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Taking Power to Sea: A Poststructuralist Discourse Theoretical Critique of Marine Spatial Planning.

Abstract

Responding to calls for a more theoretically-driven, post-positivist and radical Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) research that approaches the policy as a political project, this paper develops a political discourse theory approach to critical MSP. Elaborating *radical contingency* as an ontological condition of social life, which points to the ineradicability of power and conflict in MSP social relations, the paper problematizes MSP as constituting *politics*, or key practices that attempt to organize human co-existence and thus, conceal this radical contingency. These practices (e.g. ecosystem-based management, participation, planning regulation and the organization of socio-natural spaces), whose outcomes are far from adaptive, consensual or neutral are discussed as sites of "politics" that effectively marginalize particular groups of people and "herd" their participation and ways of knowing toward achieving limited policy outcomes. Drawing on the MSP Directive, the paper further teases out how specific narratives and rhetorical signifiers around "integrating" and "balancing" potentially irreconcilable sustainable development objectives may interpellate particular stakeholders in ways that render them ideologically complicitous in sustaining, rather than challenging, neoliberal logics of managerialism and economic maximization of marine resources. But in tune with the ontological condition of the social as radically contingent, the paper discusses how and why participatory spaces may constitute a potential space of contestation for marginalized voices and thus, reveal the *political* moment of MSP. Calls are made for future empirically-grounded research that explores how these MSP

practices are lived and with what implications for marine protection and extant social relations of power in different MSP contexts.

Keywords: critical marine spatial planning; poststructuralist discourse theory; ecosystem-based management; participation; power (*politics* and the *political*).

1. Introduction and Aims

Conceptualized as a marine governance expression of sustainable development, Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in the European Union (EU) has far reaching ambitions of tackling social, environmental and economic conflicts across EU seas by implementing ecosystem-based management (EBM). It is assumed that science-based knowledge and broad stakeholder participation will deliver rational, adaptive, holistic and consensual solutions to these conflicting interests and thus ensure the acceptance and effectiveness of planning decisions. The MSP literature over the years has emphasized the usefulness of EBM and participation for the integrated planning of balanced environmental protection and sustainable use of ocean and coastal resources. In a reformist, rather than critical approach, research has generally accepted the rationality and assumed neutrality of MSP, thereby asserting a certain *post-political* condition (Allmendinger & Haughton 2010) of its practices. It is argued, often unreflectively (e.g. Agardy et al. 2010; Douvere 2008) that MSP constitutes an effective means of resolving a multitude of conflicting interests and values among a range of stakeholders in a pro-active and balanced way and that science-based knowledge can objectively provide solutions to social, economic and environmental problems. This argument stems from the unsettling assumption that participation among broad stakeholder groups can lead to equitable and consensual decisions and that the adaptiveness of EBM as a tool

can facilitate objective decisions. Consider, still, the following assertions from prominent MSP scholars: 1) Ehler's (2012: 3) emphatic assertion that 'MSP is clearly an idea whose time has come'; 2) Douvère's (2008: 765) rather uncritical and unedifying observation that MSP is crucial because it '[f]ocuses on influencing the behavior of humans and their activities over time'; and 3) the unsettling argument by Ritchie and Ellis (2010) for a move away 'from a phase where we need to be concerned with debating speculative institutional design to one where we need to focus on the way the new marine management regime can be implemented successfully' (718). While it has been noted in the critical terrestrial spatial planning literature that far from neutral, policy interventions to meet sustainable development objectives often provide conditions to meet particular perspectives while marginalizing others (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010; 2012), it is clear that MSP scholarship has set more of a reformist than a critical agenda to planning policy and practice. This relative non-reflexivity towards MSP policy and practice, which barely acknowledges 1) the possibility of its negative distributive impacts (Flannery et al. 2016); and 2) systems of exclusion that are constitutive of these arts of governing spatial relations, knowledges and subjectivities, has largely shoved the policy into the domain of the *post-political*, where rational consensus, rather than antagonism and power relations, is assumed to characterize social relations. This assumed power-neutrality ignores the ontological character of all systems of social relations as *radically contingent* and thus, sustained by systems of inclusions and exclusions. Put differently, this rationalist approach to planning and its reformist-oriented research ignores 1) that power not only functions to shape MSP practices and outcomes, but more importantly, antagonism is a constant and inescapable feature of all social relations; and 2) that because of this **ontological condition**, every symbolic order – **which by the way, is forged and maintained through power relations and ideology** – is a precarious achievement and susceptible to challenge. While

sympathetic to the need to find ways to advance successful implementation of MSP, I propose that a useful start would be to deconstruct and unseat the assumed neutrality and objectivity of its practices, by way of revealing underlying power relations and antagonisms, which if not already manifest, may be lurking to hatch as EU Member States move towards finalizing their marine plans by 2020. A successful implementation of MSP, I contend, can only come by way of acknowledging and addressing unequal power relations and social injustices if ecosystem-based marine decisions are to truly reflect society's choices.

