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## MSP in theory vs. reality: Preliminary governance findings of MESMA project

In January 2014, an EU-funded study on the governance of marine spatial management in Europe was released. Undertaken as part of the Monitoring and Evaluation of Spatially Managed Marine Areas project (MESMA; [www.mesma.org](http://www.mesma.org)), the study suggests that, for the 13 cases that MESMA examined, MSP in practice is very different from the ideals and theories typically recommended in MSP literature.

Key points from the study's summary document include:

- MSP in the case studies was more about integrated use than implementing ecosystem-based management. That is, the MSP was intended to provide for, or at least not obstruct, strategically important infrastructure development projects. Marine spatial plans either provided for strategically important infrastructure development projects, or they were "disconnected by design" from the decision-making platforms for such major projects.
- None of the case studies employed a step-by-step, participative, ecosystem-based marine spatial planning process of the sort recommended by Ehler and Douvrou (UNESCO, 2009, [www.unesco-ioc-marinesp.be/publications](http://www.unesco-ioc-marinesp.be/publications)).
- A top-down approach was followed in all the case studies. While there may have been platforms for stakeholder participation at certain phases of the projects, these were often disconnected by design from the final decision-making platforms and processes.
- Some stakeholders who have been involved in participative MSP platforms expressed disappointment and frustration at the lack of influence of their input on policies and decisions, and there was a growing sense of apathy about the processes. Some stakeholders, particularly those related to strategically important infrastructure development projects and offshore fishing, adopted a strategy of circumventing such participative platforms, opting instead to wield influence at higher political levels.

The summary and full study results are downloadable at [www.homepages.ucl.ac.uk/~ucfwpej/pdf/MESMAGovernanceFindingsOutline.pdf](http://www.homepages.ucl.ac.uk/~ucfwpej/pdf/MESMAGovernanceFindingsOutline.pdf). A special issue of the journal *Marine Policy* based on these findings is in preparation.

**Note:** An interactive chat with Peter Jones, lead MESMA governance researcher, will be held 1 April 2014 on OpenChannels.org. For the time of the chat and other details, as well as to participate in it, go to <https://www.openchannels.org/node/5875>.

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