



Researching People and the Sea

Methodologies and Traditions

Edited by

Madeleine Gustavsson · Carole S. White
Jeremy Phillipson · Kristen Ounanian

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“I have been waiting long for such a book. Universities train students in how to carry out social research under ideal circumstances, with the syllabus full of textbook-recipes from which to choose from. Yet, students are often ill-prepared for what they find when trying to implement the research techniques they have learned to the real world. It is therefore important to know what previous researchers have experienced when in the field, and what they had to do to generate their data. In this important book, authors share the lessons they have learned the hard way in order to succeed. In particular, it better equips us for what to expect when entering the world of people who draw their livelihoods from the sea. This reflection helps us, as researchers, to deal with the emotional stress that ensues when things do not work out exactly as planned, which they seldom do.”

—Svein Jentoft, *Professor Emeritus, Norwegian College of Fishery Science, UiT—The Arctic University of Norway*

“The book answers the long-standing question about the role of social sciences in marine resources and ocean governance. With transformation and innovation being asked of all scientists today to address the increasing complexity of challenges facing the society, the book provides the best evidence of how well-equipped social science, and interdisciplinary, researchers are in tackling them. Unlike other books on social science research methods, this volume offers rare insights about what works, and as importantly, what doesn't, with thoughtful reflections from trained and experienced researchers, many of them female, early career scholars. For those who like to dismiss social sciences as 'soft', the book will change your mind. For those thinking that social science research is easy, you will think twice. For those looking for new ways of approaching societal problems and doing research, the book will delight and surprise you, and will encourage you to enjoy the new journey.”

—Ratana Chuenpagdee, *Professor, Too Big To Ignore (TBTI) Global Partnership for Small-Scale Fisheries Research and Memorial University*

“A ‘must read’ item in the reading list for research training programmes for social scientists of all hues—important, not only as a crucial part of basic training, but also as a timely intervention in the current debates over the expansion of social sciences into new areas.”

—David Symes, *Reader Emeritus, University of Hull*

“Marine social sciences occupy the interstitial spaces between the established social sciences (such as sociology, anthropology and human geography), the marine natural sciences (including oceanography and marine biology) and the professional sciences (for example: law, policy and management). The thirteen essays in this book span the straits separating discipline-based text-book methods and the realities of conducting and interpreting interdisciplinary methodology. This is research as social practice, enriched by candid reflection on errors, insights and course-corrections. The authors and editors provide a valuable aid to those navigating this knowledge-archipelago, whether as graduate students, professors or marine spatial planners. It will be especially useful to orientate the many researchers who enter the field from the marine natural sciences. To those working in interdisciplinary teams or commissioning marine social research, it will help build understanding and respect for those who are mapping the myriad relationships between sea and society.”

—Edward H. Allison, *Professor, Research Chair for Equity and Justice in the Blue Economy, WorldFish, Penang, Malaysia and Research Director, Nippon Foundation Ocean Nexus Center, Earthlab, University of Washington*

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Preface

This book is the culmination of a two-year collaboration, beginning with a call for contributions launched in the late summer of 2018 to take part in a workshop the following year at the biannual MARE (Centre for Maritime Research) conference in Amsterdam. The workshop was the first in the twenty-year history of the conference to give dedicated attention to the methodological practices of its burgeoning marine social science community. During a well-attended conference day, with four consecutive sessions focused on ‘Researching people and the sea’, eighteen authors presented early versions of their papers and received feedback from a panel of discussants. Subsequently, the chapters were developed by authors and editors through several iterative rounds of revisions and, in the end, fifteen reflexive chapters have come to fruition in the pages of this volume.

This collaboration was born to rectify the long-standing and surprising absence of a comprehensive publication focused on the explicit discussion of social science methods and methodologies in fisheries and marine research. Such an absence in the literature can be particularly noticeable to students and researchers who may be new to this area of research, and is something we have been conscious of through our own careers as postgraduate students, postdoctoral researchers and now supervisors and research project leaders. To attend to this gap, the volume seeks to provide a novel space to reflexively and openly share experiences and lessons

learnt from the field. It is particularly relevant to social science researchers and students seeking to embark on research into people and the sea and to policy makers, practitioners and scientists wishing to understand the social dimension of the marine and coastal environments. We hope the book will encourage other authors and publishers to bring further attention to methodological practices and training needs within the marine social sciences.

