and the first of two special issues contains a wide set of interesting case studies and debates around planning. Jay (2022) takes a largely theoretical approach in his consideration of the two planning “milieus” of the land and the sea. He investigates whether MSP practitioners in the UK might benefit from a more tangible, lived experience of the marine areas that they plan, much as land use planners might obtain not only through their work but also through being able to walk the streets and landscapes. Focusing on Denmark, Howells and Ramirez-Monsalve (2022) discuss administrative and governance issues that can arise in MSP. In this case, conflict occurs between the objectives of the agricultural

sector and the mariculture (aquaculture) sectors, with MSP processes often taking precedence over terrestrial practices, and the two being poorly integrated. Smith et al. (2022) stick to a broadly similar theme as they explore the coherence of policy that is required to adapt to climate change at the coast in Ireland. With no dedicated policy for managing the coast, planning activities tend to be ad-hoc in nature and lack coordination. Yet et al. (2022 – outlined in more detail below) consider the opportunities for implementing a more community-centric approach to MSP practices. Finally, Tafon et al. (2022) take on the challenge of finding ways to reduce the deep-rooted conflicts between users of marine space and resources. Their notion of pragmatic agonistic co-produced conflict transformation (PACT) might be drawn on to understand (the causes of) conflict better and to institutionalise the means of tackling it.

The second special issue in this series, due to be published later in 2022, will introduce more papers around these themes, and propose an agenda to encourage further integration of planning practice and research on land and at sea.

### **Learning from Community-Based Engagement**

Participatory, community-based engagement is the focus of the paper authored by the Dalhousie University-based research group that is exploring aspects of MSP (Yet et al., 2022). Funded by the [Ocean Frontier Institute](#), this research group is exploring questions about community-level engagement and local-level relevance of MSP and connecting planning systems and processes across land and sea.

While national and regional MSP seek to meet national objectives, its greatest local contribution could be supporting the development and resilience of coastal communities. Thus, the people of coastal communities need to be fully engaged to help shape the policies and regulations that will affect their regions. Challenges for their engagement exist, however. Critiques of MSP stakeholder engagement globally reveal weak local engagement practice, highlighting the need to improve MSP processes. Community and land-use planning and environmental management have a longer history of addressing the same concern. In the study, titled “Learning from experience: Lessons from community-based engagement for improving participatory MSP,” Yet et al. (2022) consider how development of participatory principles and processes in terrestrial planning could inform engagement practices in MSP. This research asked: What are the best practice principles from terrestrial planning and environmental management models for community-based, participatory planning and decision-making? and 2) What are the stakeholder and community engagement practices in MSP?

From the terrestrial planning literature, the research identified eight principles for community-based, participatory planning (see Table 1 in Yet et al., 2022): 1) Participation must be underpinned by principles of empowerment, equity, trust, and learning; 2) Communities must be engaged early and throughout the process; 3) Participation must ensure broad

representation; 4) Community participants must be involved meaningfully in plan-making; 5) Engagement methods must be tailored to the community context; 6) Facilitation must be skilled and impartial; 7) Both local and scientific knowledge must be considered in decision-making; and 8) Participation must be institutionalized.

After establishing engagement practices and challenges in these two planning realms through a literature review, the study turned attention to engagement practices in community and coastal and marine planning in the maritime province of Nova Scotia, Canada. The research team interviewed practitioners in local planning and ocean management about their community engagement experiences and perspectives to answer the questions: How do these experiences compare across practitioner groups? How do these perspectives compare with best practice principles for community-based, participatory planning and decision-making? and, What lessons can be drawn from community-based participatory planning practice for MSP?

In the Nova Scotia case study, actors in different roles in community engagement shared concerns about local engagement effectiveness. Community-level participants expressed skepticism based on experiences with coastal and marine management and planning initiatives. Government participants described successes and challenges of reaching and involving community members and for managing expectations of engagement and its outcomes. Although MSP is not well known among the local government or industry and economic development agency participants in Nova Scotia, participants from these organizations recognized the opportunity to strengthen MSP engagement by giving more attention to knowledge and skills of local government and community groups, a perspective shared by participants from community-based organizations.

Linking local planning with marine planning needs may help shift the process from a hierarchical structure critiqued in the scholarly literature to a collaborative engagement model. Such a link would increase the relevance of MSP for local governments and coastal communities and support coastal community development.

## **Conclusion**

Without a strong focus on proactive, continued local community participation, assisted by relationships with community-level organizations, leaders, and officials involved in community planning, local participation in MSP is not guaranteed. Linking MSP with community planning, where institutional and citizen-driven processes already use community-based, participatory engagement, would benefit MSP. Connecting with local processes would lead to MSP outcomes that are relevant to people living in the coastal zone. Attending to community planning and development in MSP gives local governments the opportunity for input into decisions about coastal waters where they do not have jurisdiction, as is the case in Canada. Implementing MSP in Atlantic Canada provides an opportunity to model this connection. Beyond Atlantic Canada,

this study is relevant to other communities and local governments considering their roles in MSP and development of sustainable coastal communities.

## References

\*Included in the *Planning Practice & Research* special issue, "Planning for Sea Spaces I: Processes, Practices and Future Perspectives."

