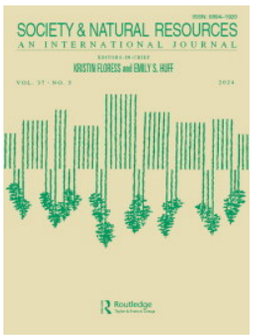

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Framing Matters for Ontological Politics of the Ocean: Contrasting European Union Policy Framings with Recreationists' Alternative Experiences of a Living Sea World

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ABSTRACT

Several political and academic arenas have been turning their focus to the seas. In the EU, the need to govern and plan sustainable uses of the seas has primarily been expressed through the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD). This paper analyses the different sea worlds as well as conceptualizations of the sea, expressed by recreationists on one hand, who experience the sea in terms of connections and as unbounded and alive, and the marine management documents on the other, where the sea is portrayed as a passive utility in need of organization. It argues that using particular frameworks, the process of sea governance provides grounds for cognitive inequality. The paper contributes to ontological politics by empirically portraying how the 'protected sea' mingles with sea realities, such as 'free seas', and '(un)safe seas', whereas the latter two are underrepresented in the policy documents.

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Marine governance; maritime spatial planning directive; marine strategy framework directive; ontological politics; recreation; sea

Introduction

Nature, in general, and seas in particular, have been increasingly recognized by science, policy, and media as needing management (Rudolph et al. 2020). Oceans and coasts are increasingly popular places for human activities and are in the European Union (EU) planned and governed through common directives, guided by sustainable development as the guiding principle (Elliott, Borja, and Cormier 2020). In the EU, the directives central to the realization of sustainable use of oceans and coasts are the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) (Directive 2008/56/EC) and the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD) (Directive 2014/89/EU).

While the majority of studies on EU marine directives have investigated and evaluated tools and processes implemented through the directive frameworks (e.g. Friedrich et al. 2020; Gee et al. 2019), examinations of the epistemologies and ontologies related to the sea, its use, as well as governance and planning are rarer. While epistemology denotes how

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we understand the world and ontology describes the existence of the world(s), the way political practices shape a particular ontology and how different realities interact with each other can be embraced by the term *political ontology* (Blaser 2009). The small but growing body of research focusing on the political ontology of natural resource governance maintains that *reality* (i.e. ontology) is both political and multiple (Boucquey et al. 2016; Mol 1999). As an example of the first aspect of political ontology, Acton et al. (2019) show how the Sargasso Sea becomes framed in a simplified and fixed way through processes of policymaking, even though available data points to the importance of mobility and complexity. Illustrating the second aspect of political ontology, Law and Lien (2013) demonstrate that in contrast to the common notion that salmon exists as a single ontological entity, different salmons are enacted through different fish-farming practices. Inspired by these theoretical and empirical insights, we suggest that formations of planning and governance importantly produce new ontological and epistemological relationships (Boucquey et al. 2016), as the 'real' and political are inherently entangled (Mol 1999). Subsequently, the political enactments of the MSFD and MSPD have the power to create new sea relations and realities, which continuously mingle with-, shape-, and are shaped by alternative relations and realities produced by concrete activities at seas.

In this paper, we acknowledge the conceptual frameworks used in EU marine policy documents as vital elements of marine spatial planning practices (Boucquey et al. 2016). We aim to further the discussion on the political ontology of the seas by contrasting these framings, as an important constitutive part of ontological politics, with the lived realities of sea users. By focusing on the tension between political visions and lived realities, we address an important knowledge gap in the field of ontological politics of sea planning (ibid.).

A foundational argument guiding this paper is that if the sea, as experienced by stakeholders governed by the directive, is radically different and incompatible with the general framing of sea management; then a legitimate, transparent and fair inclusion of these stakeholders in sea governance is put into question. Taking our cue from a critique of dualistic framings of human-nature relations within post-humanism, new materialism, anthropology, and political ecology (e.g. Anderson 2014; Plumwood 2002; Castree 2001; Escobar 1999), we argue that the way the EU directives frame the sea can set the stage for cognitive inequality. This inequality is based on ontological and epistemological incompatibilities and the subsequent inclusion/exclusion of certain types of conceptualizations of human being in the world (Burman 2017; Wilson 2018). While certain realities become reaffirmed and powerful, others remain marginalized or even hidden (Leach et al. 2007).

We support our argument by drawing empirically on the case of marine- and coastal governance in Sweden. We analyze MSFD and MSPD related documents in Sweden, an EU country with a long coast and strong marine focus. The framing of human-sea relations and the sea in the documents is systematically compared to the way recreational sea users describe their sea experience as specific experiential knowledge of being in the sea.