That said, it must be acknowledged that a number of scholars have leveled some important critique against MSP. Kidd and Shaw (2014), for instance argue that MSP needs to be understood as a social and political process and as such, the design and implementation of plans must be informed more by socio-political specificities of context, rather than a rationality that follows universal principles and steps. St. Martin and Hall-Arber (2008: 780) submit that to be truly holistic, efforts to collect geo-coded environmental information through ecosystem-based management, must acknowledge a 'heterogeneous "social landscape" of communities, fishing and other resource-dependent practices, and local knowledge that similarly varies across space'. Elsewhere, Ritchie and Ellis (2010) discuss the play of power in participative processes and the role that stakeholder subjectivity plays in them. On their part, Ritchie (2014) and Tynkkynen (2014) found that the framing of the marine "problem" in largely scientific and political terms has paved the way for scientific-technical interventions, while limiting citizen participations in finding solutions. Arguing for a radical turn in MSP scholarship, Flannery et al. (2016) suggest that rather than approach conflict as an object to be resolved, it should be embraced and harnessed toward adaptive learning, social justice and equity. Yet, such important critiques from the social sciences often lack a coherent theoretical framework that both captures the very ontological condition of

social life, and that can serve as an optic with which to unravel the inadequacies that a critical approach to MSP sets out to analyze. It was not until most recently that the call by Ritchie and Ellis (2010: 717) for ‘more theoretically-driven, post-positivist forms of [MSP] research’, has begun to be heeded, by way of work by Boucquey et al. (2016). Articulating the categories of “ontological politics” and “assemblages”, Boucquey et al. (2016: 3) approach the practice of MSP, especially its techno-managerial data-gathering and map-making exercise as constituting an ‘art of government’. Recognizing that ‘governance projects to measure and organize socio-natural spaces have often resulted in the marginalization of human communities’, they insist that the ‘focus of analysis then becomes [...] how and why particular assemblages emerge and function as they do’ (Boucquey et al., 2016: 3). However, in choosing to engage with the new configuration of governmental power inherent in MSP *beyond* what they refer to as a mere ‘politics of denunciation’ or ‘the politics of the anti’ (Boucquey et al. 2016: 2), the dimension of *the political* – how power may shape MSP practices and outcomes – is regrettably underemphasized in the authors’ insightful contribution.

Reflecting on the achievements and challenges of a discourse analytical approach to environmental politics, Hajer and Versteed (2005: 175) famously proposed that ‘given the changing nature of policy making, discourse analysts are supposed to have a task in identifying the new sites of politics and analyzing the political dynamics therein.’ This paper responds to this call by “taking power theory to sea”. It does so by elaborating a key poststructuralist discourse theory (PDT) ontology and related concepts that may unseat the positivist and rationalist evidence-based epistemology that governs MSP thinking and practice, thereby furthering a more substantive critique of MSP logics and social relations. Framed as a theoretical contribution with illustrative examples, the paper contributes to MSP scholarship by emphasizing the function of power and

ideology in shaping MSP social relations and outcomes. Far from neutral, three key MSP practices – participation, EBM and planning regulation – are discussed as sites of *politics* in which power functions through practice to further a particularly preconceived vision of the world. Put differently, the paper contributes with PDT-informed discussions that unseat or provide a particular skepticism on the taken-for-granted neutrality, rationality and holism of MSP practices and their consensus-driven ambition. In discussing these practices as sites of politics that are inescapably penetrated by radical contingency, the paper challenges the orthodoxy among practitioners and researchers alike that participatory or ecosystem-based MSP can possibly contribute to balancing conflicting social, economic and environmental interests at sea in a holistic, adaptive, objective, power-neutral, and consensual way. However, although these practices may inhere systems of “government”, participative spaces in particular, are also discussed as having a transformative potential, where a political subjectivity may be formed for social actors.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section provides a review of the MSP literature in terms of how this literature defines and problematizes participatory ecosystem-based MSP. This leads straight to section 3, which elaborates a PDT social ontology of radical contingency and related concepts with which I unseat mainstream MSP thought and practices. Radical contingency is discussed in terms of the *politics* and the *political* dimension of MSP by elaborating how power may function respectively as a technique of “government” and as a political practice in MSP social relations. However, given that rhetorical devices often sustain particular conceptions of a sustainable future while marginalizing others (Ritchie, 2014), section 4 briefly teases out how the marine “problem” is constructed in a key EU MSP document, and discusses how specific narratives therein may conceal radical contingency through interpellating or directing stakeholders

towards acquiescing to, rather than challenging normatively suspect MSP social norms. Section 5 concludes by way of sketching out paths for future research.