The editorial team would like to thank the support of Publisher Rachael Ballard and Editorial Assistant Jo O'Neil for their continuous support during the development of this volume. We are indebted to the anonymous reviewers of the original book proposal, to our original discussants at the MARE workshop, and to David Symes for his, as ever, expert critique of our introductory and concluding chapters. Nor would the volume have seen the light of day without the contributions of our authors who, without exception, responded positively and efficiently to our editorial inputs and reviews of draft chapters. This book project had no specific funding; however, we wish to gratefully acknowledge the support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under grant refs ES/R00580X/1, ES/R010404/1 and ES/S007024/1 which supported some of our time to work on this publication.

Trondheim, Norway
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Part I

Introduction

1

Researching People and the Sea—Setting the Scene

Carole S. White, Madeleine Gustavsson,
Jeremy Phillipson, and Kristen Ounanian

1.1 Setting the Scene

Attention to and interest in the world's marine environment and resources has grown both politically and academically over the past decade. Oceans and coasts have risen to the top of international and national government

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agendas. They have sparked the interest and imaginations of researchers and the public at large. The prolific number of conferences, courses, initiatives and networks dedicated to understanding and managing interactions of people and the sea is testimony to this trend. As the community of researchers engaged in what is often referred to as the 'marine social sciences' grows, there is an ever-present need for training and capacity building in both theoretical and methodological practices.

Recognising that in the social sciences context is everything, this book focuses on the particularities and challenges of applying social science approaches to the study of people and the sea. Now that calls for social science expertise are increasingly being made and heard, there is concomitant imperative for marine social science capacity to be nurtured and developed. At the heart of this need are methodological practices: *how* to design and undertake research in this context. After all, it is through these practices that knowledge is generated, new theory is developed and evidence is constructed that informs policy and practice. This edited book's primary contribution, therefore, rests on its in-depth assessment of social scientific practices within the marine and coastal realm. As many of us recognise, articulating the issue to be addressed is one of the first steps in any research endeavour.

A dual discourse has recently emerged, where coastal and marine ecosystems are perceived as both needing protection and as spaces for sustainable development and economic growth (Arbo et al. 2018; Bennett 2019). Arguments for marine conservation, motivated by the globally urgent challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change (e.g. UNFCCC 1992; UN Convention on Biological Diversity 2004; IPCC 2019; Garcia and Rice 2020), sit alongside growing enthusiasm for the continued development of tourism, deep-sea mining and marine energy and the potential they offer for revenue generation from previously untapped resources (e.g. European Commission 2012). It is therefore a crucial time for the social sciences to become more engaged and contribute to answering vital questions that concern people and the sea, as highlighted by the recent 'Manifesto for Marine Social Sciences' (Bavinck and Verrips 2020). Understanding how people use, relate to and interact with coastal and

marine environments has never been so important, with social scientists able to bring into view a host of vital considerations pertaining to issues of inequality, wellbeing, social relations, gender, governance, values and knowledge, *inter alia*.

However, the study of people's interactions with the sea is certainly nothing new. Such interactions have long been addressed in the social sciences, particularly in fisheries (Symes and Hoefnagel 2010; Urquhart et al. 2011), where a long tradition of work exists among anthropologists (e.g. Tunstall 1962; McCay 1978; Acheson 1981), sociologists (e.g. Neis 1992), political scientists (e.g. Kooiman 2005) geographers (e.g. Symes 2006) and others. However, with most government and research institutions by default focusing on fisheries and the marine domains as technical and biological concerns, it has followed that the findings and conclusions generated by the natural or economic sciences have dominated evidence-based policy discourse. It has fallen to social scientists themselves to argue for their important contribution to knowledge, to demonstrate their value and legitimacy, in an attempt for their work to be recognised and respected alongside natural scientists and economists (Jentoft et al. 1998; Symes 1999; Urquhart et al. 2014). The tide has now started turning in this respect. As the UN Decade for the Oceans starts (2021–2030), there are calls for new understandings, approaches and solutions to be developed that will address the complexities and unknowns of the marine world (Bennett 2019; Claudet et al. 2020) and with this, a recognition of the need for social science expertise and interdisciplinary research collaboration involving social scientists (Phillipson and Symes 2013).