Framings of Human-Nature Relations

Marine Governance and Planning

Under EUs overarching Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP), the MSFD (Directive 2008/56/EC) and the MSPD (Directive 2014/89/EU) are central to the realization of

integrated, sustainable use of oceans and coasts. MSFD is an environmental directive that emphasizes the degradation of marine ecosystems by human activities and places a legal requirement on the EU Member States to establish a 'good environmental status' (GES) across the European seas by 2020. The MSPD, on the other hand, is a planning directive that while giving reference to the MSFD principles, is geared toward the sustainable development of marine spaces in more general terms. The directive aims to guide and facilitate the management of increasingly diverse and competing uses of marine spaces, including extraction and use of both fossil- and renewable energy resources, extraction of various raw materials, maritime shipping and fishing, ecosystem and biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage, aquaculture, and tourism. The Member States are required to establish maritime spatial plans by the end of March 2021.

The two directives have been the object of a broad range of scholarly interest, as they constitute two relatively new international governance frameworks (e.g. Pınarbaşı et al. 2020). This paper adds to this existing body of interrogations of the directives (e.g. Tafon 2018; Jentoft 2017; Flannery & Cinnèide 2012) by paying particular attention to the ontological politics of marine governance and the inclusion/exclusion of alternative ontologies and epistemologies by the EU directives. We do so by zeroing in on one of the many maritime sectors that the two directives are mandated to govern: tourism. Marine and coastal tourism is a sector signified by a lower degree of detailed regulations and free movement compared to other sectors, such as energy production, maritime shipping, fishing, or aquaculture. Given previous studies on the sense of belonging and transformational identities among recreational sea users (e.g. Anderson 2016; Humberstone and Brown 2016) we assume that due to its fluidity, recreation is difficult to fixate/stabilize and represents a context where radically different ontologies can be seen. Therefore, we suggest that by focusing on marine tourism we can make radically different sea realities visible.

Different Ways of Understanding (Our Place in) Nature

Society and natural resource relations can be conceptualized in many different ways. Here, a fundamental distinction is made between *dualistic* and *beyond dualistic* ways of understanding human-nature relations. Most influential conceptualizations of society-nature relations in natural resource governance are commonly associated with an anthropocentric and dualistic understanding of the position of humans in relation to nature (problematized in Benson 2019). The origin of a dualistic understanding can be traced back to Descarte's oppositional pairing and separation of mind over matter. The dichotomist conceptualization of the world in terms of human and nature has both historically and in practice not only led to a separation but also a different treatment of each binary in the pair (e.g. Plumwood 2002). The way we distinguish, or group, the world, has reality effects, which in practices connects different standards and treatment to the different groups established (Mol 1999). As a consequence, a dualistic perspective in human-nature relations implies that humans independently and actively adapt to, affect, order, cultivate, and 'stand above nature' (Arias-Maldonado 2015, 24).

The dualistic understanding of human-nature relations has provoked the emergence of alternative ontologies and epistemologies. Across interdisciplinary fields such as

human geography, science and technology studies (STS), as well as environmental humanities and social science, scholars are attempting to reformulate dichotomies such as human/nature or human/culture in more relational terms (e.g. Anderson 2014; Braidotti 2013; Castree 2001; Escobar 1999). By showing the influencing importance of things, both posthuman- and new materialist theorizations go beyond the human vs. non-human separation and challenge sentiments that ascribe superiority to 'human' in relation to 'nature' (e.g. Braidotti 2013). Scholars have emphasized that the socially constructed borderline between what is human and what is nature is blurred, or hybridized, making humans in today's world of societal, environmental, and technological changes, increasingly entangled with non-humans (Arias-Maldonado 2015). To give literal and particular importance to the materiality of the oceans, some scholars have worked with 'wet ontologies' (Acton et al. 2019; Boucquey et al. 2016; Steinberg and Peters 2015; Steinberg 2013). Steinberg and Peters (2015), for example, show that the ocean is an ideal case for challenging debates restricted by static notions of territory. New materialistic theory in general, and object-oriented-ontology in particular, claim that nature, as well as other non-human elements, have agency. According to such a perspective, human and non-human actants stand on a less vertical plane in relation to human actors, and non-human elements are not merely passive things that only become active through human actions (Bennett 2010). This ontological position is particularly provocative in the context of marine resource governance, where duties and responsibilities tend to be exclusively assigned to humans and their institutions (Benson 2019; Kadfak and Knutsson 2017).

Scholars paying attention to the broader political nature of ontological and epistemological claims (e.g. de Rijke, Munro, and Zurita 2016) have acknowledged how certain types of knowledges, engagements, and worldviews become more powerful than others through both material and discursive processes. Taking the ontological and epistemological politics of the ocean seriously, we provide an in-depth analysis of contrasting sea realities in the case of Sweden.

