



Transdisciplinary Research: Can Citizen Science Support Effective Decision-Making for Coastal Infrastructure Management?

Sonya Agnew*, Kathrin Kopke, Orla-Peach Power, María Del Camino Troya and Amy Dozier

Centre for Marine and Renewable Energy, Environmental Research Institute, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

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*Correspondence:

Sonya Agnew
sagnew@ucc.ie

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Stakeholder engagement is increasingly recognised as imperative for developing effective climate change adaptation policy within the EU, particularly for delivering sustainable coastal infrastructure. This perspective discusses how current transdisciplinary research (TDR) approaches concerning ecoengineering solutions for artificial coastal structures are insufficient in ensuring adequate stakeholder engagement to facilitate coherent and enduring decision-making and policy development processes. Socio-cultural analysis focussing on how people view and feel about artificial coastal infrastructure within coastal infrastructure research has been recognised as a large knowledge gap. We suggest that citizen science (CS) methodologies as part of a cultural ecosystem services (CES) research approach can adequately inform and support the implementation of ecoengineering solutions for hard artificial coastal structures whilst addressing existing barriers associated with stakeholder engagement in current TDR approaches.

Keywords: transdisciplinary research, stakeholder engagement, citizen science (CS), cultural ecosystem services (CES), ecoengineering, coastal infrastructure

INTRODUCTION

Coastal ecosystems worldwide are impacted by a range of cumulating pressures including increasing urbanisation, industrial development, recreation, and tourism (Bulleri and Chapman, 2010; Firth et al., 2016; Strain et al., 2017) and are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as increased storminess, sea-level rise, and erosion (Cheong et al., 2013; Firth et al., 2016; Environmental Protection Agency, 2018). Consequently, artificial structures such as jetties, harbours, and marinas and defence mechanisms such as seawalls, groynes and riprap are necessary to support and protect coastal communities (Firth et al., 2013). The proliferation of this infrastructure has led to widespread coastal hardening contributing to changes in the coastal environment (Crowe and Frid, 2015; Firth et al., 2016; Bishop et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2019) such as resource depletion, habitat degradation, and species loss (Cigliano et al., 2015; Firth et al., 2016).

Academic focus has progressively sought to address the complexity of these issues through the development of nature-based solutions (Bulleri and Chapman, 2010; Firth et al., 2013). One recent approach considers the application of novel ecoengineering (also known as “ecological engineering”) mechanisms that aim to enhance biodiversity on hard coastal structures

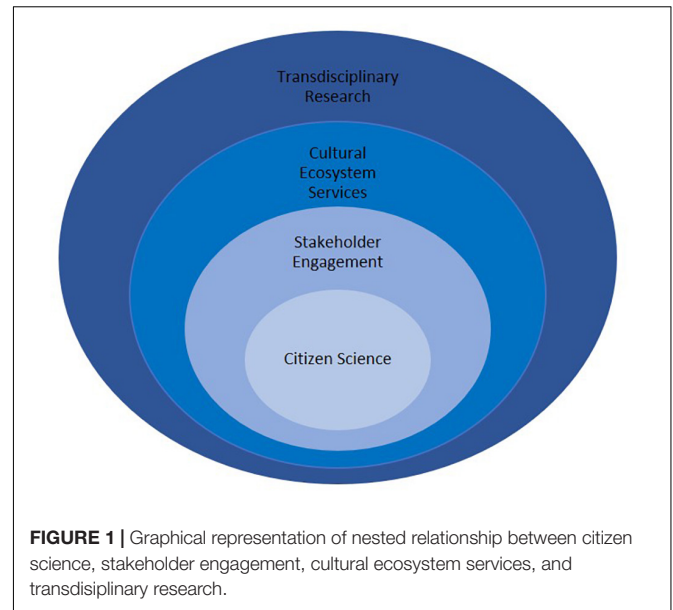
(Evans et al., 2019; Natanzi et al., 2021). Ecoengineering involves the inclusion of enhancements that can be retrofitted to existing structures, or incorporated into planned structures to provide habitat for native species, enable habitat complexity, and address the negative impact of artificial structures along coastlines (Cheong et al., 2013; Firth et al., 2014, 2016; Daffron, 2017; Ware and Callaway, 2019; Airolidi et al., 2021; Natanzi et al., 2021).

