

Ecosystem-based Management and Marine Spatial Planning: Transboundary Issues in Stakeholder Engagement

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TÜRKİYE

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Summary

Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is essential for managing shared marine spaces. By balancing ecological, economic, and social priorities, MSP has evolved to incorporate ecosystem-based management (EBM), promoting sustainability. However, developing policies across borders presents challenges for several reasons. Examples of these include differences in governance structures, a lack of trust among stakeholders, and limited resources, which often make collaboration challenging. On the other hand, effective governance needs coordination at multiple levels, such as by involving regional councils, ministries, and cooperation networks. This study examines how public governance can support cross-border MSP efforts. It conceptualises the inquiry through a literature review, using thematic analysis in NVivo 14. The initial key themes include governance, stakeholder engagement, and knowledge sharing. Additionally, interviews with MSP stakeholders in the Mediterranean region will provide further insights. We expect the findings to help demonstrate good governance practices that strengthen stakeholder participation.

Keywords: strategic management, marine spatial planning, maritime business administration, blue economy, ecosystem-based management

Word count: 1476

Introduction

The biophysical dynamics of the ocean do not follow political borders, making transboundary effects a significant challenge in marine planning and management (Frazão Santos et al., 2019). As a response, marine spatial planning (MSP) emerged as a social construction of the ocean (Trouillet, 2020). Defined as “a public process of analysing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives that usually have been specified through a political process” (Gopnik et al., 2012, p. 1139), MSP is a key approach to tackle such transboundary issues (Morf et al., 2019). While the early applications of MSP research were criticised for being descriptive and inadequately critical, there appears to be progress in the critical applications of MSP in recent years (Tafon et al., 2019). Despite the progress made in several aspects, such as integrating stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process (Spijkerboer, 2021, Smythe and McCann, 2018), transboundary MSP still poses significant challenges for stakeholder participation (Morf et al., 2019).

Another development in the marine management landscape is the introduction of ecosystem-based management (EBM) as a complementary approach to MSP. EBM is defined as “an environmental management approach that recognises the full array of interactions within a marine ecosystem, including humans, rather than considering single issues, species, or ecosystem services in isolation” (Christensen et al., 1996 in Ansong et al., 2017, p. 65). Today’s MSP applications are interwoven with EBM (Haapasaari and van Tatenhove, 2022).

This paper examines how public management can effectively navigate the challenges of cross-border collaboration in MSP cases where multiple countries share coastal and marine areas. The authors aim to provide generalizable recommendations for future MSP projects and research through this examination. To achieve these objectives, the study begins with a review of the relevant literature, utilising Research Rabbit and Endnote 2025. The authors conduct a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012) of the literature in NVivo 14. Next, the study interviews key stakeholders such as ministries, regional councils, and working groups (Haapasaari and van Tatenhove, 2022). While stakeholder definitions are abundant in the literature, this study follows the following definition: “Stakeholders may include anyone affected by or with a claim to or interest in the planning area” (Smythe and McCann, 2018).

The findings are expected to contribute to knowledge by advancing practice and theoretical discussions by integrating governance frameworks and stakeholder engagement strategies to address challenges in transboundary MSP.

Literature identifies MSP as an essential approach to dealing with fragmented governance and policies. This requires integration across geographical and political boundaries, sectors, and various types of knowledge. However, challenges persist in ensuring meaningful stakeholder participation, interagency cooperation, and cross-border policy coherence.

The following section presents the initial findings of the literature review to the reader. An overview of the method and research timeline follows. Finally, the authors present expected findings and recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

Marine governance concerns interactions among state authorities, market stakeholders, supranational organisations and civil society within a complex, multi-level and multilayered institutional setting (Soma et al., 2015, p. 4). Building on this, there is broad agreement that MSP should incorporate transboundary considerations, given the interconnected nature of marine ecosystems, resources, and activities (Jay et al., 2016, p. 85).

Conceptual Framework of Marine Governance

Marine governance is influenced by formal and informal rules, actors, resources, and discourses, which impact policy outcomes (Haapasaari and van Tatenhove, 2022, van Tatenhove, 2013). Effective governance arrangements require facilitation across multiple levels, including regional councils, ministries, and cooperation networks (Stojanovic and Gee, 2020, Smythe and McCann, 2018, Soma et al., 2015, Frazão Santos et al., 2019).

The literature highlights the critical nature of institutional governance arrangements in ensuring the successful implementation of MSP, especially in transboundary contexts where cooperation among national, regional, and local authorities is often challenging (Haapasaari and van Tatenhove, 2022, van Tatenhove, 2013, Spijkerboer, 2021, Piwowarczyk et al., 2019). Differences in national MSP systems, regulatory frameworks, and institutional priorities pose

significant barriers to integration (Piwowarczyk et al., 2019, Morf et al., 2019, Haapasaari and van Tatenhove, 2022, Stojanovic and Gee, 2020).