Analysis

Method

The methodological design outlined below was informed by the overarching research question:

> How is the sea, as well as human relations with the sea, understood and imagined in two different sets of empirical material: policy documents associated with the implementation of the MSFD and MSPD directives, and sea users governed by these directives?

The analysis we present in the following section builds on a sequential methodology. In a first step, through a pre-study, the MSFD and MSPD directives along with available scholarly literature on the directives as well as sea tourism literature (experiences) were analyzed. This first analysis brought forward the dualistic, top-down as well as predominantly generic nature of the tools and structure used in the directives on the one hand, while we found a more than dualistic way of understanding the sea in the tourism experience literature. In order to open for and capture this multiplicity, we performed

open and non-structured interviews with marine tourists that were not limited to the policy documents' themes, but were inspired by the tourist experience literature (e.g. Anderson 2016). We furthermore delimited our empirical focus by (a) using Sweden as a country-specific, although a representative, empirical case of how the compulsory implementation of the EU directives is designed and framed in relevant national policy documents; and (b) qualitatively interviewing recreational sea users along the northern Swedish West coast (a hot-spot for marine- and coastal tourism).

Approximately 50 interviews with recreational sea users (kayakers, day trip boaters, as well as yacht- and sailboat users) were conducted during the summers of 2014 and 2015. During 20–80 minutes, the conversations explored if and how the framings in the policies have been shaping their realities (e.g. probing about environmental impacts). More importantly, the interviews consisted of open questions to stimulate the respondent to talk about what the sea means to them, intending to bring forward detailed accounts of particular recreational experiences. While we acknowledge that the narratives accounted for by the respondents would have been somewhat different if our interviews would have been guided by central themes and concepts in the two directives, the main purpose of the interviews was to open up alternative epistemologies and ontologies. By designing the interviews as open and unstructured, we ensured that the respondents' narratives were not influenced by the conceptualizations of the dominant epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the two EU directives.

For the document analysis, nine reports published by the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) were analyzed. SwAM is the government agency responsible for the practical implementation and coordination of the MSFD and MSPD Directives. Three sets of reports were selected for the analysis: (1) documents related to the MSFD, (2) documents related to the MSPD, and (3) documents related to marine tourism (to establish an empirical link to the topic of recreational boating). SwAM has published four reports in relation to the MSFD (Table 1 below). As directed by the MSFD, the first report includes an initial assessment of the status

Table 1. The analyzed reports.

Analyzed reports	Title in English	Year of publication
MSFD		
Report 1	Good Marine Environment 2020 – Part 1: Marine strategy for the North- and Baltic seas. Introductory assessment of status of environment and socioeconomic analysis	2012
Report 2	Good Marine Environment 2020 – Part 2: Good environmental status and environmental quality standards	2012
Report 3	Good Marine Environment 2020 – Part 3: Marine strategy for the North- and Baltic seas. Monitoring program	2014
Report 4	Good Marine Environment 2020 – Part 4: Marine strategy for the North- and Baltic seas. Action program for the marine environment	2015
MSPD		
Report 5	Roadmap Maritime Spatial Planning	2016
Report 6	Maritime Spatial Planning – Current Status 2014	2015
Report 7	Application of ecosystem based management in maritime spatial planning	2012
Report 8	Marine spatial plans for Gulf of Bothnia, Baltic Sea and Skagerrak/ Kattegat (Ch 4, 12, 13)	2019
Marine tourism		
Report 9	Marine tourism and recreation in Sweden	2012

of the environment and the initial directions for a socio-economic analysis, adapted to the Swedish context.

In relation to the MSPD, the four analyzed reports (5–8) describe the process of marine spatial planning and identify as well as evaluate the most important maritime industries and activities in Sweden. Report 5 (2016) describes the general planning goals to be reached (e.g. good environmental status, sustainable growth, regional growth, and sustainable shipping). Report 6 (2015) digs deeper into each strategically important maritime industry and evaluates potential positive and negative environmental and social impacts. Report 7 (2012) connects ecosystem analysis to maritime spatial planning, while Report 8 (2019) presents spatial plans for marine areas in Sweden in the form of a proposal submitted to the government in December 2019.

While tourism and recreation are mentioned in both sets of reports, a special report (Report 9 2012) on tourism and recreation in relation to the MSFD was also selected for analysis.

The joint analysis of the documents and the interviews was conducted as a qualitative thematic analysis (Clarke et al., 2015). The analysis was developed following three main steps: (1) reading and categorizing interviews and the documents; (2) reviewing ways of framing human-nature relations, and the different epistemologies and ontologies underpinning these framings (presented earlier in the section on *different ways of understanding (our place in) nature*); and (3) in-depth analysis of the empirical material.