Amid the urgency for answers or policy solutions, and substantive input from the social sciences, is also a need for critical reflection on how social science knowledge is produced, in what can be a rewarding, but challenging field of study. There is real risk that without essential training, experience and learning on methodological practices, the opportunity to grow and strengthen the contribution of the marine social sciences will be missed. Worse still, 'light touch' methodological approaches may be implemented to serve agendas that conflict with rigorous and critically informed social science approaches. They risk misusing or co-opting

social science to justify instrumental interventions around regulation and behaviour change for conservation or other purposes (McKinley et al. 2020).

However, responding to an increased demand for social sciences in marine topics is not enough. This must be matched with a development in capacity within the social sciences, and in equipping social scientists to engage effectively in wider interdisciplinary collaborations, if they are to address the real-world challenges facing society. To a large extent, that development in capacity starts with research design and methodology. Learning from and innovating methodological practices is vital for social scientists, whose research methods in themselves impact and create social realities (Moon and Blackman 2014; Flyvbjerg 2012). However, practical experiences in deploying social science approaches and methods in researching people and the sea have rarely come under the spotlight. Methodological learnings, including the successes, trials and tribulations in conducting research and using methods in this context, are only occasionally discussed or published (Moon et al. 2019). Typically, they remain hidden away in field notes and unpublished doctoral manuscripts, with the opportunity for shared learning and capacity building that comes from *doing research* thereby missed.

Although institutional challenges remain, the demand for social science expertise is growing and broadening to encompass a wider range of marine, coastal and maritime challenges, sectors and policies. As Arbo et al. (2018) suggest, the need to build on the fisheries social science tradition and re-orientate and strengthen capacity to critically engage in a concerted focus on marine sustainability and blue growth has never been greater. It is more than ever necessary to take stock and give space for reflection and shared learning about how social scientists generate and produce research insights, with a view to better equipping researchers working in this growing field.

1.2 Methodological Challenges: Key Questions and Themes

To develop and grow the social science contribution to our understanding of people and the sea, the challenge is not only to expand the horizons of our field of enquiry, but also ensure that we build essential capacity that includes methodological learning and innovation. Over the course of our careers, we each develop a methodological toolbox accompanied with research skills. These research skills include reflexivity and adaptability, which are built through experience, training and learning from carrying out research. In this volume our aim is to take a rare step in bringing together and sharing that learning from a range of research topics and geographical locations. Our exploration of the traditions and practices of researching people and the sea is guided by three themes. The first theme embraces reflections on ‘doing social research’, including the process of data collection in the field. The second theme delves into case examples of specific methods to highlight how these are innovated or adapted in specific research contexts. The third theme picks up on increased calls for interdisciplinary work and policy engagement when studying people and the sea. A consistent thread that runs throughout the book is that of ‘innovation’ in practices, methods and approaches.

Our first theme is entitled ‘Experiences from the Field: Adapting Methods, Practices and Reflexivity’. It focuses on the experiences of doing fieldwork, and the innovation and flexibility required during the process of data collection. In other words, this theme explores innovation in research practice. Through this theme we ask, ‘What are the challenges and experiences of doing social science fieldwork in marine and fisheries settings?’ Conducting social science in these settings can be particularly challenging—especially when it comes to the practicalities of doing fieldwork and making choices in relation to the myriad of potential methodological approaches. The process of fieldwork can be messy in nature, requiring the researcher to be adaptable and flexible, in response to what they experience and observe. This is where the researcher innovates and realigns their chosen pathway.

For instance, practical or ethical considerations may come to the surface only when the fieldwork has begun. Such types of challenges may be familiar to those researching the social and occupational practices of fishing and fishing communities, though even in this context methodological insights are rarely brought to the surface. Many coastal fishing communities are isolated, hard to reach and suspicious of outsiders, particularly when mistrust of governing and research institutions has evolved over time. Building rapport and trust is therefore crucial, as well as finding ways to ask questions with care and sensitivity. The positionality of the researcher is also an important consideration in fieldwork: How will the researcher be perceived and viewed by those they are researching? How will this influence how people respond and behave and, as a consequence, the research findings? Furthermore, doing fieldwork in coastal and marine settings is often associated with a large degree of uncertainty associated with the changing environment and weather, that those who depend on the sea experience day in, day out. Where and when can the researcher best engage with those they are interested in studying? Much of this may be beyond the realm of the researcher's control, and they must find their own ways to manage the unknown and how this may interact with their research plans. In this first theme of the book, we therefore focus on the experiences of fieldwork, and in particular on the reflexivity and adaptability that accompanies any scientific endeavour. In addition to the peculiarities of working in a marine context, this theme reflects on the common issues experienced through planning and conducting field research; including issues around research design, positionality, ethics, safety and ensuring that the resources available can match the scope of the research.

