

Exploring Marine and Coastal Epistemologies: A Roundtable Workshop

Workshop Report
January 23, 2017

Co-organised by the
Institute for Geography, University of Hamburg,
Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Research
(ZMT), & Sustainability Research Centre (artec),
University of Bremen

Table of contents

• Introduction to the Workshop	2
• Plenary Session	3-4
• Group Work Sessions	5
• Space/Place	5
• Local/Global Knowledges	5-6
• Nature/Culture	7
• Concluding remarks and future steps	8
• Annex A: List of participants and contact details	9
• Annex B: Workshop programme	10

Introduction to the Workshop

On January 23rd 2017 an interdisciplinary roundtable workshop took place at Hamburg University to explore questions of epistemology relating to the coast and marine. The workshop brought together twenty human geographers, social and cultural anthropologists, historians and sociologists from universities and research institutes in Bremen, Bremerhaven, Hamburg, Kiel and Dublin for the purpose of initiating a cross-thematic dialogue focussed on issues of meaning and sense-making, being and dwelling in the context of the coast and marine. Oceans and seas have traditionally been represented as placeless physical spaces, beyond the boundaries of the social sciences and humanities. In recent years, the marine is increasingly the subject of global universalising narratives, whether in the context of debates on the Anthropocene and global climate change or blue growth policies with an instrumental, resource-centric focus. Rarely is sufficient attention paid to the multiple and diverse ways of knowing, experiencing and relating to the coast and marine.

The manifold lifeworlds and sociomaterialities of coasts, seas and oceans have nevertheless long been the foci of diverse inter/disciplinary traditions spanning maritime history, literary studies, coastal anthropology, human geography, and postcolonial studies among others. Arguably, conventional perspectives used when theorizing marine and coastal spatialities and their diverse social practices (e.g. industrial fishing, tourism, coastal protection, nature conservation, marine spatial planning, seabed mining etc.) continue to implicitly adopt a utilitarian and resource-centric lens. Alternative marine and coastal epistemologies engage with situated knowledges and their embodied sensibilities, as well as the diverse ways of knowing, perceiving and enacting coastal and marine environments as socionatural and political spaces. Placing attention on such alternative marine and coastal epistemologies the workshop recognised and explored the plurality of ways of understanding, knowing and working with the coast, sea and ocean. Specifically, the workshop drew on participants' research experiences, and provided a space for reflection on our own marine and coastal epistemologies as well as those we encounter and work with in our respective fields.

The workshop included a mix of roundtable plenary discussion and focussed group work sessions. The organizers had identified thematic fields in advance of the workshop – 'naturecultures', 'place/space' and 'local / global knowledges'. –They were adapted as a heuristic lens to help structure the workshop discussion. Each of the three thematic fields were identified as associated with specific disciplinary traditions or schools of thought with specific practical or policy implications.

Plenary Session

Disciplinary tradition / schools of thought

Naturecultures, political ecologies, more-than-human geographies

Social construction of space, place & landscape, spatial practices

Postcolonial / decolonial theories, sociology of knowledge

Thematic field

Nature/Culture

Space/Place

Local /Global Knowledges

Implications in practice

Biocultural diversity, cultures of nature conservation, natural and cultural heritage

Place at sea, coastlines as liminal, boundary spaces, oceans as relational spaces

Global oceans, climate change, local narratives, making sense of coastal change

To aid the first plenary discussion each participant was asked to write down specific discussion points and topics of personal interest on cards provided, crosscutting one or more of the workshop's thematic strands.

The cards were subsequently pinned to one of three boards, labelled according to the thematic fields outlined above. A selection of the issues raised is reproduced below. In the course of the workshop discussion the meaning and labelling of the three categories was critically discussed and reflected upon. In particular, the purported distinction between local and global knowledge was critiqued as essentialising and unhelpful. While the same critique can be levelled against the other two thematic categorisations (nature/culture & space/place), such heuristic distinctions were intentionally used to provoke further debate on how oversimplified perspectives and binary thinking could be challenged/overcome by reflecting on the existence of multiple coastal and marine epistemologies. For example, participants pointed out how the term 'epistemologies' is perhaps better suited to capturing the relational translocal nature of knowledge flows, in similar ways in which particular knowledge forms have always remained neo-traditional given their temporal transformations.