2. Marine Spatial Planning and participative ecosystem-based management

The seas are becoming more spatially crowded with human activities (e.g. offshore wind energy installations, underwater pipelines, shipping, aquaculture and mariculture etc.), resulting in increased stress on, and degradation of, the marine environment (Ritchie and Ellis, 2010). The management of these activities faces serious challenges related to private and common property rights of marine resources, as well as fragmented policies (Kidd, 2013) and regulations that are ill-suited to current intensified socio-ecological and economic uses of the marine resource (Peel and Lloyd, 2004). In the EU institutional framework, three regulatory instruments – Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP), Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), and Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSP Directive) – establish MSP as an integrative tool to address these issues and achieve broader environmental, economic and social sustainability objectives at sea. Participative ecosystem approach to management is considered an operative cornerstone of MSP. The MSP scholarship (e.g. Douvere, 2008; Ehler, 2012) thus sees MSP as signaling policy and practical commitments towards more effective and integrated marine governance, in response to the problems of technocratic, single sector and piecemeal management that bedevil traditional marine planning approaches. Ecosystem-based MSP is seen as a more effective tool that can manage all marine resource uses, while protecting the entire marine ecosystem under a common, spatially-based plan. It is considered a comprehensive approach because rather than manage ecosystem components separately, the spatial orientation of MSP permits a holistic approach to

decision-making that takes cognizance of the entire marine/coastal ecosystem and its processes (Sivas and Caldwell, 2008). This spatial dimension and the integrative, cross-sectoral and participative vision of MSP has been referred to as a ‘true ecosystem approach’ to the sustainable management of the marine ecosystem and its uses (Borja et al., 2016: 2). MSP is thus defined as the rational organization of the use of marine space and the interactions between its uses, to balance demands for development with the need to protect the environment, and to achieve social and economic objectives in an open and planned way (Douvere, 2008, p. 766).

A major principle of ecosystem-based MSP is the underlying logic that the successful management of human activities towards socio-ecological sustainability rests fundamentally on the application of science-based ecosystem knowledge (Agardy et al. 2010; Borja et al. 2016). This idea of science-based knowledge as a cornerstone of MSP is established in the different MSP policy instruments cited earlier. But it is more prominent in the MSFD, which urges Member States to ‘apply an ecosystem-based approach to the management of human activities, ensuring that the collective pressure of such activities is kept within levels compatible with the achievement of good environmental status’ (EC, 2008: Art. 1 (3)). This implies regular measurement and monitoring of the state and health of the ecosystem over time and across space (Knol, 2013). Several geo-coded data information collection and analysis e.g. – geographic information systems, remote sensing and tracking technologies etc. – have been developed to measure ecosystem health before and after planning intervention. While ecological measuring and monitoring is an essential way in which EBM is made operational, knowledge that informs ecosystem-based governance is often *constructed* (Peel and Lloyd, 2004; Knol, 2013; Tynkkynen, 2015). In the context of knowledge generation in the Barents Sea, Knol (2013) noted that knowledge of ecosystem health that informed management was constructed based on ‘pragmatic choices’ of scientists (p. 12). For him, the

science and politics of assembling and re-assembling the objects of existing monitoring programmes into sets of indicators of ecological quality that informed marine management suggests that ‘governance [or in this case, its science-based knowledge] is an effect of actors’ practices, which could have turned out differently if other choices were made’ (p. 3). ‘Other choices’ he insists, ‘could have been made that would have led to a different construction of ecological quality’ (p.12). Furthermore, although ecosystem “health” is conceived both in terms of the survival of the natural system and the well-being of society (Borja et al. 2016), it has been noted that the scope of current data collection methods is limited to biophysical ecosystem, with little attention paid to the “human dimensions” of the marine environment (St. Martin and Hall-Arber, 2008). Thus, it is suggested that far from an objective reality, that which emerges as a defined “problem” to which ecosystem-based MSP is expected to find solutions, is nothing but a “socially constructed” problem with socio-political implications for how MSP is rolled out and practiced (Ritchie and Ellis, 2010).

Lastly, it is believed that by rolling out MSP as a participative process, with spatial planners providing their technical skills, the different and often conflicting values and interests around sea use can be addressed towards rational, objective and consensual marine decisions. This assumption largely stems from participation research that suggests that participative, problem-solving planning yields both stakeholder agreement and on-the-ground environmental benefits (see Bielele and Cayford 2002). A number of studies have been critical of the validity of these purported socio-ecological benefits of participative EBM. In the context of six planning sites in the US, Layzer (2008), for instance, found that participatory ecosystem-based projects yielded fewer-than-anticipated environmental benefits, and that where disagreements arose among stakeholders, these were simply ‘glossed over’ by planners, leading to stalemates during the plan implementation stage

(p. 5). Furthermore, although the MSP literature suggests that engagement with local resource users is crucial to the success of area-specific schemes (Pomeroy and Douvere, 2012), St. Martin and Hall-Arber (2008) note that the participative potential of local, area-specific resource users and communities is greatly hampered by what they call the ‘cartographic silence’ of current EBM technologies that fail to incorporate the heterogeneous knowledges that these communities hold on the marine environment (p. 780). Thus, factors such as scale framings of the marine “problem” (Tynkkynen, 2015), the epistemology of marine knowledge (St. Martin and Hall-Arber, 2008; Flannery et al. 2016), as well as planning regulation in terms of ownership and stewardship of the sea may play a decisive role in scripting out and determining the “what, how and who” of actual participative MSP. The next section elaborates PDT concepts to illustratively problematize these issues.