During the first read of the documents and interviews, general themes were formulated with the aim to demonstrate significant differences in terms of imaginations of human-sea relations in the policy documents, compared to the recreational boaters' accounts. The in-depth analysis guided by the literature review in step (2) focused on relating the contrasts in the understandings and beings in the (sea) world to the epistemological and ontological differences in what the sea worlds are for the policymakers on the one hand, and for the sea users on the other. Eventually, it became possible to show different ways of understanding and being through the following three categories: human-sea separation vs. connection, the sea as playing an active vs. passive role in human-sea relations, and organized spaces vs. free places.

Findings

We find that the MSFD and MSPD implementation documents' framing of human-nature relations, underpinned by notions of separation, passive utility, and organization of the sea space, is propelled through the main tools relied upon, such as the Drivers-Pressure-State-Impact-Response (DPSIR) framework, Ecosystem Services (ES), and visual techniques such as mapping. Below we attain these respectively and compare them with the experiences and imaginations expressed by the interviewed recreational sea users, who stress feelings of connection to the sea and express the importance of freedom.

Human-Sea Relations: Separability vs. Connection

The characteristic of 'separability' in the framings of human-nature relations can be most demonstratively discussed in relation to the DPSIR framework. DPSIR is described as a tool that frames 'society/humans' and the 'environment' as interacting through a causal

relationship (Report 1: 130). DPSIR is used as a point of departure and as an organizing framework in several of the analyzed reports (Report 1 – 4) through accounting for direct (the fishing industry, shipping, and agricultural production, etc.) and indirect (demography, economy, socio-politics, culture, etc.) human driving forces behind changes in the environmental state of the sea. The driving forces are in turn seen as causing pressures (extensive and intensive fishing, oil spills, increased nutrient supply, etc.) that disturb the status of the ecosystem (e.g. decreasing fish stocks or decreasing water quality), which induces negative impacts on human well-being (e.g. decreased access to marine food or lost recreation opportunities). To safeguard human wellbeing and the state of the environment it depends on, marine governance then responds through policy instruments and physical measures. In this framing, humans (through drivers, pressures, response) and nature (state, impact) are separate categories and entities. Consequently, the reports (and their sections) are also divided accordingly by either focusing on social aspects (studied by social scientists) or natural aspects (studied by natural scientists).

Marine tourism, categorized as a social aspect, is assumed to both impact on and being impacted by the environmental status. For example, it is described as contributing to the introduction of invasive species (Report 4: 109) and that its' economic and social value is dependent upon the quality of the environment:

> The leasing of summer houses, hotels and hostels that are affected by, and depended upon, an improved marine environment. These three sectors have turnover of 38–53 billion SEK per year. The report estimates the producer surplus of marine tourism to between 4.8 and 6.6 billion SEK per year. It is furthermore estimated that marine tourism provides around 35 000–50,000 jobs. In addition, there is a great deal of benefits from recreational activities at sea that do not involve any economic transaction. (Report 4: 108)

The created reality of a sea that is environmentally impacted by humans in policy has also reached recreational users. When probing about environmental impacts, sea users either omit, deny, or admit these. For example, some refuse to accept that their recreational use of the sea should be described in terms of negative environmental impacts. Others state that compared to other human activities or activities of other animals, the impact of recreational boating is minimal. 'Even sea birds produce waste as they poop in the sea' (2014-08-10), responded a female visiting in a sailboat. Her response related to a regulation introduced in the spring of 2015, stating that recreational crafts that are within 12 nautical miles of the coast are banned from discharging sewage (Transportstyrelsen 2022), but her response challenges the categorization of- and differentiation between 'humans' and 'nature'. Others accept the 'human impact' in the form of boat materials and their production, chemicals in the septic tanks, use of gasoline, air pollution, noise, oil leakage, and littering.

However, asking sea users about their experience at sea more broadly gives us access to the realities beyond the way the DPSIR tool conceptualizes human-sea relations. A retired woman, interviewed in a traditional 20-foot sailboat together with her husband, described her sailing experience almost poetically. For her, a seascape is a place where she can feel a strong connection with nature:

> When we are going by sailboat, we are in contact with nature, we are in it. It's the sailing in itself that is the experience we are out after […] we are going in contact, interplay, with nature, and it's the sailing in itself that is the thing. […] For me, nature is much more important than culture, buildings, more important than man-made things. I think it

> gives me more sense of, more feeling of, life. Perhaps is the extension of my own life too. When I am out in nature I can feel connected to nature and it brings my own life experience to a new level. (2014-08-02)

This reality of 'sea as a place of connection', as the quote above exemplifies, is visible in several ways. First, the deeper relatedness to the sea as a physical and spiritual connection. The quote above illustrates that the physical contact forms and shapes a close connection that is more pronounced in a sailboat than in a motorboat, as sailing is more strongly shaped by the movement of the sea. The quote from the sailboater above moreover shows that the experience at sea is both an extension of someone's life and transforms ones' life, describing an intangible connection and thus embeddedness in the sea world. A kayak affords a similar feeling of embeddedness, as expressed by a man in his 40 s: *'It's the point of kayaking, to blend in and be part of the ocean.'* (2015-08-14) Moreover, some boaters we interviewed used the phrase: *'I was born on the sea'* (2014-08-01), by which they express the strong link between the sea world and their identities.

