

DECENTRALIZATION AND COASTAL GOVERNANCE

The Effect of Subnational Self-Rule on Biodiversity Protection in Spain

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BlueGreen
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INTRODUCTION

BlueGreen Governance on the One Ocean Science Congress

BlueGreen Governance is a Horizon Europe and the UK Research and Innovation funded project that aims to develop innovative land-sea governance schemes. Therewith the BlueGreen Governance project responds to the need for better-informed decision-making processes, social engagement and digital innovation while promoting more harmonious and effective science-policy-society interfaces in the context of ocean, marine and coastal governance. The BlueGreen Governance project is presented in a series of posters.

Subnational governance levels play a pivotal role in protecting biodiversity, as has been observed in multilevel democracies over recent decades. However, while research on the impact of decentralization on environmental governance has expanded, it remains uncertain whether particularly empowering regional authorities with self-rule has enhanced biodiversity protection outcomes in coastal areas.

SERIE OF POSTERS

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HYPOTHESES

To fill this gap, this research examines the performance of Spain's decentralized political system through three key dimensions and six corresponding hypotheses:

D1: COMPLEXITY

H1A. Vertical checks and balances between central and regional authorities prevent overreach, resulting in more robust coastal biodiversity governance.
H1B. An increased number of decision-makers leads to institutional coordination issues, undermining coastal biodiversity governance.

D2: REGIONAL DISCRETION

H2A. Empowered regional governments step in with proactive measures when national policy stalls, boosting coastal biodiversity governance responsiveness.
H2B. Discretionary regional policymaking produces inconsistent standards across jurisdictions, weakening overall coastal biodiversity governance coherence.

D3: LOCAL PROXIMITY

H3A. Proximity to local ecological and social contexts enables tailored interventions, improving coastal biodiversity governance effectiveness.
H3B. Close local ties expose subnational policymaking to capture by vested interests, compromising coastal biodiversity governance integrity.

METHODS

Qualitative case study design

CASE STUDIES

Canary Islands (Insular Atlantic region)
Valencian Community (Multi-province Mediterranean region)
Region of Murcia (Single-province Mediterranean region)

DATA COLLECTION

Document analysis
Semi-structured interviews
Focus groups

DATA ANALYSIS

The data gathered was analysed using thematic analysis

RESULTS

D1: COMPLEXITY

H1A. Rejected

Both regional and national governments have challenged each other's regulations, but central government policies tend to prevail-often to the detriment of coastal biodiversity.

H1B. Confirmed

The regions analysed face major challenges linked to multilevel governance, such as fragmented regulations, overlapping responsibilities, poor data coordination, and limited resources to manage complexity.

D2: REGIONAL DISCRETION

H2A. Confirmed

Most of the regions studied adopted strategies for coastal biodiversity protection decades ago, and are in the process of developing new legislation on the same issue.

H2B Rejected

Regional governments' commitment to biodiversity protection is limited by their lack of authority over coastal areas. They tend to be more proactive when led by left-leaning or regionalist parties.

D3: LOCAL PROXIMITY

H3A. Confirmed

The closer proximity of subnational governments to regional realities enhances their capacity to design and implement effective biodiversity protection policies.

H3B. Confirmed

This nearness also heightens the risk of influence from regional economic interests and elites that may oppose biodiversity initiatives.