3. Radical Contingency

I draw on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s post-Marxist, poststructuralist and postmodern political theory to elaborate a PDT that positions itself against a positivist epistemology and a rationalist evidence-based approach that largely dominates the study of MSP. Within an anti-essentialist epistemology and an anti-foundationalist ontology, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) assert that the social is *radically contingent/undecided*, arguing that ideology and institutions/practices function to conceal this very ontological character of social life. This idea of radical contingency/undecidability is premised on the recognition of a *radical negativity* or “the real” (in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms) that permeates all systems of social relations. This radical negativity that manifests itself through the ever-present possibility of antagonism in the social, impedes the full totalization of society and thus, forecloses the possibility of a society in which divisions and power are eradicable (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Since society is permeated by this

ever-present lack, the social is said to be an undecided terrain packed with a configuration of hegemonic practices aiming to establish order in a context of contingency (Mouffe, 2013). With this in mind, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) assert that the conditions of possibility of society and of the identities of subjects and objects are not ahistorical, but quasi-transcendental. That is, within this historicist ontology, what we say, think or do are not conditioned by some pre-given essence or “natural” objectivity capable of determining all meanings into a stable structure, but are the result of political struggles and historical practices and transformations that brought them into existence (Torfing, 2005; Mouffe, 2013). Radical contingency thus, speaks to the role of power and ideology in the forging and maintenance of every social order (Howarth 2010), but also to the *impossibility* of society (Laclau 1990). In this latter aspect, radical contingency suggests ‘an uncertainty that inhabits both the environment where politics is practiced, as well as the practices themselves’ (Griggs and Howarth 2004: 181). As researchers, our task then is to investigate those underlying MSP logics and social practices that appear mundane and natural, and then turn them inside-out to reveal their differential systems of inclusion and exclusion, as well as their underpinning ideologies. This means that we need to see the formative order of different MSP discourses and practice (e.g. economic growth, ecosystem-based management, participation, sustainable energy etc.) not as stable, self-producing structures, but approach them in their *relationalist* character as temporary and precarious systems, which are ‘constantly subjected to political attempts to undermine and/or restructure the discursive context in the course of history’ (Torfing, 2005: 14). Ritchie (2014) highlights the quasi-transcendental nature of MSP in the UK when she notes that although MSP is a radical approach to planning the marine environment, ‘its emergence as a new area of Government regulation highlights assumptions and ideologies that align with New Labour’. Furthermore, in asserting that ‘policy interventions, such as MSP, rarely

enjoy consensus' she acknowledges a certain 'preposition of struggle within policy interventions' (Ritchie, 2014: 668). This "preposition of struggle" in social life is what poststructuralist discourse theorists call radical contingency, which I conceptualize here following Metzger et al. (2014) in terms of the *politics* and *political* dimension of MSP.

3.1. The politics of MSP (Different ways of governing people's knowledge and choices)

By the *politics* of MSP, I refer to 'the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seeks to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions which are always potentially conflicting' (Mouffe, 2013: 3) since they are affected by radical contingency. Thus, considering that 'the lack of *foundation*, the sheer *contingency* of any social order' is the beginning of politics (Rancière, 1999: 16), MSP and its different practices must be approached from a Foucaultian "governmentality" (Foucault, 1997) or a Rancierian "police order" (Rancière, 2001). Following from this, it would be faulty to distinguish between discursive phenomena and what may appear as non-discursive MSP phenomena. Indeed, such seemingly non-discursive MSP phenomena (e.g. participation, planning regulation, ecosystem-based management, and the science of spatializing sea/coastal uses) are often in-and-of themselves discursive, and may constitute systems of inclusion and exclusion in which there are winners and losers. By attempting to organize human co-existence and navigate conflictuality around the marine problem, the *post-political* (Swyngedouw, 2010; Ritchie, 2014) assumption that underpins such practices may function to conceal radical contingency. Given the claim that European MSP was motivated 'in large part by economic goals, such as renewable energy targets that could only be met by including offshore locations' (Gopnik et al., 2012), one can no longer take for granted the assumed neutrality, rationality and consensus of MSP practices nor their lived effects. Far from neutral and objective, these practices should be approached as sites of *politics*, in which the illusory ambition of

achieving marine spatial solutions through “rational” consensus and an “objective” science-based knowledge inheres deep systems of power, exclusion and antagonism. As sites of politics, we need to acknowledge and confront these practices as constituting systems of ordering and governing social and spatial relations towards preconceived policy objectives.