Second, the embeddedness in the sea world by sea users, and the deep connection with the sea elements, are visible also by paying attention to the human body. While on the sea, you for example feel the movement of the sea to the extent that you may become seasick. The moving feeling is also retained in the body so that even after coming back to stable land, you may feel as if it is moving for a while. Third, the boaters expressed a sense of being wary of the sea. The boat users would adjust their trips depending on the weather and the conditions at sea, contrasting the dominant logic of human drivers affecting the sea in the policy reports. Since the ocean is so open and conditions may change very rapidly, they expressed a sense of being dependent on the 'mercy of nature', having no place to hide. An experienced female kayaker expressed this in the following way:

> On the land, you can always hide and run and you can do a lot more compared to the water. When you are sitting in the ocean and then if it starts to rain, you can cover a little bit, but you have to deal with it. On land, you can always go inside or find a tree or something but on the ocean, you can't do anything directly. You can paddle to an island but it takes more time. (2014-08-04)

Accepting lack of control and uncertainty stands in stark contrast to the emphasis of marine policy making to plan and manage the seas. A mother in her 30 s, using an older motorboat borrowed from her parents, not knowing how her new-born child will experience the sea for the first time describes this lack of knowing as freedom: *'It's a freedom that you don't decide. We didn't know that we will end up here'*. (2014-07-30)

The Nature of the Sea: Passive Utility vs. Dynamic Active Force

While DPSIR provides a general frame for conceptualizing the relationship between humans and the sea in the implementation of the MSFD, the concept of ecosystem services acts as a template for how the sea is envisioned across the MSFD and MSPD reports. The two tools are also frequently used in combination.

Ecosystem services (ES) is a concept that connects humans and nature by accounting for the goods and services provided by nature to people, such as food, climate regulation, or cultural services (Convention on Biological Diversity 2019; Granek et al. 2010).

The provision of services and benefits to humans and their society by the sea is an important characteristic in the analyzed reports. The application of ES in the reports illustrates a dialectic understanding of human-sea interactions, according to which human activities are affecting the provision of sea services, while the human access to services in turn affects the well-being of present and future generations. It is a relationship where humans are actively inducing changes to which marine ecosystems are reactively responding. The shared basic interpretation in all the reports is that the sea is predominantly passive and subjected to the power of human use and management. For example, Report 4 emphasizes that human pressures on the marine environment have to decrease in order to ensure long-term human benefits from marine ecosystem services:

> The marine environment of today is not good enough to allow us to benefit from all of the services that the sea could provide. This is mostly due to the pressure introduced by human activities, the level of which is currently too high. The human pressure needs to be decreased in order for the quality of the marine environment and the access to ecosystem services to be improved. (Report 4: 106)

ES also provides the principal means for linking tourism to the sea by defining it as a cultural service provided by the marine environment:

> Enjoyment of recreational activities refers to economic and societal values of activities carried out in the marine environment such as sport fishing, boating, diving, swimming and bird watching. The service further includes the use of coastal and marine environments to promote and sustain national and international tourism (Report 9: 26).
>
> For the analysis, we are interested in those visitors who enjoy the opportunities for recreation that the marine environment in Swedish marine waters offers, i.e. those visitors who consume the ecosystem service of "marine recreation" provided by Swedish marine waters (Report 9: 22).

By relying heavily on ES, the documents predominantly communicate the utility function of the sea. The notion of the sea as being utilized by active humans is expressed in both Report 6 and 9, portraying tourists as consumers of ecosystem services. Moreover, the importance of particular ecosystem services tends to be evaluated in economic terms, for example by assessing the revenues generated by tourism or the costs of ecosystem degradation caused by such activities (Report 4: 108 excerpt p.8).