Our second theme focuses on innovation through particular case study research methods. We explore how innovation occurs in both what could be considered 'conventional' social research methods, and through those that have taken inspiration from other disciplines. 'Windows into Particular Methods: Innovations and Traditions', asks 'How can innovation in social research methods generate new insights and knowledge?' Here, we emphasise that creativity and learning in designing and, critically, deploying methods can be used to generate new knowledge and insights. Innovative approaches and methods are increasingly called for

by funders, with the implicit motivation of finding new insights rather than reproducing tried and tested ‘traditional’ methods that may yield the same or ‘already known’ results. While radical methodological innovation is undoubtedly welcome, it is equally significant to consider the vital innovation necessary in those ‘everyday’ research practices when researchers immerse themselves in the field. Innovation in methods can therefore be realised in multiple ways (Taylor and Coffey 2008). In this theme, we highlight two approaches to introducing innovation into methods: firstly, adapting conventional social science methods in-situ (i.e. in the field), in order to generate new ways of thinking about or doing research, and the necessary creative adaptation of methods in their context. Secondly, innovation through creating new methods or adapting methods from other disciplines, and applying them to the marine or fisheries domains.

Finally, the third theme concerns ‘Translating Across Disciplines and Policy’, which involves innovation in communicating research and exchanging expertise. It concerns the hybridity required when conducting interdisciplinary research and when engaging with policy. We ask ‘How can knowledge be translated across disciplines and into policy?’ In addition to the increasing role and call for social sciences alongside contributions from marine and fisheries science, interdisciplinary research has become more popular and is emphasised frequently as a requirement in many funding calls. Furthermore, there are demands from funders for research to deliver policy impact and to evidence this.

Interdisciplinary perspectives offer the possibility of improving understanding of major socio-technical challenges in the marine and coastal environment, in order to find solutions and new insights into complex problems. There has been more and more cross-fertilisation of ideas from different disciplines within the social sciences and increasingly with those from the arts and humanities. Yet these trends come with their risks and challenges for the social sciences, which need to be recognised and addressed, particularly in learning to speak to and engage with disciplines that are epistemologically different and in ensuring an ‘upfront’ rather than ‘end-of-pipe’ role within the research design (Lowe et al. 2013).

A further ‘translation’ problem comes with attempting to apply the research we conduct into policy. This often presents a challenge for many

researchers who are faced with the communication and language barriers that exist between academia and other institutions with a mandate to implement the necessary change that may be highlighted through research (Ota and Just 2008). Publishing and communicating research findings are not enough—a sustained effort to engage with policy at crucial times is often necessary in order to build trust and translate research effectively in such a way that it has potential to impact policy. However, constraints on researchers mean that this is a further challenge that can only be tackled effectively with development of skills and dedicated resource.

1.3 Introducing the Book Chapters

The book brings together thirteen accounts and reflections on studying people and the sea in order to address the gap between what is learned from social science methods textbooks, guides and anthologies, and the conditions encountered in the field and the planning, troubleshooting and manoeuvring often required for success. Some chapters provide insights on the deployment of methods in the specific context of studying people and the sea, some fold in experiential insights and others wrestle more with interdisciplinary work and expectations of social science. The overall aim of the collection is to focus attention on *how* research on people and the sea is conducted, what knowledge is produced through this process and how this work is embedded in place-specific, discipline, institutional and policy contexts.

1.3.1 Experiences from the Field: Adapting Methods, Practices and Reflexivity

This theme includes four chapters which focus on ‘in the field’ experiences from doing fieldwork in fishing communities. Each chapter engages directly with *how* to use and adapt well-established qualitative methods while in the field in response to matters that arise, particularly within a fisheries context. The authors reflect on both the successes and failures that come with *doing* research. As each chapter highlights, it is through