For example, a recent attempt in both MSP research (e.g. ICES, 2013) and practice to identify coastal residents’ socio-cultural attachments and uses of sea space has been to resort to the *where* question, prompted by the need to determine the specific location of a coastal activity so as to impose a certain order and enable manageability. Yet, cultural values that are of an affective character, such as seascape and visual aesthetics constitute values that are not limited to a specific sea space, but often cover a very wide, infinite horizon, and thus, are not easily representable on spatial maps. The tendency in planning circles has been to bundle up such affective values into so-called “cultural” ecosystem services, which by definitional fiat, are often reduced to coastal values that are more easily expressed in monetary and sectoral terms, and representable on spatial maps. These “spatially representable” ecosystem services include such tourism-related activities like hospitality, recreational tourism, surfing and kayaking etc., that in most instances, can easily be delimited to specific sea spaces. Thus, this seemingly non-discursive, spatialized system in which affective socio-cultural values are packaged into monetary values and calculated through such technical devices as cost benefit analysis, more often than not, constitute a discursive system of government and exclusion, in which holders of affective values are the ultimate losers.

Consider yet another MSP practice that may constitute a site of politics in which systems of exclusions are immanent. The fact that ecosystem-based MSP as a practice rests centrally on the principle that the *best available scientific knowledge* should inform marine spatial decisions (EC,

2008; 2014), reveals an acknowledgement of the inadequacies of science to provide timely and accurate information about ecosystem functions and services. As such, EBM is conceptualized institutionally as an adaptive tool that can respond to changing knowledge and conflicting demands and interests. Yet, rather than open up the field of “scientificity” such that holders of what may *a priori* be considered “irrelevant” *doxa* (tacit, experiential knowledge) of ecosystem functions (St. Martin and Hall-Arber, 2008), EBM is premised on a discursive episteme of a “rational” and objective science. In Foucauldian reasoning, this discursive episteme effectively renders EBM an apparatus, not for the separation of truth from falsehood, but for discursively gatekeeping what is acceptable as scientific knowledge (Foucault, 1997). In this power-knowledge nexus, power is discursively constituted through an accepted form of knowledge and “truth” regime that effectively contributes to Othering and marginalizing “non-science-based” ways of knowing and their users. And inasmuch as the constitutive “politics of truth” inherent in the thinking and practice of EBM automatically forecloses experiential, place-specific and user-based knowledges from entering the domain of acceptable scientificity (St. Martin and Hall-Arber; Flannery et al., 2016), then far from neutral and adaptive, EBM constitutes a discursive art of “herding” particular groups of people and their “alternative” ways of knowing and living with the marine environment towards achieving limited policy outcomes. This is increasingly so in a context where scientificity is epistemologically constrained and spatial planners and scientists are assumed to be the privileged holders of the ecosystem *techné* (obtained through formal education and applied expertise), while holders of knowledge that is not sourced from this “privileged” *techné* are foreclosed from contributing to the “best” available scientific knowledge that MSP purports to need. So, given the inability of science to provide policy with complete and reliable knowledge of marine ecosystems (due to inherent complexity and scientific uncertainty), could the time have come to open up its

scientificity to other avenues so that marginalized epistemologies may contribute to truly participatory-derived MSP decisions? Arguably, it would only be then that we could truly begin to talk of a *knowledge-adaptive* ecosystem approach to marine governance.

Another crucial, yet under-researched MSP practice that constitutes a potential site of governing place-based perceptions and choices of sea use is marine regulation. Principle 1 of the Malawi Principles on EBM emphatically states that ‘the *objectives* for managing land, water, and living resources is a matter of *societal choice*, determined through *negotiations* and *trade-offs* among stakeholders having different *perceptions, interests and intentions*’ (SCBD, 2004: 8-9 my emphasis). Both the scientific and grey literature agree that decisions should reflect society’s choices (see Long et al., 2015 for a review on the topic). Although MSP is characterized by some form of power devolution in the sense that local and regional authorities are given the mandate to draw and implement plans, the highly statutory planning character of such “soft-space governance” processes may provide ‘a more restrictive framework for legitimation and challenge’ (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010: 813). Indeed, although marine stakeholders generally agree on the necessity to involve the public in decision-making processes early on (see; Pomeroy and Douvere, 2008; Gopnik et al., 2012), most EU Member States’ planning regulation effectively prevents coastal municipalities and coastal residents from participating meaningfully in MSP processes. Although they are entitled to participate in discussions and air their views, marine regulation functions to constrain opportunities for their meaningful participation in forming or objecting to marine plans. Generally, local municipalities and coastal residents who may be affected by marine plans in different ways, cannot meaningfully object to such plans because as per national planning regulation, they do not have jurisdictional competency at sea. The situation is however, different in contexts like Sweden, where municipalities have a twelve-nautical mile

planning jurisdiction. However, in countries like Estonia, for example, the sea seems to be a common pool resource, as the state exercises exclusive jurisdictional control over its exclusive economic zone and internal waters, including waters surrounding islands. In this case, both local municipalities and coastal residents who objected to a pilot (Hiiumaa County) MSP plan saw their objections discarded by planning authorities on the legal basis of their non-jurisdictional competency at sea. As long as planning regulation continues to constrain possibilities for meaningful debate over the use of sea space and objection to marine plans, EBM can hardly be said to be adaptive nor can ecosystem-based marine decisions be said to reflect society's choices. Participation, under such circumstances would seem to be a co-opted discourse and a post-political tactic whose end is a narrow consensus that legitimizes preconceived policy outcomes that have not been the subject of societal debate.