Research into ecoengineering solutions for coastal artificial structures has predominantly focussed on the development of interventions and enhancements within an ecological and environmental context (Evans et al., 2015; Firth et al., 2016; Strain et al., 2017; Whelchel et al., 2018; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2020) and while nascent research has begun to emphasise the importance of stakeholder perspectives, perceptions and input (Evans et al., 2017; Gray et al., 2017; Kienker et al., 2018; Strain et al., 2019; Ware and Callaway, 2019), this remains limited.

Yet, stakeholder engagement embedded in eco-sociological research plays an important role in addressing complex socio-environmental issues in coastal and marine research, including: marine litter (Veiga et al., 2016; Black et al., 2019a); ocean literacy (Santoro et al., 2018); sustainable marine spatial planning and governance (Jentoft et al., 2012; Soma et al., 2014; Giakoumi et al., 2018; Twomey and O' Mahony, 2018; Mannan et al., 2020; O'Keeffe et al., 2020; Flynn et al., 2021). Engaging multi-perspective stakeholders can provide researchers with the opportunity to incorporate insight and knowledge from diverse groups (Waltham and Sheaves, 2015; Ryfield et al., 2019; Cabana et al., 2020) and presents a platform to communicate research beyond the limitations of the scientific world (O'Shaughnessy et al., 2020). For ecoengineered artificial coastal interventions to be successful, we argue that citizen science methods as part of a nested approach (see **Figure 1**) can facilitate dialogue across diverse stakeholder groups (Firth et al., 2016; Evans et al., 2017; Strain et al., 2019; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2020), and that the fundamental principles of transdisciplinary research (TDR) are best equipped to achieve this.

TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

Transdisciplinary Research (TDR) is “at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all discipline” (Nicolescu, 2005, p. 4) and represents a significant paradigm shift in research emphasis, building on multi- and inter-disciplinary approaches, and facilitates a move beyond disjointed academic positioning to establish unified outlooks on specific issues (The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1998; von Wehrden et al., 2019). Although discourse on the need for synergies in research through TDR emerged in 1970, the concept was not fully embraced on an international platform for a further two decades. The Charter on TDR was established at the First World Congress on Transdisciplinarity (1994) in response to urgent calls from the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro 1992 for new research agendas to address global environmental crises and develop cohesive sustainability pathways (Bernstein, 2015). Alongside reaching beyond the boundaries of any one academic field or discipline (Klein et al., 2001; McGregor,



2004; Hirsch Hadorn et al., 2008; European Commission [EC], 2014b; Wickson and Carew, 2014; von Wehrden et al., 2019), TDR aims to integrate diverse societal perspectives (Hirsch Hadorn et al., 2008; Cundill et al., 2015; Pettibone et al., 2017; Rigolot, 2020), which can include governmental decision makers, commercial and industry stakeholders, civil-society stakeholders, community-based organisations, and NGOs, in addition to diverse academic disciplines (Bracken et al., 2015; United Nations [UN], 2017; Twomey and O' Mahony, 2018; Vienni Baptista et al., 2019; von Wehrden et al., 2019). Increasingly encouraged in academic research, particularly in relation to the natural environment (Bracken et al., 2015; von Wehrden et al., 2019), TDR seeks to address practical “real world” problems (Klein et al., 2001; McGregor, 2004; Robinson, 2008; Arnold, 2013; European Commission [EC], 2014b; Wickson and Carew, 2014) including the pressures of climate change (Godemann, 2008; Lang et al., 2012; Scholz, 2020).

Stakeholder engagement has been widely acknowledged within environmental EU legal and policy frameworks as a cornerstone in developing effective and coherent policymaking (Darvill and Lindo, 2016; Twomey and O' Mahony, 2018; Schneider et al., 2019; OECD, 2020). As a result of the Rio Declaration (1992; see Principle 10 and Agenda 21), a multilateral environmental agreement known as The Aarhus Convention (UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters) (1998) was adopted in 1998. This agreement entered into force in 2001 and was subsequently ratified by the EU in 2005. More recently, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stressed the importance of public participation in achieving sustainability and environmental protection (United Nations [UN], 2015). Goal 16 calls for “responsive, inclusive, and participatory and representative decision-making at all levels” (United Nations [UN], 2017, p. 25). The environmental regulatory framework of the EU, as established within the EC's Better Regulation Guidelines SWD