\*Howells, M., & Ramírez-Monsalve, P. (2022). Maritime spatial planning on land? Planning for land-sea interaction conflicts in the Danish context. *Planning, Practice & Research*, 37(2), 152-172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2021.1991656>

*Abstract:* Denmark is currently producing their first Maritime Spatial Plan, as required by the European Union's Maritime Spatial Planning Directive 2014/89. This article investigates the Danish approach to governing land-sea interactions, exploring the impacts of various institutional and procedural factors on the practice of planning at the land-sea interface in Denmark. We find that in Denmark, the MSP process has priority over the terrestrial planning system, that there is a complex institutional set-up with a lack of integration between the maritime and terrestrial planning systems, and that there exist differing perspectives about the importance of certain industries leading to conflicts.

\*Jay, S. (2022): Experiencing the sea: Marine planners' tentative engagement with their planning milieu. *Planning Practice & Research*, 136-151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2021.2001149>

*Abstract:* It is more difficult for marine planners to gain understanding of their plan areas than terrestrial planners, because of the relative remoteness of the sea. However, direct experience of the marine planning milieu, including the sea's bio-physical dimensions, may lead to better planning outcomes. A series of interviews with UK marine planning professionals reveals that experience of their planning milieu can be characterised as tentative, though also suggests ways forward in this respect. An "experiential" approach to marine planning is proposed, by which planners seek, through multiple methods of learning, to be cognitively immersed in their planning milieu, including its non-human aspects.

\*Smith, G., LeTissier, M., O'Hagan, A., Farrell, E. J. (2022). Policy coherence for climate change adaptation at the land-sea interface in Ireland, *Planning Practice & Research*, 37(2), 173-188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2021.1991657>

*Abstract:* One area where climate adaptation policies are proving difficult to design and implement is at the coast. On one hand, some of the most severe impacts of climate change are being recorded at the coast — especially through erosion and flooding — whilst on the other hand, these areas represent complex land-sea planning and policy interfaces. This paper analyses the coherency of policies along Ireland's coast from a climate adaptation perspective. Results suggest that many policies are developed in an ad-hoc fashion around the needs of single sectors. Improved policy coherence at all levels of governance is required to address this.

\*Tafon, R., Glavovic, B., Saunders, F., Gilek, M. (2022). Oceans of conflict: Pathways to an ocean sustainability PACT, *Planning Practice & Research*, 37(2), 213-230.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2021.1918880>

*Abstract:* Festering ocean conflict thwarts efforts to realize the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. This paper explores transformations of ocean conflict into situated sustainability pathways that privilege human needs, justice, and equity. We first outline the promise and limits of prevailing ocean/coastal governance practices, with a focus on marine spatial planning (MSP), which by framing conflict in shallow terms as use incompatibility, supports resolution strategies that privilege neoliberal technocratic-managerial and post-political models of consensual negotiation, thereby obscuring the structural inequalities, maldistributions, and misrecognitions that drive deep-seated conflicts. Next, the distinctive features of the marine realm and ocean conflict are explained. Third, we outline the root causes, drivers and scale of conflict, with reference to history, climate, culture, governance, institutions, and prevailing international socio-political conditions. Fourth, we reflect on the nature of conflict, exploring implications for shallow and deeper approaches of handling conflicts. Fifth, we highlight the implications of knowledge co-production for understanding and transforming conflict in pursuit of justice. Then, in response to the orthodoxies of MSP and prevailing conflict resolution strategies, we elaborate an alternative approach — Pragmatic Agonistic co-produced Conflict Transformation (PACT) for sustainability — sketching out key elements of a praxis that seeks to transform destructive interaction patterns of conflict into co-produced, constructive, scalable and “institutionalizable” yet contestable and provisional sustainability knowledge-action.

Walsh, C. (2020). Conference report: Spatial strategies at the land-sea interface: Rethinking maritime spatial planning, University of Hamburg, 11–13 September 2019. *TPR: Town Planning Review*, 91(3), 343-348. <https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.2020.19>

*Abstract:* The article offers information on the conference Spatial Strategies at the Land-Sea Interface: Rethinking Maritime Spatial Planning held at University of Hamburg, Germany from September 11-13, 2019. Topics discussed include the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive of European Union, which has emerged within a marine management context, experimental alternative mappings for MSP based on spatial data, and challenges associated with spatial strategy making at the land-sea interface.

\*Walsh, C., Sielker, F., Smith, G., & Crawford, J. (2022). Planning for sea spaces I: Processes, practices, and future perspectives. *Planning Practice & Research*, 37(2), 131-135.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2022.2046362>

Editorial

\*Yet, M., Manuel, P., DeVidi, M., & MacDonald, B. H. (2022). Learning from experience: Lessons from community-based engagement for improving participatory marine spatial planning. *Planning Practice & Research*, 37(2), 189-212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2021.2017101>

*Abstract:* Marine spatial planning (MSP) is critiqued for inadequate stakeholder engagement practices, particularly for determining community-level interests. Community engagement is foundational to community planning, a local-level process in terrestrial planning. This study compared the community engagement experiences of practitioners in local and national-level

organizations in Nova Scotia, Canada, likely to participate in MSP to participatory best practice principles identified in the terrestrial planning and environmental management literature. Giving more attention to knowledge and skills of local government and community groups could strengthen participatory practices in MSP, link community and marine planning, and increase the relevance of MSP for coastal community development.