

The Scope of Marine Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Zone Management: New Challenges for the Future

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“The sea, the great unifier, is man’s only hope. Now, as never before, the old phrase has a literal meaning: we are all in the same boat.”

Oceanographer: Jacques Yves Cousteau.

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Editorial

Marine environment is home to a rich biodiversity and long supported tradition of economic activities. Although we have used it for thousands of years, its importance to society, to life on Earth, as we know it today, goes far beyond what we imagined.

In this context, marine planning emerged in the seventies as a response to the interest of the States in the establishment of Marine Protected Areas [1]. The best example in this regard is the Australian Great Barrier Reef Park. Today, the rapid growth that marine planning is undergoing is due to the interests of energy production [2], namely the rise of offshore-wind farms [3]. These interests are the main underlying reasons for the marine spatial planning efforts undertaken in regions as diverse as Germany, the UK, Belgium or the U.S.

With these motivations, international and national policies have increasingly changed towards promoting a framework for marine management oriented to the governance of these spaces [4]. Indeed, the United Nations have been promoting since the 1992 Rio Conference the need for new management tools for maritime areas, establishing the objective of the parties to have management tools by 2002. In result, in the first decade of the XXI century there have been many advances in this regard; the UNEP Regional Seas Programmes have been particularly successful in this field, highlighting the success of the Mediterranean Sea Program. The European Union has responded to these advances developing an Integrated Maritime Policy which has established a suitable framework to manage marine areas of the Member States. Other countries such as the USA, UK, Australia and Canada have also made significant improvements. Then, it seems clear that public policies begin to reflect changes that point towards governance as better management model for marine areas. But what does it mean for managing marine-coastal areas?

Marine ecosystems, and the activities they support, have an intense relationship with ecosystems and activities located in the emerged part of the coast [5]. Indeed, Chapter 17 of Agenda 21 [6], states in its 17.39 Article, in relation to the protection of the marine environment, the following: public bodies for coastal-marine coordination should provide the capacity and authority needed to monitor all activities and sources of marine pollution located on land, and propose appropriate control measures.

These recognized relationships between land and sea environment are frequently not translated into the management systems [7]. Two distinct management areas are distinguished. The first covers coastal terrestrial areas and coastal marine waters [8], where land-sea relationships are very close and justify the approach to this scope of management through the perspective of integrated coastal zone

management. Therefore, marine spatial planning, as also land planning, should be conceived as a management tool of this continuous land-sea area. The second management area would consist of marine waters, where ecosystems and activities do not keep such close relationships with the terrestrial area. In this case, the approach would be the integrated management of marine areas, in which maritime spatial planning would be a tool for management as well, but under this different and more international perspective [9].

In conclusion, in the next decades more efforts should be focused on bringing clarity in how to organize current management systems for introducing the connectivity between land and sea as a way to improve the coastal and marine governance.

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