(2017) 350, has embedded stakeholder engagement into the legal and policy making process, requiring a 12-week public consultation for major policy initiatives. Public consultation requirements for example are specified within the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (85/337/EEC) as amended by 97/11/EC, the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC), the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) (2008/56/EC), and the MSP Directive (2014/89/EU) (European Commission [EC], 1985, 1997, 2000, 2008, 2014a). Such processes require support across society to be successful (de Groot and Schuitema, 2012; Black et al., 2019b) and need to be underpinned by relevant environmental research that includes social dimensions.

Current approaches concerning the extent that civil society and stakeholders are included and engaged differ between EU environmental, legal, and policy frameworks (Black et al., 2019b). TDR presents an opportunity to enhance the science-policy interface, but to fully realise the potential of TDR and engage society in research-driven solutions, consideration of who contributes to scientific research, “what does and does not belong to scientific knowledge” (Regeer and Bunders, 2009, p. 54), and an unpacking of how diverse perspectives and values are considered and evaluated in decision making processes is required (Regeer and Bunders, 2009). Funding bodies seeking to address these shortfalls have therefore increasingly recommended that applied environmental research generate, facilitate, and incorporate diverse and equally legitimate knowledge beyond the academic sphere within the decision making process to establish effective and relevant policies (Pohl, 2008; Mobjörk, 2010; Bracken et al., 2015; IPBES, 2019; Vienni Baptista et al., 2019).

CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Ecosystem services (ES), conceptualised by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment [MEA] (2005), are the diverse values and services that ecosystems provide to humanity and are increasingly used in research to support decision-makers and develop policy Millennium Ecosystem Assessment [MEA], 2005; Darvill and Lindo, 2016; Irvine et al., 2016). Cultural ecosystem services (CES) are one focal point for the realisation of such aims. CES encompass societal factors and can be broadly conceived of, as the contributions by ecosystems in generating knowledge and supporting human experiences (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment [MEA], 2005; Satterfield et al., 2013; Ryfield et al., 2019). Moreover, a CES approach can provide a framework to advance the integration of different academic disciplines, and support both the inclusion of heterogenous and localised perspectives, and collaborative efforts with stakeholders to address complex environmental issues (Milcu et al., 2013; Ghorbanzadeh and Björkqvist, 2019; Ryfield et al., 2019; Gould et al., 2020).

However, CES does not provide a “magic wand” solution which guarantees the comprehensive inclusion of stakeholder values in decision-making processes. In fact, the effectiveness and applicability of the ES framework, specifically in relation to CES, has been the topic of much scholarly debate (Fish et al., 2016; Kirchoff, 2019; Gould et al., 2020). Commentators have noted

CES are less embedded in natural science studies than other ES categories, and despite the importance of community support for ecological interventions, a robust understanding of what people value, particularly where there is no clear indication of material benefit (Small et al., 2017), is often not effectively explored or relayed to decisionmakers (Chan et al., 2012; Canedoli et al., 2017). In exploring socio-cultural values held by stakeholders (Ryfield et al., 2019), CES data is characteristically subjective, context dependent and intangible, and captures values such as aesthetics, spiritual values, and sense of place (Daniel et al., 2012; Plieninger et al., 2013; Small et al., 2017; Chaudhary et al., 2019; Ryfield et al., 2019), and is commonly explored using qualitative methods which are primarily embedded within social science paradigms (Chan et al., 2012; Tengberg et al., 2012; Canedoli et al., 2017; Ryfield et al., 2019; Gould et al., 2020).

Academic literature has begun to unpack some of the barriers in CES driven research such as data collation and interpretation, as associated data has been reported as difficult to categorise or isolate (Milcu et al., 2013; Gould et al., 2019), is less quantifiable compared to natural sciences, frequently difficult to measure (often omitted from traditional valuation analysis processes) (Small et al., 2017), and present barriers to achieving the synergy required within TDR. Thus, there is an urgent need to address existing and entrenched disciplinary ontological differences to enable the transition from current “epistemological sovereignty” (Miller et al., 2008, p. 8) toward effective and robust pluralistic approaches.