From these discussions, it becomes clear that governance interventions such as participatory, ecosystem-based MSP constitute a technique of "government", which by fusing around consensus and technocratic environmental management, seeks to annul the properly political moment, while consolidating a post-political era (Swyngedouw, 2009) of marine governance. Yet, radical contingency suggests an impossibility (Laclau, 1990) or ungovernability (Metzger et al., 2014) of society, or a certain precariousness that penetrates the environment where politics is practiced (Griggs and Howarth, 2004). It is to the recuperation of this political moment – the inescapable antagonistic dimension – in MSP practice that the paper now turns.

3.2. The Political Dimension of MSP

Given the temporality and precariousness of human social norms (whose formation are never the result of a natural objectivity), it goes without saying that every symbolic order is dislocated or susceptible to challenge from counter-hegemonic practices that attempt to disarticulate it and

install in its place, a new order (Laclau, 1990; Mouffe, 2013). The inevitability of antagonism in this dialectical relation in all human societies is what is referred to as the *political*, which belongs to the ontological level, and different from “politics”. The political, as conceptualized by Mouffe (2005; 2013) is the ineradicable dimension of antagonism, power and conflict that is constitutive of the social. This political condition, which reveals the social as constitutively split and thus dislocated (Laclau, 1990), presents a window of hope for marginalized voices in social relations that MSP research has thus far ignored (e.g. coastal residents). This hope derives from the fact that although ideology functions in managing the way we read past, present and future events (Torfing, 2005), and *politics* conceals radical contingency, such ways of knowing become *dislocated* when they are confronted with new events that the discursive structure fails to symbolize. Dislocation derives from the fact that every discourse or identity, due to its ontological finitude, depends on a negativity – an external, threatening discourse – in order to cover over its ontological lack. This “covering over” is done by mediating or co-opting the negativity through the articulation of equivalential chains that emphasize sameness between the main discourse and its co-opted counterpart. Indeed, as previously discussed, there is no doubt that environmental governance regimes, including MSP depend on, and rhetorically tout, participation as a process to politically legitimize spatial decisions. Flannery et al. (2016), for instance, suggest that through stakeholder consultation, the discourse on participatory-based MSP decisions constitutes co-optation of genuine demands for democratic decision-making by the policy. Added to this is an emerging body of terrestrial planning literature that provides thought-provoking critiques of participatory planning, in which spatial planning is problematized as a new way of stabilizing the neoliberal economic growth *status quo* (see Swyngedouw 2009; 2010; Allmendinger and Haughton 2010; 2012; Metzger et al., 2014). The conceptualization of dislocation as ‘the foundation on which new

identities are constituted' (Laclau, 1990: 39) both provides a novel critique of participative spatial planning and contributes to *bringing back the political* in spatial planning in general, and MSP, in particular. Indeed, a discourse like participatory governance that MSP co-opts to gain full identity and acceptability has the characteristic of what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) refer to as a *constitutive outside*. It is precisely a constitutive outside because while it gives a practice like MSP "fullness", it nonetheless reveals the limits of the symbolic order (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). In other words, it is 'an "outside" which blocks the identity of the "inside" (and is nonetheless, the prerequisite for its constitution at the same time)' (Laclau, 1990: 17). Thus, dislocation is the result of a split or tension within different constitutive particularities that the structure incorporates to cover over its lack. Because of this split, dislocation shows the inability of a discursive structure to successfully fix meaning into a solid topography, thereby revealing the social as a space of contestatory practices. Thus, while stakeholder participation may be a co-opted discourse and a site of *politics* wherein restrictive regulations, knowledge epistemologies and other practices function to legitimize neoliberal MSP perspectives while marginalizing alternative objectives, it is nonetheless a potential space for political transformation. It is an arena where marginalized voices may seek to dislocate dominant marine governance logics that do not have a purchase on their visions of a sustainable future. Such transformative spaces, which speak to how social actors react to radical contingency (Griggs and Howarth, 2017), reveal the precariousness of narrowly reached consensual marine decisions and thus, the impossibility of society. As EU Member States work towards finalizing their marine plans by 2020, critical MSP needs to probe into participatory spaces and reveal both the contingent social relations and the contested social norms therein.