At a fundamental level the question of the particularity/specificity of a "marine" perspective was raised. Does the marine require different methodological and theoretical approaches than the terrestrial? Does the nature of the marine, as a mobile, fluid, dynamic space in some way shape its epistemologies? Are there terrestrial cognitive limitations to our understanding of the marine? At a practical level, a number of participants raised the issue of how to open up discussions of different epistemologies within a policy environment. How can we engage policy-makers with

this subject? Should broader questions of particular coastal and marine epistemologies – and their salience – be made politically, socio-economically and ethically relevant, and if so in what ways? Are there practical limitations to the incorporation of local situated narratives within management processes?

Naturecultures	Local / Global Knowleges	Space / Place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there aspects which a naturecultures perspective cannot address? • What can a naturecultures perspective make visible which a political economy approach does not? • How are nature-culture binaries reflected in spatial practices? • What are the morality / ethics of deep sea mining and resource use? • What does a naturecultures perspective imply for policy and politics? How to productively complicate things? • How can we deal with nature romanticism (undisturbed pristine nature) in practice? • Need to critique the notion of invasive species • What boundary concepts can bridge the marine/terrestrial divide? • What boundary concepts can bridge the marine/terrestrial divide? • How to deal with environmental injustices in remote places where no specific community is affected? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What forms of knowledge of the deep sea are available? • How do we comprehend marine identities and identity politics? • What values are ascribed to the sea in different contexts by different actors? • What is the relationship between 'experts', 'activists', 'locals' and 'lay people'? Are they useful or applicable categories? • Need to understand scientific epistemological cultures of the coast • What is the role of the global North in producing dominant narratives of the marine? • Need to understand marine conservation practices in the Global South • What does decolonial thinking in contrast to postcolonial sensibilities bring to coastal research / politics? • How can the arts instigate science – stakeholder interaction? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to grasp the 'otherness' of the sea • Limits of the marine? Antarctica as marine space? • How do we methodologically comprehend the liminality of coastal places? • What is the difference between dwelling and being in relation to the sea? • Need to understand current context of territorialisation and inudustrialisation of the sea – sea grabbing • How can sense of place be fostered in a global space of flows? • How are nature- culture binaries reflected in spatial practices at the coast and at sea?



Groupwork Sessions

In the second phase of the workshop, participants were asked to join one of three breakout groups, focussed on the three thematic axes: nature-culture, space/place and local / global knowledges. The discussion within each group was kept on track by group moderators assigned in advance.



Space/Place

The space/place group moderated by Martin Döring (Hamburg) focussed on the use of the concepts space, place and landscape as a way of analytically understanding how people relate to their environments. Key issues raised and discussed included the following question: how do we grasp the 'placefulness' of the sea? – What are the implications of the dynamic, fluid and variable nature of coastal environments for our conceptualisations of space and place? How do we bring in fluidity – without resorting to narrative? It was argued that place meanings are constructed through the interactions of local communities, stakeholders and governance actors. From an assemblage perspective, place may be understood as produced and constantly in a process of change. The group furthermore discussed the tensions encountered by planners and environmental managers who need to work with static concepts which poorly reflect the nature of marine and coastal environments. Focussing on marine boundaries and borders, it was argued that the ways borders work at sea can provide new insights on the nature of borders and bordering practices more generally. It was emphasised that there are different ways of making space legible and suggested that we perhaps need to be more creative in how we work with space / place narratives in the research process, potentially working with song or fictional stories rather than solely papers and reports. Following the work of Doreen Massey, it was emphasised that heterogeneity and diversity are fundamental, constituent features of spatiality. This presents challenges for comparative case study research but further highlights the importance of spatially explicit and locally-situated perspectives.

