UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Manifesto for the marine social sciences

Bavinck, M.; Verrips, J.

Link to publication

MANIFESTO

Manifesto for the marine social sciences

Maarten Bavinck[1,2] · Jojada Verrips[2]

Introduction

Preamble

There are manifestos, or public declarations, of many kinds. The current Manifesto of the Marine Social Sciences that emerged from the MARE 2019 Conference has a limited purview. Its audience is the epistemic community of marine social scientists, understood as the collection of scholars that is engaged with the understanding of people's relation with the coastal and marine environment. Within this circumscribed yet still colossal realm, it strives to identify the topics that are most relevant to social scientists today. While the MARE network derives originally from the field of fisheries studies, the present Manifesto takes a broader perspective on the marine and coastal realm and is largely crowd-sourced (see below for a description of the process). Although the points it makes are not referenced, they are drawn from a significant fount of social scientific activity. They can of course be argued about—in fact, this may actually be their purpose. After all, the social sciences, other than the natural sciences that, in an Aristotelian perspective, aim to realize universal truth (episteme), are better in contributing phronesis: "practical wisdom on how to address and act on social problems in a particular context" (Flyvbjerg et al. 2012:1). Such 'wisdom' is to be debated again and again, and yet again. In order to stimulate such debate, the organizers invited twelve scholars (or teams of scholars) to comment on the Manifesto's content, specifying a variety of angles. These range from the local to the international, the practical to the theoretical, as well as the topical and sectoral. The commentaries follow the Manifesto text.

✉ Maarten Bavinck
j.m.bavinck@uva.nl

1   UiT Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway

2   University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Genesis of the Manifesto

The idea of a Manifesto for the Marine Social Sciences arose during preparations for the 10th People and the Sea Conference in Amsterdam (June 25-28 2019). The theme of this conference being 'Learning from the Past, Imagining the Future', the conference committee set out to organize a series of sessions with ex-keynote speakers (from nine biennial conferences in the period 2001 to 2017), who were asked to reflect on their earlier keynote speeches and the continued relevance of their ideas for the present and the future. Twenty six ex-keynote speakers were thus approached and thirteen agreed to participate again in the 2019 conference[1]. In line with their lines of expertise and the topics of their earlier keynotes, the organizers gathered the speakers into four panels and requested them to submit a short list of bullet points "that might be included in a manifesto for the marine social sciences" and would be relevant for at least the coming decade. Each panel was moderated by a pair of younger marine social scientists. In preparation of the conference, the organizers grouped the bullet points provided by the ex-keynote speakers under four headings: (1) methodologies and approaches; (2) urgent marine social science topics; (3) suggestions for governance research; and (4) suggestions for the science-policy-society interface—and circulated the list to the session moderators, some of whom proposed changes to the draft text. The four ex-keynote speaker sessions were well attended and included a number of vigorous debates. On the basis of these discussions, the session moderators suggested revisions to the pre-conference text. Meanwhile, one of the MARE 2019 keynote speakers and an ex-keynote speaker also made written suggestions. The organizers then decided on a final survey round of crowd-sourced inputs. The pre-conference text was condensed so as to fit on one page and participants at the conference dinner were requested to pick out three bullet points they felt were most important and also to add topics they felt were

---

[1] The ex-keynote speakers who contributed to what has become this Manifesto are (in alphabetical sequence): Eddie Allison, Alpina Begossi, Katrina Brown, Peter Burbridge, Tony Charles, Moeniba Isaacs, John Kurien, Edward Penning-Rowsell, Jeremy Phillipson, Kevin St. Martin, Rashid Sumaila, Leontine Visser, and Rolf Willman. Their inputs are well appreciated

missing. Sixty-four people (or groups thereof) responded to this dinner call, submitting their reactions on paper either at the close of the dinner, or during the last day of the conference. In addition, two ex-keynote speakers submitted post-conference reflections on the text of the manifesto. All these inputs were gathered and summarized in a post-conference text. Following a two-step process, the organizers subsequently grouped and reworded the statements under three headings—marine social science topics, governance research priorities, and methodologies and approaches—making a distinction between general recommendations and recommendations for the fisheries field, from which many participants in the MARE conference derive. The end-result was then presented and discussed on November 5-6, 2019, at the Global Ocean Social Sciences—a UN Ocean Decade Event in Brest, France. Some of the comments made there have been incorporated into the current version of the Manifesto, which, for the moment, is considered to be final.

