

## STEWARDSHIP FOR COASTAL GOVERNANCE

### Commentary on 'The Littoral and the Liminal: Challenges to the Management of the Coastal and Marine Commons'

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Bonnie McCay's description of coasts as liminal fits well with what we perceive of this ecosystem - as a highly diverse, complex and dynamic place that poses great challenges to management. The ambiguity in the definition of the coasts and their boundaries reflects the difficulty that governments and institutions face in delineating their authority and jurisdiction. A major part of the challenges and difficulties in managing the coasts is due to the multitude of coastal actors. They range from traditional users, including small-scale fishers, shellfish gatherers, subsistence fish farmers and rural dwellers, to modern and industrialized users, such as large-scale fishers, intensive aquaculture producers, oil and gas explorers, hotel and resort operators, and urban residents. The polarity of these two types of coastal uses is evident since for some people, coasts are areas of the last resort where they migrate to in search of livelihoods, while for others, they are places where wealth is radiated and accumulated.

Boundaries and liminality of coasts are at the centre of discussion for coastal practitioners, whether they lean towards zoning as the key instrument or they prefer a holistic and integrated management approach. Recognizing the interactivity and connectivity between coastal ecosystems and humans that depend on them, management goals are often ambitious, including for example, maintaining ecosystem integrity and the resource base, optimizing benefits for current and future generations, and minimizing stakeholder conflicts (Cicin-Sain and Knecht 1998; Kay and Alder 2005). With the availability of modern technology and advanced computerized software, decision-support tools for coastal management especially those based on Geographic Information System (GIS) become highly popular. The main driver in the application of these tools is to enhance our understanding of the complexity and dynamics of the coastal environment as well as of how human activities impact these ecosystems. These tools also enable us to identify problems and explore options. Yet, the question that is rarely factored in the models is the one posed at the People and the Sea IV Conference - *Who owns the coast?*

McCay's eloquent deliberation of this question and the issues surrounding it triggers further interrogation about why the question is not often raised as part of the mainstream discourse in coastal management. The answer may lie in the way we treat the issue and the perspective we bring to the exploration of options and solutions. For example, from the management perspective, challenges and concerns related to the ocean and coastal commons such as over-fishing, ecosystem degradation and food security may be due to the lack of private ownership,

and the solutions may therefore be found through some forms of property right regime. I would suggest here that these issues can also be seen from a broader perspective, that is governance perspective, which suggests that they are not just technical problems that can be fixed using standard management measures (such as area and seasonal closure) or economic incentives (such as Individual Transferable Quotas or itqs). When seen through a governance lens, the problems of the commons may not be about resource or exclusion of harvesting rights, and the solutions may be found not in the management toolbox, but within the governance sphere.

The 'interactive governance' framework proposed by Kooiman *et al.* 2005 is one such perspective. The focus of this approach is about how multiple actors, not only the governments, but also fishers, fish traders, consumers, environmental organizations and others coastal stakeholders, interact and negotiate to solve problems, explore opportunities and form governing institutions. The implication of such approach is that actors may not agree about what the problems are, what they are caused by and where the solutions may be found. It also means that there is no once-and-for-all solution since the problems may keep reappearing. These characteristics of the problems make them wicked, and not tamed (see Rittel and Weber 1973; Jentoft *et al.* 2008), and thus should be treated as such. Consequently, the limits to how governable ocean and coastal system are and what can reasonably be expected of a governance system needs to be recognized (Jentoft, 2007). Also, the question needs to be raised about to what extent property rights can help to make these problems more tame than they currently are. Applying the interactive governance approach to the problems related to the coastal commons may result in a discovery that property right is not the only solution, and perhaps not even the most important one, and that we need to look at coastal systems from a broader perspective. I would propose that what may be required for coastal governance is stewardship, which means taking care of something that one does own, not as a property but as a heritage and as a collective responsibility.

An example of attentions towards stewardship is documented in Canada's Oceans Strategy released in 2002 under the Oceans Act. **One of the key policy objectives** of the strategy is the understanding and protection of the marine environment. Promoting a sense of stewardship through public awareness is recognized in the strategy as a way to develop community's sense of pride and public ownership that will aid compliance and enforcement in oceans governance (Foster *et al.* 2005). Stewardship is referred to as 'an ethic that embodies cooperative planning and management of environmental resources with organizations, communities and others to actively engage in the prevention of loss of habitat and facilitate its recovery in the interest of long-term sustainability'<sup>1</sup>. Conversely, property ownership, the state or fact of exclusive rights and control over property<sup>2</sup>, is not mentioned in the Sustainable Development Strategy, the document providing directions and guidance to the Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), the responsible agency for developing and implementing oceans policies and programs on behalf of the Government of Canada, except in the context of shared ownership of the future direction among all interested parties that may result from the stakeholders' consultation process.