4. Construction of the Marine “problem” and Implications for Subjectivity and Marine Protection

It has been argued that while the non-binding IMP is a growth-led MSP policy, its legally-binding cousin, the MSFD is more focused on environmental protection as a central pillar of sustainability (Qiu and Jones, 2013). Although this may have been understood as a signaling a strong commitment to environmental protection at the EU level, maritime economic activities such as offshore wind energy seem to have been the main driver of MSP in several EU countries (e.g. Germany, Estonia, Denmark, the UK etc.). The implication for practice is the possible emergence of divergent interpretations and understandings of MSP across EU regional seas (Ritchie and Ellis, 2010), and perhaps, more grave, the evolution of different MSP discourses, practices and expectations at national and sub-national levels. This has been referred to as a problem of “conceptual fragmentation” of MSP (Van Tatenhove, 2017). The emergence of the EU Maritime Spatial Planning Directive of 2014 (henceforth Directive), which establishes a common legally-binding framework for MSP across EU regional seas, further complicates the MSP conceptual landscape. As Member States are required to have completed their marine plans by 2020, I tease out how the marine “problem” is constructed in this key instrument and with what implications for the conceptual rollout of MSP at different scales. This deconstructive exercise is urgent, not least because the way the Directive constructs/problematises the marine “problem” certainly shapes what can and cannot be thought of the “problem”, thereby delimiting the range of policy outcomes (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). I therefore ask, following Bacchi (2009), *how does the Directive represent the marine “problem” and with what implications for stakeholder subjectivity and marine protection?* Here I discuss how the *beatific* and *horrific* dimensions of specific narratives inherent in the Directive, may sustain subjects of *lack* as *desiring* subjects (Glynos and Howarth, 2008) and thus, conceal radical contingency in the face of normatively suspect logics. As subjects

of lack, narratives are often internalized, for they function through master signifiers to keep subjects' desires of a possible "fullness" alive. As Glynos and Howarth so eloquently put it, the beatific dimension of fantasy is that which 'promises a fullness-to-come once a named or implied obstacle is overcome', whereas the horrific dimension 'foretells of disaster if the obstacle proves insurmountable' (Glynos and Howarth, 2008: 147). The internalization of these desires, and the preoccupation to realize them often mask for subjects and thus sustain, certain normatively suspect social practices.

In the EU, the appeal of ecosystem-based MSP to universalism increasingly shows itself through the construction of narratives and imaginaries around such master signifiers as "coherent" plans, "balanced" interests and "integrated" knowledge. These master signifiers have become buzzwords in MSP planning and institutional stakeholder dialogue circles, with little or no agreement on their actual meaning. In constructing ecosystem-based MSP as an integrated planning approach that can reach the economic, environmental and social objectives of sea use holistically (beyond single issue approaches), the Directive frames the marine "problem" is fundamentally that of *conflicting uses*. It explicitly states:

The high and rapidly increasing demand for maritime space for different purposes, such as installations for the production of energy from renewable sources, oil and gas exploration and exploitation, maritime shipping and fishing activities, ecosystem and biodiversity conservation, the extraction of raw materials, tourism, aquaculture installations and underwater cultural heritage, as well as the multiple pressures on coastal resources, require an integrated planning and management approach (EC, 2014: para. 1).

Here, it would seem that *conflicting uses* is the "problem" that needs to be resolved, and that it is in their *sustainable coexistence* that the "solution" is found. Within this *use* construction, it would

follow that the problem is not a problem of say, socio-political lifestyles and choices, or our dependence on nature for capitalist accumulation of wealth. Rather, far from questioning the *increasing economic demands* for maritime space, the Directive represents these demands and uses as somewhat “natural” and “necessary”, and in this logic is couched the implicit assumption that the technological-managerial expertise of the planner is an “objective necessity” for harmonious, sustainable coexistence of conflicting uses. In line with a neoliberal-managerialist discourse (Ritchie, 2014), MSP is thus represented as a useful tool that can be deployed to ‘*manage* spatial uses and conflicts in marine areas’ by ‘identifying and *encouraging* multi-purpose uses’ (EC, 2014: para. 19 my emphasis) that can secure a ‘*competitive, resource-efficient and green* economy’ (EC, 2014: para. 4 my emphasis).

As *conflicting uses* is the problem, a “sustainable coexistence of uses” (EC, 2014: para. 8) is represented as a solution, and in this solution is a couched number of beatific narratives. Namely, sustainable coexistence of uses would support Europe’s strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by ensuring and delivering ‘high levels of employment [and], productivity’ while promoting a more ‘*competitive, resource-efficient and green* economy’ (EC, 2014: para. 4 my emphasis). Furthermore, Ecosystem-based MSP ‘will contribute to promoting the sustainable development and growth of the maritime and coastal economies and the sustainable use of marine and coastal resources’ (EC, 2014: para. 3). Significantly, it is suggested that ‘healthy marine ecosystems and their multiple services, if integrated in planning decisions, can deliver *substantial benefits* in terms of food production, recreation and tourism, climate change mitigation and adaptation, shoreline dynamics control and disaster prevention’ (EC, 2014: para. 13 my emphasis).

The Directive also enumerates a number of what can be termed “thieves” of humanity’s “enjoyments” of ecosystem services. These “thieves” are both human and natural pressures that

can lead to the ‘deterioration of environmental status, loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystem services’ (EC, 2014: para. 13). Biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, the Directive argues, will lead to ‘severe impacts on coastal [and marine] economic development and growth’ (EC, 2014: para. 13). More importantly, it is not these losses in themselves that seem to be problematic. Rather, it is the constructed *horrific* experience qua “theft of enjoyment” resulting thereof, that is emphasized. Hence the numerous beatific “enjoyments” that *integrated* planning and management of coastal and marine resources promise.

