

# MPAs Regulation and the Relationship between Nature and Society: Onto-epistemic issues in England

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# Starting Point

- Environmental law and policy rely on natural sciences for setting their objectives and targets

BUT

- In recent decades, there has been an emphasis on including other knowledges into decision-making
  - **Convention on Biological Diversity 1992, Art 8(j)** “Subject to its national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices”
  - **Aarhus Convention 1998** on public participation in environmental decision-making
  - **Sustainable Development Goals** (goal 16 on promoting inclusive societies and institutions for sustainable development)

## Questions arise

- 1-Why is the inclusion of multiple knowledges important?
- 2-Who is called in to represent different knowledges?
- 3-How are different knowledges brought together in the decision-making space?
- 4-To what extent are epistemic choices dependant on ontological assumptions?
- 5-Finally, as researchers how can we find out how these knowledges interact with each other?

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# 1. Why is the inclusion of multiple knowledges important?

- Instrumental reasons (help gaining a wider picture, help compliance if there is collective ownership of decision-making)
- Normative reasons (it is a democratic right to be heard, it fosters environmental justice)

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## 2. Who is called in to represent different knowledges?

- The usual suspects? (e.g. environmental NGOs representing nature, fishers representing economic concerns)
- Who is left out? (e.g. urban residents in coastal decision-making fora)

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### 3. How are different knowledges brought in together in the decision-making space?

- Thin participation (a trade-off between pre-existing interests)
- Thick participation (an attempt to reach inter-subjective view transcending individual preferences)

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## 4. To what extent are epistemic choices dependant on ontological assumptions?

Cartesian dualisms:

- mind vs body
- society vs nature

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5-Finally, as researchers how can we find out which knowledges are at play and how they interact with each other?

- Desk based research helps but it is not enough
- Primary qualitative research is essential (e.g. interviews, participant observation)
- Reflexivity (awareness of researcher's ontological assumptions, of their positionality)



# An example: MPAs Regulation in England

- Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, Part 5 and the establishment of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs)
- Socio-economic factors to be taken into account for establishing MCZs. Extensive participation for choosing MCZs location but fishers un-happy.
- Why? Thin participation, dualism between nature and society not overcome.
- Methods employed in the research(desk-based law and policy review+ interviews)