The commentaries

Following the completion of the Manifesto, the organizers invited a dozen social scientists (or groupings thereof) to respond to its content. Multiple considerations played a role in the choices made. First of all, the organizers were looking for a mix of scholars from mid-career to end-career phases. Most, but not all, attended the MARE People and the Sea Conference in 2019. Second, the organizers aimed to realize a diversity of opinions, actually suggesting topical angles to the invitees. This helped to avoid duplications and ensure a reasonably complete coverage of the Manifesto's ambit. The twelve commentaries follow the Manifesto text and are organized in what seemed a logical sequence: proceeding from fisheries to more general oceanic topics, and from practical – or applied – to theoretical perspectives.

Manifesto for the marine social sciences

Urgent marine social science topics

General topics

1. Oceanic and coastal environments differ in many respects from terrestrial ones. Social scientists are to explore the similarities, differences, and interlinkages that exist with regard to implications for people and their environments.
2. Climate change mitigation and adaptation should be high priorities for research due to their environmental, economic, social, ethical, and moral implications and impacts. As climate change threatens to "drown out" human development concerns however, it is necessary to find common ground between the climate agenda and the development agenda

and realize an understanding of institutions and practices necessary to achieve both aims.
3. We must critically engage with the Blue Economy process—study it and engage with protagonists in their respective forums. The rapidly changing political economy of coasts and oceans underscores the need for critical as well as constructive social-science analyses.
4. We must move beyond fisheries to understand the intersections that occur with other sections of the maritime and coastal economy, so as to include the perspectives of actors like windfarm and oilrig workers, ship crews, tourist industries, and aquaculture operators.
5. The future of youth and inter-generational issues in marine environments are of serious concern and require further investigation.
6. Marine social science research should bring to the fore the manifold realities of people and communities and their role in the production of knowledge and in coastal decision-making.
7. "Social struggle," "distributional justice," and "outlaw oceans" are core marine social science concerns and deserve to be pursued in future research.

Fisheries topics

1. We need to pay more attention to the relationship between fish and food security and to highlight the role of (small-scale) fisheries, aquaculture, and mariculture in promoting diversity and sustainability of fish for food.
2. The current process whereby fishing rights are being commodified requires research with a strong political, economic, and ecological lens to understand the (re-)production of rights, allocations, and tenure, as well as the development of a counter-narrative for the poor and vulnerable.
3. Against the background of increasing urbanization, concentration of assets, growing uncertainty over succession, and difficulties in crew recruitment, more research should be done on migration, labor mobility, and the future of the family-based fishing enterprise in the context of larger decision-making processes.
4. Fishing activities led by women are often ignored. The same is true for the pre-harvest and post-harvest segments in which women play important roles. This should change.

Suggestions for governance research

General suggestions

1. We must strengthen the marine social science-policy interface, taking on greater responsibility for the ways in which findings enter policy and decision-making processes.

2. The ongoing "appropriation" of the oceans and rapid transformations in the marine realm require multidisciplinary interventions that look beyond technocratic solutions and understands incentive structure and possibilities for shifting these.

3. We must investigate how to weigh and integrate the relevant policy areas, sectors, and administration levels engaged in organizing the rapidly transforming marine world in such a way that bureaucratic nightmares are avoided.

4. Integrated coastal management frameworks and their counterparts in marine spatial planning are worthwhile pursuing. Special attention should be given to wicked problems, hard choices, and the political dimensions of planning.

Suggestions for fisheries governance

1. We need to go on studying and analyzing the very significant implications of climate change and social ecological transformations for coastal communities and fishing livelihoods, particularly in relation to their vulnerabilities.

2. The largest category of maritime sector workers, i.e., the small-scale fishers, should be included in marine spatial planning and other forms of governance, and their traditional tenure and access rights should be legally protected. This requires supportive research.

New methodologies and approaches

1. Our interdisciplinary engagements must be broadened in order to better understand both the present conditions and possible futures of people and the sea.

2. A human rights–based approach and ethical codes guiding marine social science should contribute to an improvement of the well-being of marginal and vulnerable people, including indigenous peoples.

3. We should stimulate the progressive integration of social and natural science research in order to support social and economic development within planetary boundaries.

4. The study of conflicting uses of coastal zones requires inter- and trans-disciplinary methodologies aimed at a strengthening of the position of coastal populations.

5. Researchers from "tropical-majority" countries should be encouraged and facilitated to do research on the socio-economic and techno-ecological situations of "temperate minority" countries.[2]

6. The application of feminist perspectives to marine access and governance issues is essential to better understand the power dynamics in the marine world. Gendered patterns and inequalities should be a crosscutting focus of all the suggestions made above.

7. We should not forget that empirical (field) research has to go hand in hand with theory development. Our aim should therefore be to develop social science theory based on coastal, marine empiricism from all over the world.

References

Flyvbjerg, B., T. Landman and S.Schram (2012). *Real social science: applied phronesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

---

[2] For an explanation of this terminology, see John Kurien (2002). People and the sea: a 'tropical-majority' world perspective, *Maritime Studies* 1(1):9-26