From these narratives, it would seem that the Directive problematizes the marine “problem” from a “soft” sustainability perspective. And there are strong indications that EU Member States’ overall commitment to achieving “Good Environmental Status” of their seas as inscribed in the MSFD is rather weak, thus pointing to the possibility that the “soft” interpretation of sustainability is gaining strong foothold in the EU. A recent report from the European Commission (COM, 2014) on the first phase of implementation of the MSFD speaks to this fact. The report emphatically states:

Member States’ definition of good environmental status and the path they set out to achieve it shows overall limited ambition, often fails to take into account existing obligations and standards and lacks coherence across the Union, even between neighbouring countries within the same marine region’ (COM, 2014: 2).

Having teased out the underlying neoliberal logics of growth and managerialism inherent in the Directive and their possible implication for environmental protection, a pertinent question begs attention. Why are pro-environment actors such as Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) not resisting MSP in different national settings? The danger in the appeal of the different beatific and horrific narratives is that they may function to structure the way social

subjects are attached to them and thus, interpellate less of questioning, and more of “balancing” subjects. In other words, a possible explanation is that although ENGOs may have played a major role in pushing MSP processes up the agenda (Calado et al., 2012), the narratives discussed above and their different master signifiers may function to constrain contestatory possibilities for these and other actors through creating docile MSP problem-solving subjects, who far from actively defining problems, are merely responding to calls to seek solutions to narrowly, predefined issues. That is, subjects who, far from questioning and contesting the basic rationale that frames the marine space as essentially an economic base, are rather *interpellated* by, and acquiesce to, the rhetoric of *balancing* or *integrating* these conflicting demands into a “sustainable coexistence of marine uses”. As such, the expertise of ENGOs may have been more influential in lending environmental and thus, political legitimacy to what is assumed to be an uncontroversial issue, than it has been to shape the problem, thus rendering them ideologically complicitous and docile subjects in sustaining a neoliberal-managerialist MSP agenda.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I my ambition has been to unseat the orthodoxy within MSP practice and scholarship as a progressive and integrative force, by highlighting the hidden ideological assumptions and power structures that underpin MSP. Through a PDT framework, I have problematized participatory ecosystem-based MSP as a site of *politics* in which restrictive regulatory frameworks, knowledge epistemologies, participative decision-making, particular constructions of the marine “problem”, as well as the act of spatializing sea use may function to govern subjectivities and knowledges towards preconceived neoliberal MSP objectives and outcomes while marginalizing

their alternatives. Yet, such arguments should not be taken as suggesting a passive or structurally determined subject/object of policy in the face of totalizing MSP structures, for it would be in rupture with the ontological condition of *radical contingency* that this paper emphasizes. Underscoring the ever-present possibility of power and antagonism in MSP social relations, I have equally discussed how participation may constitute a potential space for contestatory practices, as political subjectivity may form for marginalized social actors in dislocatory moments. Future empirically-grounded research needs to provide an account of the *political* dimension of MSP by highlighting the fundamental value differences that dislocation reveals between MSP proponents and counter-publics, and what strategies are deployed by these actors to defend their value positions. Significantly, it is necessary to understand how in different MSP contexts, placed-based marine users and communities draw on different discursive strategies to forge political alliances that seek to challenge dominant MSP norms, but also how such alliances and challenge may be disarticulated and “managed” by the powers that be. Additionally, where participatory-led MSP processes are said to have “balanced” interests into consensual marine decisions, research needs to deconstruct such consensus and reveal the exclusionary politics that may constitute it. Ultimately, since spatial plans are only ‘indicative and confer no right to develop’ (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010: 804), the study of MSP power relations must extend beyond participatory planning settings to include extra-planning spaces, such as appeal courts where the *politics* and the *political* dimension of marine governance are likely to be relocated. This is increasingly important since a great number of marine plans are likely to end up in appeal processes given the high possibility of planning stalemates resulting both from fundamental value differences over sea use and the current *post-political* orientation of MSP, where consensus over what constitutes a sustainable future is highly exclusionary. Particularly, it is fruitful to investigate how various MSP

publics differentially draw on environmental, economic and place-based discourses as well as “lay” and/or “expert” knowledge to defend the “legality” of their position, while challenging their opponent’s. Equally important, future research needs to investigate whether such extra-planning spaces ‘provide the stuff for democratic politics’ (Mouffe, 2005: 31) where disagreements play out agonistically, or whether they constitute a mere technique of “managing” opposition while providing legal support for narrowly-reached consensus. Finally, while the paper has attempted a deconstruction of the ideologies underpinning the MSP Directive and how its beatific and horrific narratives may interpellate complicitous stakeholder subjects of *lack* who identify with them, more research is needed that highlights how MSP is constructed in different spaces and with what implications for environmental protection and stakeholder subjectivity. A fruitful way to extend this critical research would be to analyze how particular narratives or discourses of environmental protection, green economy and spatial cohesion etc. are received and/or challenged by differentially positioned MSP stakeholders in different planning contexts.

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