Cultural ecosystem service provides opportunities to examine and understand the relationships, perceptions, cultural practices, and identities people have in relation to an ecosystem of interest (Daniel et al., 2012; Gould et al., 2019, 2020; QUB, 2020) and can ensure the necessary reflexivity, clarity, and rigour, to support effective stakeholder engagement in the research process (Milcu et al., 2013; Katz-Gerro and Orenstein, 2015; Gould et al., 2020). Previous CES studies have included discussions on cultural heritage values, identity, and the spatial and temporal dynamics of place to inform sustainable planning and decision-making (Tengberg et al., 2012; Ryfield et al., 2019; Cabana et al., 2020). These inquiries typically utilise tailored research approaches that may involve a mix of primary data collection methods (i.e., community level interviews, participatory events, GIS and remote mapping, focus groups with decision-makers, and community surveys), and secondary data (i.e., census data, geographical databases) that enable the inclusion of wider and more heterogenous populations, thus allowing for multi-criteria analysis (Ruskule et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2019; Santarém et al., 2020; Clarke et al., 2021). With this in mind, we present the role of citizen science (CS) mapping of artificial coastal structures through a CES lens to enhance stakeholder engagement in decision-making processes thus meeting a primary goal of transdisciplinary research.

CITIZEN SCIENCE

Citizen science is a dynamic and rapidly divergent field of research and is perceived as a tool that can support public

engagement and interaction in policy and decision-making processes specifically concerning environmental concerns (Irwin, 1995; Purdam, 2014; ECSA, 2015; Vann-Sander et al., 2016; Garcia-Soto et al., 2017). Here, members of the public or non-professional scientists participate in data-gathering projects by recording observations, transcribing information, georeferencing datasets, or mapping (Purdam, 2014; ECSA, 2015; Ryfield et al., 2019; Tauginienė et al., 2020). Benefits of CS as a methodology are multifaceted and have been shown to expand the range of stakeholder inclusion in processes (Vann-Sander et al., 2016; Owen and Parker, 2018). Namely, CS can make specific issues like management or conservation of coastal heritage more accessible and relevant to the wider public, and can create a deeper understanding among participants of associated environmental challenges such as the impacts of climate change on coastal heritage (Dawson, 2014). Such actions have been demonstrated to drive community-based citizen initiatives, enabling direct discourse between citizens and local decision-makers (Owen and Parker, 2018), while facilitating new collaborative pathways between members of the public, NGOs, scientists, and decision-makers (Vann-Sander et al., 2016; Tauginienė et al., 2020). This has been used as an instrument to advance political agendas within the public sphere through both formal and informal avenues (Schade et al., 2021).

Citizen science is increasingly recognised as a pathway for enhancing stakeholder engagement in decision-making processes and the exchange of knowledge between academic and non-academic groups (ECSA, 2015; Tauginienė et al., 2020). This is evident, for example, through EU support for CS in both FP7 and Horizon 2020 funding programmes through for example the *Science for and with Society* programme (2018–2020), and more recently in the *Best Practices in Citizen Science for Environmental Monitoring programme* European Commission [EC], 2020a). Ongoing support for CS as a participatory tool is also signalled in the EU's recent document *Prepare Europe for climate disruptions and accelerate the transformation to a climate resilient and just Europe 2030*, which recommends cooperation between researchers, citizens, governments and industry to support the communication and education of climate risks and solutions whilst facilitating the reconciliation of different viewpoints and values where possible (European Commission [EC], 2020b). Notwithstanding the growing interest in applying CS approaches to stakeholder engagement, the application of CS within academic research frequently remains limited to singular disciplines and its potential within TDR remains underexplored (Hecker et al., 2018).

