

Incorporating cultural ecosystem services into marine spatial planning: The ICES approach of cultural significance of sea areas

Summary (150 words)

Marine or Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is a normative approach for decisions on the competitive use of sea space based on several knowledge domains. From an ecosystem service perspective, MSP can be understood as an attempt to allocate space to the full range of ecosystem services provided by coasts and oceans. While it is common to focus on the ecological and economic values provided by the sea, it is less common to regard the sea as a place defined by cultural meanings even though these can be highly relevant for local acceptance and support of planning decisions. The presentation will introduce criteria for assessing the cultural significance of sea areas developed in a workshop of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). The criteria are linked to a risk management approach in order to highlight how cultural values could be integrated into decision making processes.

Abstract (600-1200 words)

Marine or Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is a normative approach for decisions on the competitive use of sea space based on several knowledge domains. For Europe, Maritime Spatial Planning as set out in the EU Directive 2014/89/EU, establishing a common framework for maritime spatial planning, has a clearly economic connotation. The objectives refer to the development of maritime economic sectors, marine areas and use of resources, despite reference to the ecosystem approach and placing growth within the limits of sustainability.

As shown in the Coastal Futures project in Germany (Lange et al. 2010), the spatial distribution of uses in the sea can be conceptually linked to ecosystem services. When looking at MSP from an ecosystem service perspective, MSP can be understood as an attempt to allocate space to the full range of ecosystem services provided by coasts and oceans. However, since not all services can be maximized simultaneously, society must make decisions on the relative preferences for different services. At the same time, it is not always clear which marine goods, services and benefits are actually valued, by whom they are valued, where these values are located in space, and what conflicts exist between different types of values. For example, what is the value of recreational, aesthetic or spiritual services provided by the sea? While it is common to focus on the ecological and economic values provided by the sea, it is less common to regard the sea as a place defined by these and similar cultural meanings and the often immaterial values associated with them. While Strategic Environmental Assessments allow to routinely taking ecological considerations into account, information on social and cultural attachments is rare and therefore not routinely considered in decision-making in MSP. But as shown by Gee (2013) cultural values play a significant role in the perception of sea uses by local coastal populations and therefore have an impact on the local acceptance of and support given to planning decisions.

For planners and managers, the key question in this context is how MSP can take account of these immaterial values in risk assessments in a way that is commensurate

with ecological or economic values. Against this background a workshop on “Mapping Cultural Dimensions of Ecosystem Services” (WKCES), organised by the ICES Working Group on Marine Planning and Coastal Zone Management (WGMPCZM), developed an approach to identifying and mapping culturally significant areas as well as related risk assessment criteria (ICES 2013).

The workshop used the word “connection” as an inclusive descriptor of the many ways that people relate to and value ecosystems. Given the wide range of cultural contexts, and focusing on indigenous cultures as a specific example, a key conclusion is that cultural values cannot be defined through universally valid pre-set criteria. “What is a cultural value” needs to be defined by the stakeholders, rightsholders and communities of interest within the planning area and in those spatial areas that will experience the impacts of a planned project. In this context “Culturally significant areas” are proposed in analogy to “ecologically significant areas” in order to link up with the nature of spatial planning processes. To identify an area as culturally significant is to conclude that the area provides cultural services that are critical to the wellbeing and identity of the given community. The approach uses five criteria to assess the cultural significance of marine features: 1) cultural uniqueness; 2) community reliance; 3) importance to social-ecological resilience; 4) degree of tradition associated with the feature; and 5) association with dramatic cultural change. Location/spatial extent, temporal scale, and the environmental quality required to maintain the cultural feature or practice in question, are added considerations in the approach. In order to enable planning decisions, a two-stage process is suggested, consisting firstly of establishing a baseline of cultural features or practices of importance and secondly, carrying out a risk assessment, determining the sensitivity of the cultural features or practices identified to potential developments in the planning area.

The risk assessment approach is modelled on the process of ecological risk assessment, identifying vulnerable cultural ecosystem services based on existing and future pressures in the planning area and ascertaining the likelihood of losing or damaging a given cultural ecosystem service. It uses pre-agreed risk criteria to draw up a classification of risks as extreme, very high, medium, low and negligible. The tolerability of the risks in terms of the potential consequence to cultural integrity are evaluated in collaboration with the community of interest.

The presentation will introduce this approach, discuss its underlying assumptions and frame it in the context of Maritime Spatial Planning processes.

References

Gee, K (2013). Trade-offs between seascape and offshore wind farming values: An analysis of local opinions based on a cognitive belief framework. Phd thesis University of Goettingen. 245 pp.

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