Yet the sea as a passive commodity or utility provider is not prominent among interviewed sea users. They describe the sea as an active, transformative, and dynamic force. For example, a 68-year-old female in an older sailboat states:

> It is fascinating that the sea is so variable. The sea may be scary, but it can also be calm, and beautiful. It changes. For me, nature gives me strength. (2015-08-15)

This sentiment not only stands in stark contrast to the idea of controlling and planning the sea but also to an epistemology according to which nature benefits humans through services and goods. Instead of an almost causal, utilitarian interplay, the sea users still stress emotional connection. Many of the persons we interviewed expressed a sense of empowerment through the unpredictable forces of the sea. The boaters also frequently talked about the continuously moving sea as alive, and how the feeling of being alive is

brought to the forth when near or in/on the sea. The sea is talked about as if it was human through sentiments such as 'the sea speaks'; that in the evening 'she will calm down'; and as if the sea has agency: 'nature decides how you should treat it and when you can go out boating'. This notion emphasizes an active rather than passive sea. In a typical description provided by a 50-year-old male visitor from Norway in an average-sized motorboat, the sea is understood as an active and powerful element, triggering both caution/danger and pleasure and as both positive and negative force for human wellbeing:

> The sea is a strong element; it's fascinating. It can be very rough, and it can be very nice. It speaks; it's always different and I like that. I like to be a part of it and enjoy it, first-hand, not on television. It's very fascinating. In Norwegian history, it's one of the things that killed the most, and it is also one of the things that had pleased the most. And it is the same element. You can enjoy it and at the same time, it can also be very dangerous. It makes us a little interested, it makes you watch out and be aware. You have to enjoy it but you also have to watch out, be aware at sea, to be safe. You have to always take nature into consideration for all your decisions when you are out at sea. The conditions change so you have to be aware, you have to think. That's nice. And then you can go to some nice places and just chill and swim, make good food and enjoy life. (2014-08-01)

We conclude that while the passive utility of the sea is frequently put forward as its' most instrumental quality in the MSFD and MSPD documents, the sea users describe the sea as a highly active force with both personality and agency. Since this reality of a dynamic sea is not considered in the policy documents, our analysis brings forward alternative sea ontologies. However, as we will see in the next section, although 'the beyond commodified sea reality' persists among sea users, the epistemological dominance of the sea as a passive utility for human benefits in marine policy has far-reaching implications for the way the human spatial organization of-, and control over the sea is imagined.

The Organization of Sea Space: Human-Sea Interactions vs. freedom

The cognitive separation of humans in relation to the sea, along with the prioritization of human vs. non-human agency, also has a spatial dimension. The final main feature of human-sea interactions in the analyzed reports is the organization of space through area-based approaches. In reports $5-8$, spatial planning is proposed based on a horizontal (across the sea) and vertical (down the water column) organization of marine space, as well as a focus on the spatial relationship between differentiated and conflicting uses of resources and user groups. According to the reports, the main aim of the implementation of the MSPD in Sweden is to more effectively manage the increasing competition for marine space among different uses and user groups and the actual or potential conflicts that arise from this competition. The main tool for accomplishing this are maps that enable visual projection and overlays of various uses, activities, and sectors, and that identify potential conflicts:

> Many of the potential conflicts of interests in marine areas concern space: different interests and activities that, quite simply, do not fit within the same area. These conflicts may occur in or on the seabed, in a column of water, or on or above the ocean surface. But there are also many interests that work well together and these can provide positive synergy effects (Report 4: 192).

This spatial organization of activities is primarily envisioning space as a 'void' that is increasingly filled with competing human activities. Essentially, it is a process of

allowing and even increasing certain activities in certain spaces, while at the same time restricting others. For example, in protected areas (natural reserves, national parks, or Natura 2000 areas), regulations include a general prohibition of fishing or the restriction of a particular type of fishing activity (Report 6: 29). The reasoning provided is that while some marine spaces are under-used and provide not yet exploited opportunities for increasing human benefits from ecosystem services (for example areas suitable for novel energy technologies), others have particularly high marine natural values (e.g. coral reefs) and need protection from human exploitation.

Turning to the specific case of tourism, the MSFD categorizes it as one among many possible marine activities that need to be taken into consideration when member states are establishing spatial plans. In Report 6, tourism and recreation in Sweden is considered a core activity, in relation to which areas of national interest are identified and mapped:

> The national interest claims for recreation are defined as areas with major 'outdoor values' due to particular natural and cultural qualities –recreational fishing is also included in these claims. Variation of the countryside is a natural quality that is important for recreation. The areas with national interest claims have such great outdoor values that they are, or could be, attractive to a great number of visitors. The national interest claims for recreation are currently under review, specifically with regard to nature in proximity to urban areas. There are also geographically demarcated national interest areas, which have been determined by the Parliament. These areas have such great natural and cultural qualities that they are or could be, attractive to a great number of visitors from all or most of the country, or to visitors from overseas (Report 6: 65).

