MarXiv Summary

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If you start it, they may not come: Why some stakeholders did not participate in a marine spatial planning process.

Using the recent ocean planning process in the US Northeast, this paper assesses the perspectives of stakeholders who did not participate in a marine spatial planning (MSP) process. Since it is more challenging to find and survey stakeholders who did not participate in a process than ones who did, the authors chose a smaller study area – Massachusetts Bay – to examine. They conducted a scoping survey (235 respondents) to understand respondents' relationships with the marine environment, their understanding of MSP, and why they did or did not participate in the Northeast regional ocean planning process. In addition, the authors held three focus groups (21 participants total) to further explore participants' understanding of the planning process and their perceptions of the process. The scoping survey was "not intended to be representative", and focus group participants were chosen from scoping survey respondents.

The authors found three issues that influenced the exclusion and/or non-participation of the interviewed stakeholders:

1. Many (approximately a third of all survey participants) had not heard of the process, and many had the perception that the process was deliberately exclusionary. For instance, meetings were held in places considered to be inaccessible and at times that were not convenient for many stakeholders. They also believed that the process was focused on a narrow range of sectors, particularly energy.
2. Many study participants felt that the regional scale of the process was inappropriate.
3. The benefits and/or losses that might result from the process were not clear to stakeholders.

The authors conclude that truly participatory MSP processes should:

1. Incorporate social science that brings understanding of complex social-spatial relationships.
2. Make public participation more meaningful.

Allow debate of the purpose of the MSP process. As with many MSP processes, public participation in the process in the US Northeast was largely confined to the final stage in the process – the "operational" stage – and came in the form of public hearings and review and comment opportunities. There also needs to be meaningful public participation in earlier phases to determine if a process would have value or purpose and how it should be carried out – the "normative" and "strategic" stages.

This is a summary of:
Exclusion and non-participation in Marine Spatial Planning

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Added to MarXiv:
November 2017

Published: Marine Policy, 2017

Suggested Citation:
If you start it, they may not come: Why some stakeholders did not participate in a marine spatial planning process. OCTO (2017). DOI: 10.17605/OSF.IO/AD8YS

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