It can be argued that disciplinary entrenchment of CS, including the accessibility and publication of CS driven data, contributes to siloing in research design, epistemological stagnation, and science-centric emphasis. Indeed, while CS approaches are also applied within the arts, humanities, and social sciences (AHSS) (Dawson et al., 2014; Dobрева et al., 2015; Butkevičienė et al., 2021; Heinisch et al., 2021), they are less evident within scholarly literature when compared with scientific publications in the natural sciences (Vann-Sander et al., 2016; Tauginienė et al., 2020). Recent analysis

within a European context revealed that 80% of CS research occurs within natural sciences and 11% within AHSS (Hecker et al., 2018). Moreover, both CS and CES are challenged by a prevailing methodology that favours natural science-based approaches to data collation and interpretation (Tengberg et al., 2012; Fish et al., 2016; Vann-Sander et al., 2016; Gould et al., 2019; Ryfield et al., 2019). However, there have been significant advances in the area of CES classification (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment [MEA], 2005; TEEB, 2010; Haines-Young and Potschin, 2013, 2018), which help provide in-depth understanding of local community perceptions and values, which can be applied to investigations around artificial structures and ecoengineered enhancements along coastlines. Concurrently, novel CS approaches are also emerging across disciplines and moving beyond a hitherto predominantly terrestrial arena, with increasing uptake of CS in coastal and marine research areas (Garcia-Soto et al., 2017; Fulton et al., 2019). Innovative methods of data collection mapping—enabled through new and evolving digital technologies—can improve reach, communication, and engagement with participant stakeholders, alongside facilitating broader participant heterogeneity (Urváľková and Janoušková, 2019). CS methodologies have been applied in both the natural sciences, e.g., the Capturing Our Coasts project (Hyder et al., 2015; Vye et al., 2020), and AHSS disciplines areas such as the GIRT (Viduka, 2020), ShoreUPDATE (Dawson et al., 2014), and SeaSketch (Jarvis et al., 2015) projects. Similarly, digital mapping processes to gather data such as through geotagging of landscape aesthetics and recreational activities (Lee et al., 2019), crowdsourcing imagery to ascertain locations of recreational value (Gliozzo et al., 2016), identifying significant tourist sites to inform MSP policy (Ruskule et al., 2018), and co-authored mapping that examines cultural activities and participant perceptions of coastal ecological health (Ryfield et al., 2019). CS can be used to identify which CES are important to stakeholders, whilst fostering inclusive and transparent pathways in decision-making (Daily et al., 2009; Schröter et al., 2017) within a TDR approach. Such approaches can be utilised to examine and interpret how decisions—such as the introduction of hard artificial structures or enhancements thereon—are (potentially) received by local communities, providing researchers with indications of palatable solutions within coastal planning and policy development.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

While our understanding and knowledge of how ecological engineering approaches can enhance biodiversity on artificial coastal infrastructure has advanced in recent times (Firth et al., 2016; Evans et al., 2017), associated TDR research on effective stakeholder engagement to support the realisation of such interventions has not been utilised to its full potential, specifically in relation to engaging local coastal communities that inhabit the coastal areas of research interest. Furthermore, TDR can support greater reciprocity among decision-makers and through adequate planning and funding can facilitate resource provision at the institutional level for capacity building, e.g., between

disciplines and between institution and external actors (Vienni Baptista et al., 2019). Yet, it is also challenged by concerns about the effectiveness of TDR methods in generating multifaceted stakeholder-based evidence to feed into decision-making and policy formulation processes (Vienni Baptista et al., 2019). In order to fully realise the potential of TDR, the academic community must re-evaluate current methods of knowledge production to and develop adequate integrative research models (Regeer and Bunders, 2009; Guimarães et al., 2019).

The concept of CES is well positioned to contribute to TDR approaches and can provide a framework in which to engage diverse stakeholders when addressing environmental problems (Milcu et al., 2013; Katz-Gerro and Orenstein, 2015). By integrating CS methodologies and applications stakeholder engagement can be facilitated within ecoengineering research in coastal areas e.g., allowing for participatory mapping of artificial coastal structures and habitats, while potentially opening decision-making processes to stakeholder input and interaction, thus meeting a primary goal of TDR. CS is an established and valuable methodological tool utilised across many academic fields and has the potential to provide a common ground for coherent and effective TDR in finding informed solutions to “real world problems.” Thus, a CS application that is employed through a CES lens can provide a bridge between frequently juxtaposed academic disciplines as well as between academic and non-academic communities in supporting TDR aims.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

SA and KK led the work on literature review and discussion and conclusion. O-PP, AD, and MT contributed significantly to discussion and conclusions. All authors conceived and explored the idea together.

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