Local / Global Knowledges

The discussion in this group, moderated by Anna-Katharina Hornidge (ZMT Bremen), focussed on the need to overcome established binaries of 'local' and 'global' knowledge and their associated connotations. The group identified several sets of binary pairs commonly found in academic and policy discourses on the marine:

<i>Global</i>	<i>Local</i>
<i>Universal</i>	<i>Particular</i>
<i>Expert</i>	<i>Lay</i>
<i>Formal</i>	<i>Informal</i>
<i>Sedentary</i>	<i>Nomadic</i>
<i>Industrial</i>	<i>Artisanal</i>
<i>Terrestrial</i>	<i>Maritime</i>

It was noted that the binaries may not reflect empirical realities and may serve to produce and reinforce power imbalances. In practice, it may in some contexts be useful to distinguish between maritime and terrestrial knowledges, given that; for example, much knowledge of the high seas is secondary, produced by experts with access to research vessels and other specialist infrastructure. The group also highlighted the relational nature of knowledge, using the example of lionfish as an invasive species in Caribbean. In this context, the stories told about the lionfish have substantially changed in a short space of time. Previously considered a hazard and a threat to tourism, it is now becoming incorporated in local culinary traditions. Working with social constructivist perspectives we can examine the processes through which specific truth claims become institutionalised and others structurally excluded.



Nature/Culture

The nature-cultures group, moderated by Sven Bergmann (Uni Bremen) first discussed each participant's diverse points of encounter with nature-culture debates, whether through discipline specific discussions on the intersections between physical and human geography or the sex/gender debate in sociology and anthropology. Relevant theoretical frames include the work of Descola, Douglas, Ingold and Latour. It was argued that from a practice perspective it does not make sense to distinguish between the natural and cultural but to focus on the interactions. It was stressed however, that even when we recognise and acknowledge the need to overcome binary understandings of nature and culture in favour of analysing the relations between nature and culture, these concepts continue to represent powerful discourse categories. Nature-culture binaries have become institutionalised and are constantly produced and reproduced through scientific, governance and management practices. Nature-culture dichotomies become visible at the coast. Essential concepts of nature and culture are employed in narratives of nature conservation and cultural heritage at the coast. In some contexts, there is scope to work with the arguments of a small number of natural scientists who also seek to challenge existing dichotomies, but from a different perspective. Karsten Reise's work documenting the contingent human-nature interactions underlying the natural history of the Wadden Sea is a case in point.



Concluding remarks and future steps

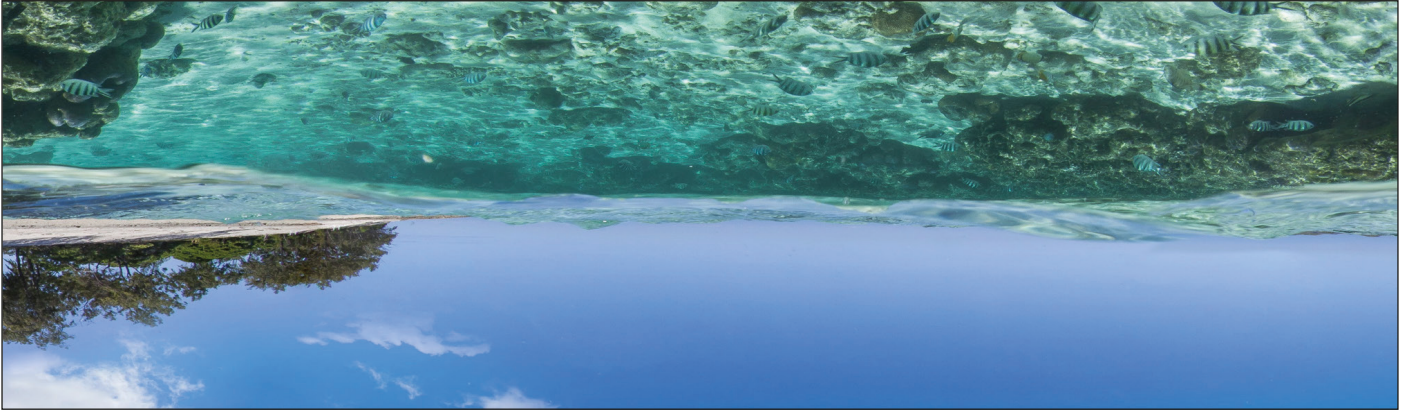
The workshop closed with a short feedback round. While it was generally acknowledged that more questions were raised than answered, most participants found the workshop to have been a very positive experience and were keen for similar workshops to be held again in the future, perhaps on an annual basis. The format, building mostly on the input of participants was appreciated as providing space for open discussions. Future events might also focus more specifically on a given topic.