Stakeholder Integration in Transboundary MSP

Stakeholder participation is a fundamental aspect of MSP, ensuring legitimacy, ownership, and inclusivity in decision-making processes (Smythe and McCann, 2018, Spijkerboer, 2021, Frazão Santos et al., 2019, Morf et al., 2019, Piwowarczyk et al., 2019, Soma and Haggett, 2015). However, transboundary MSP presents unique challenges related to stakeholder integration. Table 1 illustrates an overview of the barriers and enablers for stakeholder engagement.

Barriers to transboundary stakeholder engagement in MSP		Enablers for stakeholder engagement	
Differences in governance structures, processes, and priorities	Obstruct cooperation between national, regional, and local authorities.	Institutional enablers	Cross-border collaborations through projects and permanent transboundary cooperation mechanisms.
Limited trust between various MSP actors	Lead to reluctance in sharing information and engaging in collaborative decision-making.	Process-related enablers	Capacity building, mutual learning, and structured forums for stakeholder engagement.
Time and resource constraints	Affect the feasibility of continual stakeholder participation.	Stakeholder-related enablers	Awareness-building initiatives, inclusive participation strategies, and stakeholder

			mapping to ensure diverse representation.
Language and knowledge-related challenges,	Particularly in cross-border settings where different terminologies and knowledge systems must be reconciled.		

Table 1: Barriers and enablers for stakeholder engagement

Source: Compiled from Piwowarczyk et al. (2019), Morf et al. (2019), Soma and Haggett (2015)

Method and Future Research Directions

The study reviews relevant literature on transboundary governance, MSP and EBM using Google Scholar, further utilising Research Rabbit and Endnote 2025. This process resulted in the identification of 56 research articles and book chapters (The sample included the following: Ansong et al., 2017, Quero García et al., 2020, Mulazzani and Malorgio, 2017, Frazão Santos et al., 2019, Erkkilä-Välimäki et al., 2022, Hassler et al., 2018, Gopnik et al., 2012, Shucksmith and Kelly, 2014, White et al., 2012, Katsanevakis et al., 2011, Qiu and Jones, 2013, Pomeroy and Douvere, 2008, Soma and Haggett, 2015, Crowder and Norse, 2008, Saunders et al., 2019, Calado et al., 2021, Dalton et al., 2019, Haapasaari and van Tatenhove, 2022, Tolvanen et al., 2019, Stojanovic and Gee, 2020, Kyvelou and Ierapetritis, 2019, van Tatenhove, 2013, Ullah et al., 2021, Douvere, 2008, Piwowarczyk et al., 2019, Spijkerboer, 2021, Maes, 2008, Gilliland and Laffoley, 2008, Smythe and McCann, 2018, Soma et al., 2015, Gacutan et al., 2022, Rafael et al., 2024, Schultz-Zehden et al., 2019, Zaucha and Gee, 2019, Klinger et al., 2018, Reilly et al., 2016, Iglesias-Campos et al., 2021, Douvere and Ehler, 2009, Smith-Godfrey, 2022, Spijkerboer et al., 2020, Kerr et al., 2014, Tafon et al., 2019, Trouillet, 2020, Douvere et al., 2007, Quero García et al., 2019, McGowan et al., 2019, Kafas et al., 2017, Zaucha, 2014, Jay,

2018, Soma et al., 2018, Degnbol and Wilson, 2008, Reed, 2008, Calado et al., 2022, Morf et al., 2019, Jay et al., 2016, Li and Jay, 2020).

The authors conduct a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012) of the literature in NVivo 14. The coding process resulted in 480 codes. The codes were further analysed to structure a coherent illustration of the literature. The initial themes were as follows: Conceptual Framework of Maritime Governance, Stages of MSP, Data use and type in MSP projects, Good Practice Suggestions for MSP, and Stakeholder Engagement.

The study also utilises interviews with MSP stakeholders in the Mediterranean region. The Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) is to be used for data analysis. We will present our findings and contributions at the British Academy of Management Conference. We expect the first—and second-order findings to reveal crucial insights regarding maritime governance issues, specifically in cases where transboundary interrelations are required.

Future research can explore the relationship between maritime governance and stakeholder integration in transboundary MSP. The exploration can specifically examine how different governance modes impact policy effectiveness and social acceptance. Lastly, the role of digital platforms and decision-support systems in facilitating knowledge exchange and stakeholder participation can be investigated, as they have the potential to enhance the inclusivity and transparency of MSP processes.

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