One of the emphases of the Oceans Strategy is the promotion of ocean governance through integrated management planning and the establishment of large ocean management areas. It also supports citizen awareness activities through initiatives that foster public engagement in decision-making process. The Eastern Scotian Shelf Integrated Management (ESSIM) is an initiative that is being implemented through this Oceans Strategy. The ESSIM initiative is a collaborative planning process that involves multiple stakeholders including federal and provincial departments, aboriginal communities, municipal and local planning authorities, ocean industry and resource use sectors, coastal communities, environmental groups, and university researchers in the development and implementation of an integrated ocean management plan for the environmental, economic, social and institutional sustainability of the area (Rutherford *et al.* 2005).

Another example is related to the coastal communities on the Andaman Coast of Thailand. Like that of New Jersey, this coastal area is vulnerable to storm surges and severe climate change. Parts of the coasts are lined with mangrove forests providing protection to the shorelines, as well as serving as nursing ground and habitat to juvenile fish and marine organisms. Fishing, both small- and large scale, is the main economic activity, except in areas with sandy beaches that tourism has been developed. Management of fisheries has traditionally been the responsibility of the central government. Through the Decentralization Act in 1999, some of the management authority and decision-making powers are delegated to local government organizations. This governance reform has led to active participation of community members in the management of coastal resources and some of the efforts have shifted towards protection and stewardship of the resources, including mangrove forests. The importance of mangrove conservation was particularly emphasized after the Indian Tsunami in December 2004 as houses built behind the mangroves were left standing while those in front were washed away (Chang *et al.* 2006). The numerous voluntary, community-based mangrove reforestation and restoration projects taking place nowadays along the Thai coastal areas indicate high potentials for successful resource governance through local stewardship.

What fosters stewardship is a question that needs to be further discussed. In the above examples, ocean and coastal stewardship promoted through the Canada's Oceans Strategy follows the traditional process of legislative development, policy formulation and implementation. The Oceans Act gives the leadership role to the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans in the development of the planning and management for the stewardship of the oceans. If the process taken in the ESSIM initiative to involve multiple actors is inclusive and effective, it could lead to the increase in the awareness about ocean and coastal issues and the sense of stewardship among the public. Similar to Canada, the Thai Constitution indicates that the state shall promote and encourage public participation in preservation, maintenance and balance exploitation of natural resources and biological diversity. Mangrove stewardship on the Andaman coast was not triggered only by the Tsunami, but has been part of the voluntarily programs supported by community leaders, local government organizations, state agencies, and non-governmental organizations.

Returning to McCay's notion of the liminality of the coasts, indeed they are areas that are not easily tamed. As such, putting boundaries, however defined, for example, through zoning and property right regimes and titles of property, on the coasts and their resources, seems to go against the fluidity nature of the coasts. Moving from management to governance and from property rights to stewardship of the coasts requires a change from applying technical and institutional fixes to achieve certain objectives to exploring solutions and opportunities through interactions among actors. This implies that goals may not be predetermined, but formulated through negotiation and cooperative processes and through means that will develop among users a sense of belonging that will foster public ownership and environmental stewardship.

Lack of property rights of marine resources and freedom of access to the coasts and sea does not need to lead to the race to fish and over-fishing. Such consequences arise mainly when the image of the commons is viewed as a tragedy where people are greedy and lack self-control, or as a romance where conflicts are rife among stakeholders due to the power relationships among them. Instead, the ocean and coastal commons can be seen, as McCay points out, as a potential comedy, that is, one of community and harmonization of interests for the common good, where the coasts are seen a sour collective heritage and not only as a place of potential wealth. From the interactive governance perspective, the exploration of alternative images fits well with the recognition that there are limits to what may be governable. Governance of oceans and coasts can take a more playful approach in steering the commons away from the image of tragedy and the property right regime to the image of comedy with stewardship as the main principle.

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## Notes

- 1 'Stewardship in Action' program, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, unpublished document.
- 2 As defined in Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org); accessed on August 21, 2008)