

**Balancing Ecology, Economy and Society in two Pioneering Marine National Parks in Scandinavia – Assessing institutional designs and perceived sustainability outcomes five years after establishment**

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Even though marine protected areas (MPAs) have become central instruments in the endeavour towards sustainable development, knowledge is limited on how institutional designs influence outcomes. Through a comparative case study design, using documents and semi-structured interviews with key users, we explore the interplay between institutional arrangements and management outcomes in two adjacent, institutionally differing MPAs, the Koster Sea National Park in Sweden and Outer Hvaler National Park in Norway. The study shows that differences in overall management systems have no noticeable effects on sustainability outcomes and how they are perceived, while the differing objectives of the parks and how they are operationalised, actually seem to have affected the outcomes and influenced users' expectations. The most perceived effects on ecosystems so far are of landscape management onshore. Changes in the sea are few and likely to be affected by larger systemic conditions. The positive economic and societal effects concentrate to areas with park infrastructure and are in parallel with the Koster parks' stronger aims in social and economic sustainability. Both parks find broad support, but there is disappointment in areas with little development. Thus, with locally adapted, participatory institutional design, it is important to take users' varying expectations into account throughout the whole management process. We conclude that locally managed marine protected areas such as national parks can include purposes beyond mere nature protection and thus contribute to broader sustainability aims, but need proper process management and overall institutional embedding and last but not least sufficient resources to be successful.

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