This quotation clearly exemplifies that some spaces are more valuable than others for marine tourism and recreation. However, this prioritization is foremostly based on biological values and does not include sea users' perspectives and interests. This is surprising given that the marine areas of national interest for recreation are defined as geographically specific spaces that are claimed to have a particularly high value in terms of their attractiveness for human tourist and recreation use. As stressed in Report 9, the inclusion of different stakeholders' perspectives, knowledge, and experiences is fundamental for the long-term viability of spatial plans (Report 9: 4, 9). In contrast to the emphasis on the spatial organization of the sea, the interviewed sea users repeatedly expressed the perception of the sea as a place of freedom. Feelings and experiences of freedom emerge from both the open horizon and due to the fact that there are comparatively fewer regulations at sea than on land:

> It's not controlled, it's more freedom, you need to control all yourself, there is no one to guide you. If you are walking or in the car, you are always controlled. Even if you have different weather conditions you choose how you work with the sea. (A 46 old female, visiting Stenungsund to test scooters with her husband, otherwise kayaking and motor boating, 2014-08-04)

However, while the 'reality of a free sea' prevails in ideal, sunny weather conditions, a 'safe sea (or unsafe sea) reality' emerges when conditions are challenging (e.g. in a thunderstorm). We describe this already in the previous section, but here it has a spatial significance. Different parts of the sea become a safe or unsafe sea in different weather situations, as for example harbors may feel safer in a thunderstorm:

> It was raining, a thunderstorm, hail and then we just showed to everyone: go, leave. Two minutes after it was drama and we had approximately 20 min out and into Marstrand harbor. (A couple in their 50s in a sailboat, July 2014)

Furthermore, boat users 'mind-map' sea space according to the suitability for mooring and traveling. The mooring places, length of stay, and their route is adjusted to the currents, waves, depth and type of sea floor, winds, precipitations, type of boat (size, depth of their keel), and their safety requirements. Here we want to stress that different realities, such as 'free sea' and '(un)safe sea' not only come into being at different moments and sea places, but that they also engage with the reality of the 'protected sea' that is produced through policy. Kosterhavet marine national park, created in 2009[1] (Kostershavets nationalpark 2022), introduces certain space-specific regulations and thus infringes on the 'freedom'. However, as we can see below, the reality of the 'need to protect' (parts of) the sea is acknowledged and accepted among most sea users, as illustrated by this quote:

> I think it's a great idea to keep Koster environmentally protected and keep Koster as it is because it is a very nice area. (A 55 year boater visiting from Norway in a motor boat with his partner, 2014-07-14)

While the importance of a 'free sea' is strongly emphasized among sea users, there is some level of fear of losing that freedom, while at the same time accepting the need for order:

> I think in the sea, historically, has been a free life, so if people try to interrupt that or the state or the community, it causes more emotions, but I think it's right at the same time, that at one point, everyone sees that we need to do something, unless, this will be complete chaos. (Visitor from Norway in a sailboat, 2014-08-01)

In this last section of the analysis, we have tried to show that different realities ('safe sea', 'free sea', 'protected sea', and 'ordered sea') co-exist and interact both spatially and temporarily. Since the MSPD has not yet been fully implemented in Sweden, it remains to be seen to which extent it will influence the relationship between existing human-sea realities by giving more political power to order and protection.

Discussion

Our analysis has explored and contrasted the understandings and ways of being in the sea world as portrayed in the MSFD and MSPD implementation documents with the recreational sea users' experiences and perceptions. The framings in the nine analyzed policy documents are based on a dualistic understanding according to which humans are placed in a separate and hierarchically superior position in relation to the sea. An understanding that in turn leads to the assumption that the pathway toward sustainability is dependent on the human ability to govern, plan, and organize the seas. Our study shows that while optimism about human control over nature has been widely criticized (e.g. Plumwood 2002; Merchant 2010), the legacy of dualism still persists in contemporary natural resource governance. However, the experiences among recreational boat users, who spend a lot of time on the seas, shed light on realities that go beyond the

[1]Not directly linked to the MSFD and MSPD implementation, but it is an example of a tool that these directives support.

causal human-nature relations. Realities, where the sea dictates the conditions under which humans can engage with it. Sea experiences take us to sea worlds in which humans are embedded and where they are deeply impacted and shaped by the sea. Worlds in which unpredictability and a lack of control are 'part of life'. While marine tourism and recreation constitute an important community whose participation in the governance of marine recreational activities is key in order to ensure good governance, their understanding and experiences are not reflected in sea framings in Swedish marine policy documents.

