

Towards a more balanced management of a harbour through a Local Authority-Academic Couplet, Cork - IE

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- ADAPTATION TO RISK: Managing impacts of climate change and safeguarding resilience of coasts/coastal systems
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Knowledge-based
- Ecosystems based approach

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The strategic couplet, originally known as Expert Couplet Nodes (ECN) is an interactive alliance between multidisciplinary academic experts and local authority actors.

4. Overview of the case

This case describes the steps taken towards achieving more balanced management of a multi-use harbour: Cork Harbour, Ireland. It includes the integration of risk associated with climate change, through the establishment of a strategic alliance (couplet) between the local authority and multidisciplinary academic experts. This innovative relationship resulted in the adaptation of an Integrated Harbour Management Strategy set up with the consensus of stakeholders, and a strengthening link between science and policy at the local level.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

Cork Harbour is a large natural harbour on the southern coast of Ireland. It is of considerable importance to the socio-economic well being of County Cork and the surrounding region. It is the second largest port in Ireland, is a hub for global pharmaceutical and food-processing industries and has also a long tradition of recreation use, including sailing, fishing and power boating. All of these activities are of vital importance to the society and economy of Cork and surrounding region but also for the national economy. The Harbour is designated as both a Special Protection Area for birds and a Ramsar Wetland Site of International Importance. The areas of salt marsh habitats and intertidal mudflats are also designated as a Special Area of Conservation.

There was a recognised need for balancing the development and conservation needs of different stakeholders in this multiple use harbour due to the potential for tension and conflicts of interests between users. The most important issues arising were the impact of industries and land use activities (in Brownfield sites, water quality, atmospheric pollution); catchments land use (urbanisation and infrastructure development, land use changes); Maritime Spatial Planning (port development, aquaculture & fisheries, maritime transport); Maritime heritage, recreation and tourism (carrying capacity); and coastal flooding and erosion (impacts of climate change). The implementation of the ECN approach was at a local scale with comprehensive regulatory body involvement.

The local authorities are the principal planning consent bodies and have a significant influence on physical developments related to the marine leisure sector in Ireland, although other statutory bodies have a planning remit in the coastal environment.

b) Objectives

The main objective of the approach was to move towards the establishment of an ICZM framework strategy for the Harbour and a better integration of science-based knowledge in the planning and management regime, strengthening the link between science and policy. This was to be done with stakeholder participation and consensus. These goals were to be achieved in a mid-term timescale (3-5 years).

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

The main bodies involved were Cork County Council (local planning authority), particularly the Planning Department and the Coastal and Marine Resources Centre (CMRC), a multi-disciplinary research group from University College Cork. CMRC was responsible for conducting the associated studies and to provide scientific-based knowledge into the managing context. The Council, as the local authority, were responsible for the decision-making process and action.

b) ICZM tools

A strategic alliance between the local authority and academic experts was established with direct interaction on a regular basis. Discussions included, planning, technical measures and research tools. New knowledge of physical, social and economical attributes of Cork Harbour was generated through various studies that were mutually agreed. These involved a multidisciplinary approach, with collaborative input of geographers, engineers, environmental scientists, geo-morphologists, legal experts and GIS IT specialists. Recommendations were made and discussed with planners who added value to the research process by contributing their local knowledge, professional experience and appreciation of political realities to the equation. The ultimate outcome was the publication of an Integrated Management Strategy for Cork Harbour in 2008. There was stakeholder consensus by means of a multi-stakeholder Forum underpinned by the couplet relationship.

7. Cost and resources

Initial work was funded through the INTERREG IIIB COREPOINT project and will continue to the implementation phase under the INTERREG IVB IMCORE project

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

Most of the initial objectives were achieved in the timescale defined. These included, or were reflected in, a broader understanding of ICZM in practice, increased awareness of management options for specific problems (such as recreational carrying capacity) and an enhanced relationship between research group and the local authority. More specific objectives included those associated with the needs of the Planning Department, such as studies of the potential of coastal Brown field sites within the Harbour, the recreational carrying capacity of the Harbour and a landscape character assessment of the coastal zone. Overall, the couplet approach helped to initiate and consolidate a shift in attitude and behaviour towards traditional science and management practices in situations where new relationships between researchers and practitioners were formed.

9. Success and Fail factors

The interaction between the academic and local authority staff was favoured by their physical proximity. Both were motivated by the success of previous ICZM approaches. On the other hand, staff turnover in both the local authority and the research

centre delayed the process. Lack of time availability and a limited local authority remit for the marine environment together with conflict of interests negatively affected the progress of the process.

Lack of adequate finances has been a continuous negative factor in the couplet relationship.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

Many positive outcomes can be identified: better understanding and trust developed between coastal research and practice communities at local levels, realisation of mutual benefits, build professional capital to help address future challenges, harness relevant and appropriate science for decision-making, deliver local level ICZM and bridge the gap between EC Recommendation and local level implementation of ICZM. Even if the ECN is not permanent, the link between these two universes will be easily re-established. However, this ECN failed to incorporate the principle of complexity in the Sustainability framework and the precautionary principle was also disregarded. Some trans-boundary aspects were considered too ethereal and unrelated to more immediate, predefined management issues and processes.

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13. Sources

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-  Corepoint Expert Couplets Case Studies 2008 (1.79 MB) 
 -  Establishing information needs for planning and assessment Cork Harbour 2008 (485.07 KB) 
 -  The potential role of sustainability science in coastal zone management _2009 (107.85 KB) 
 -  The_Point_of_Corepoint_2008 (5.33 MB) 