

Ocean Conflicts – Insights from the MARE Session, *Blue conflicts and pathways to sustainability*.

Worldwide, conflicts over marine resources are growing in frequency and intensity. This accentuates the need to understand different types of conflict and develop ways, sensitive to different contexts, to constructively intervene to mitigate its negative effects on social justice and sustainability. Manifested variously in different settings, Blue Growth is seen as a key global driver that has the potential to exacerbate existing conflicts and promote the development of new ones. This was the departure point for a double session held at the 2021 MARE People and the Sea Conference titled, *Blue conflicts and pathways to sustainability*. It was noted in the session preamble that surprisingly many aspects of ocean conflicts scholarship and practice are under-developed. In response the ambitions of the session were to examine how conflict is conceptualized, what methodological approaches can effectively and meaningfully study and contribute to change conflicts, what are the origins and driving forces of conflicts, how do conflicts obstruct prospects for sustainability and social justice, and how might they be avoided, resolved or transformed.

The session included eleven paper presentations, related discussions and audience engagement and was associated with Belmont Forum's ongoing collaborative research action on ocean sustainability, including contributions from OCEANS PACT, MULTI-FRAME, NO CRISES research projects. The diverse range of presentations included theoretical reflections, systematic literature reviews, case studies from Bangladesh, Estonia, South Africa, Sweden, Norway and Brazil, methodological perspectives, empirical accounts, analytical insights and how ideas of how to position research in relation to the normative ambitions of sustainability(s) and social justice. There were several areas of agreement between the different presenters, but there were also tensions evident between different ways of framing conflict and what might be fruitful ways of engaging with it. While the focus was clearly on how to understand and address diverse marine conflicts, it was filtered through an underlying concern over the different ways that conflicts threaten social justice and sustainability. However, there was little explicit elaboration on what social justice and sustainability might imply in different contexts. Here we briefly reflect on key insights/questions arising from the session.

Blue conflict questions and areas of interest that were highlighted as requiring ongoing engagement, reflection, and development:

- Given the diversity of types and contexts of blue conflicts as well as how they are differently approached by researchers, how can research be both context sensitive and generate insights that have wider applicability (e.g., through the development of conflict typologies, constructive engagement approaches etc.)?
- Case-based studies need to concretize and contextualize marine conflict contexts, including deepening and diversifying problem understandings (taking history and the role of wider institutions into account) and gathering and locating possibilities and means for change.

- A key area of divergence among presenters was whether marine conflict can be conceptualized and approached as something to be avoided or resolved, or as a potential portal for progressive change.
- Is multi-use a viable and workable marine planning concept in practice and what is its relationship to conflict, uneven power relations, social justice and sustainability(s)?
- What forms of local resistance can lead to more just and sustainable transformation? Under what conflict conditions can local resistance lead to more just and sustainable transformation?
- How can we understand and work with coastal fishers to advance their livelihood prospects (and relatedly socio-cultural status) in the face of multiple Blue Growth interventions and other impacting industrial projects and conservation initiatives?
- Do conflicts in open seas and coastal areas have important different characteristics and if so, what are the implications for constructively engaging with conflict change?

There is interest to develop the papers presented and discussed at the session into a journal special issue on marine conflict, which we plan to advance. Some of the participants in the session also expressed interest to continue discussions and exchange as the three research projects progress, especially around trying to develop synergies between the projects to optimize the contribution and impacts of the respective research projects.