Annex A: List of participants and contact details

Dr. Henryk Alff	h.alff@fu-berlin.de	Leibniz ZMT
Dr. Maria Jose Barragan-Paladines	mariaj.barraganp@leibniz-zmt.de	Leibniz ZMT
Dr. Sven Bergmann	s.bergmann@uni-bremen.de	Universität Bremen, Anthropology
Dr. Ruth Brennan	ruth.brennan@sams.ac.uk	Centre for Environmental Humanities, Trinity College Dublin.
Dr. Martin Döring	doering@metaphorik.de	Hamburg Igeog
Dr. Kira Gee	kira.gee@gmx.de	HZG Geesthacht
Dr. Friederike Gesing*	f.gesing@uni-bremen.de	University of Bremen, artec
Prof. Dr. Anna Hornidge	anna-katharina.hornidge@leibniz-zmt.de	Leibniz ZMT
Prof. Dr. Silja Klepp	klepp@geographie.uni-kiel.de	Kiel University, Geography
Ms. Vera Köpsel	vera.koepsel@uni-hamburg.de	Hamburg Igeog
Dr. Ulrike Kronfeld-Goharani	kronfeld@ips.uni-kiel.de	Kiel University, Social Sciences
Prof. Dr. Beate Ratter	beate.ratter@uni-hamburg.de	Hamburg Igeog
Dr. Rapti Siriwardane*	rapti.siriwardane@leibniz-zmt.de	Leibniz ZMT
Dr. Cormac Walsh*	cormac.walsh@uni-hamburg.de	Hamburg Igeog
Dr. Martin Weiss	weiss@dsm.museum	Dt. Schiffahrtsmuseum
Dr. Stefanie Wodrig	wodrig@ips.uni-kiel.de	Universität Kiel

*Workshop Organisers

Annex B: Workshop programme



Exploring Marine and Coastal Epistemologies: A Roundtable Workshop

January 23, 2017, 14.00-18.00

Yu Garden Chinese Tea House, Shanghai Hall
Feldbrunnenstr. 67, 20148 Hamburg

Workshop Schedule

- 14:00: Welcome from Beate Ratter on behalf of Uni Hamburg / Institute for Geography - Introduction to the workshop from Rapti Siriwardane (ZMT Bremen)
- 14:15: Participants' introductions
- 14:35: An introduction to marine and coastal epistemologies, presented by Cormac Walsh (Uni Hamburg)
- 14:55: Plenary discussion
- 15:30: Group Work phase I – please choose one of the following discussion groups:
- 1) naturecultures, moderated by Sven Bergmann (Uni Bremen)
 - 2) space/place, moderated by Martin Döring (Uni Hamburg)
 - 3) local/global knowledges, moderated by Anna-Katharina Hornidge (ZMT Bremen)
- 16:15: Coffee Break
- 16:30: Group Work II – you are free to either chose a new group or return to previous
- 17:00: Plenary session, moderated by Friederike Gesing (Uni Bremen)
Presentation of discussions in the three groups
Plenary discussion
Final round of statements from all participants