We propose that an important reason for the exclusion of sea users' knowledge and perspectives in the Swedish policy documents, along with the persisting dualism, is that the framing in the documents is propelled through the main tools that support the implementation of the MSFD and MSPD, such as the Drivers-Pressure-State-Impact-Response (DPSIR) framework, Ecosystem Services (ES), and spatial mapping. These tools are presented as prerequisites for achieving more sustainable use of the seas, and their application by the EU states is even required by the directives. Thus, the options to adopt alternative understandings, procedures, and practices beyond the frame of these tools become limited.

Critiques in line with our findings have been directed toward these tools. General objections raised in relation to the concept of ecosystem services are for example, that it allows for exploitive human-nature relationships through economic valuation and commodification of nature (Schröter et al. 2014) and that it has limitations in capturing or stimulating the positive moral sentiments people have toward nature (Silvertown 2015, Kumar and Kumar 2008). Mapping, as another powerful ocean governance tool, has been identified as key for enacting a re-interpretation of the reality of human-sea relations in ecosystem governance, through which the ecosystems become measurable, and ordered by zones and regulations (Knol 2011). While stakeholder participation in marine spatial planning has often been presented as a solution, Flannery and Cinnèide (2012) show that shared purpose and interdependency tend to be lacking. Tafon (2018) argues that through these different techniques (participatory ecosystem-based management and organization of spaces), particular groups of people are marginalized and alternative ways of knowing are steered toward particular political goals.

Political ontology perspective contributes to the marine governance and planning critique by first noting that these policy practices shape realities. Second, political ontology invites us to explore how multiple realities interact with each other. Related to the first aspect, our tourism and recreation case show that the most apparent reality change related to the investigated ocean governance frameworks is the emphasis on protected areas. It constitutes a commodification of the sea as it depends on its capacity to deliver cultural and economic services through its attractiveness as a tourist attraction and the creation of places of 'higher value'.

Governance frameworks put forward and lend support to a specific human-nature relation (humans impacting the sea), a form of relation (sea as useful to humans), and a way of ordering this relation (spatial organization). Meanwhile, the interviewed sea recreationists highlight a strong connection between themselves and the sea and acknowledge that experience at sea has the agency to transform them. This observation echoes the finding by Anderson (2016), that there is a strong affiliation between kayakers' sense of self and belongingness to the ocean.

Related to the second aspect, in line with the ontological politics premise that realities are multiple (Law and Lien 2013; Mol 1999), we can recognize how the realities that are politically created through ocean governance, such as 'environmentally impacted sea', 'protected sea', or 'commodified sea', co-exist with the recreational users' realities such as 'sea as a place of connection', 'dynamic sea', 'free sea' and '(un)safe sea'.

We show that these alternative sea users' realities are however not acknowledged or considered in the policy documents. They align with a 'wet ontology' thinking (Steinberg and Peters 2015) that is rarely acknowledged in the policymaking processes (Acton et al. 2019). Peters (2012) shows that seas are difficult to be shaped and mold into societies' own desires. Through this study, we add that alternative 'wet ontologies' appear to be difficult to incorporate in marine policymaking in general and into current ocean governance frameworks in particular. There is little room for an alternative understanding according to which humans and marine environments are intimately connected, co-produced, co-constituted and entangled. One may mistakenly assume that such alternative notions can be included by revising the frameworks, for example by adding emotional values related to the sea. However, the contrast between the framings that guide the Swedish implementation of EU marine directives and the sentiments and experiences expressed by recreational boaters goes to the source of what the sea (world) is and how it can be understood. This means that rather than merely complementing marine policy framings, the alternative cognition of human-sea relations brought forward by sea-users fundamentally challenges the very basis of these policies. Yet alternative ontologies and epistemologies should matter for marine spatial planning and marine governance because their mere existence shows us what dominating policy documents do not see: that the seas are more than a space that facilitates movement (Steinberg 2013) and more than space in need of environmental protection.

Lastly, the fundamental mismatch between the sea world experienced by the sea users and the one portrayed through marine policy may set the stage for ontological and epistemological inequality during the implementation of policies. By taking the systematic exclusion of alternative ontologies and epistemologies by marine policy directives seriously, the wider sustainability implications of such processes and their implications can be brought into view. Consequently, by omitting knowledge, experiences, and perceptions that cognitively challenge the very assumptions that provide legitimacy to unequal and unsustainable relations and structures, alternative futures, worlds, and pathways remain hidden.

The results of the study are limited to the discourses in the documents on the one hand, and the experience of the sea users on the other hand. Additional studies could explore ontologies that can be revealed by going beyond experiences. Studies could for example follow the implementation of marine policy and explore how different ontologies and multiple seas are materially expressed and come into being through policy implementation. Such an exploration could also reveal how different ontological standpoints are argued for, resisted, and unmade. Moreover, since this study was conducted at the initial stages of the implementation of the EU directives, a follow-up study could show how the implementation more concretely redefines sea realities.

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