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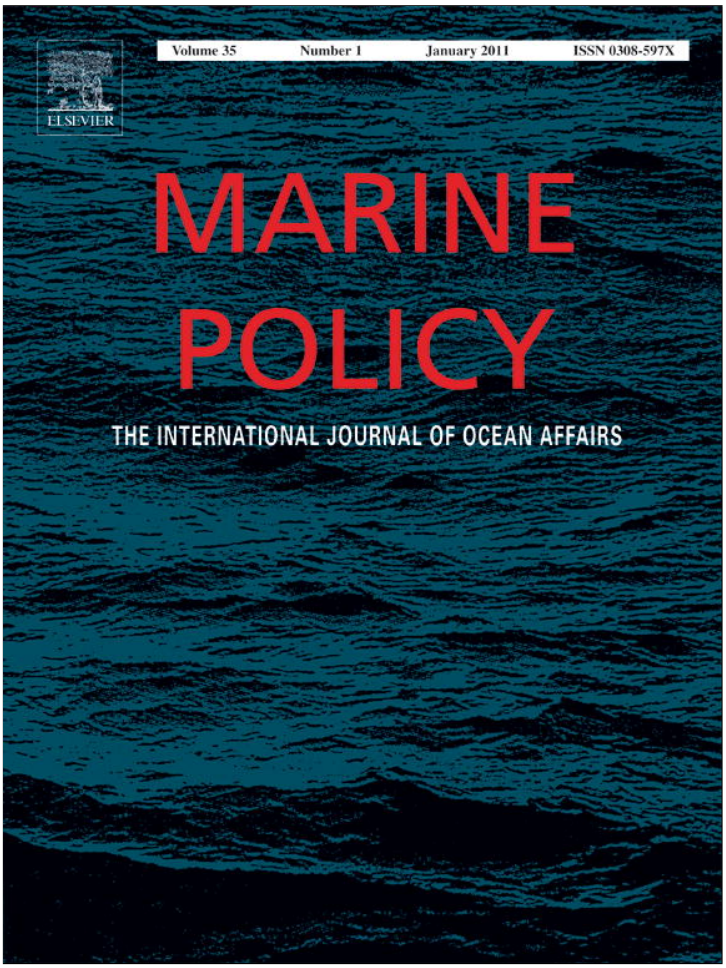

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Reflective practice for marine planning: A case study of marine nature-based tourism partnerships

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ABSTRACT

An essential component of ecosystem-based approaches in coastal zone management and the emerging field of marine planning are partnerships and collaborations between a range of multi-sector organisations and individuals. Ensuring that partnerships are effective is a priority for those responsible for planning and management in coastal and marine environments. Current partnership evaluation approaches, however, tend to view effectiveness as the cumulative end result of a set of variables acting in a linear process at a specific point in time. Given that governance and participation are acknowledged as non-linear and multifaceted processes, more reflective and nuanced approaches that take account of the dynamic, multidimensional and geographically embedded nature of the collaborative process are needed. This paper proposes a new framework for partnership evaluation based on policy narratives and indicators, and demonstrates the potential of the approach using three case studies of partnerships focused upon marine nature-based tourism. The insights from this research have direct relevance to the agencies and organisations responsible for delivering integrated coastal management, including marine spatial planning.

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1. Introduction

An essential component of ecosystem-based approaches in coastal zone management and the emerging field of marine spatial planning are partnerships and collaborations between a range of multi-sector organisations and individuals. Partnerships are usually formalised through the creation of a collective debating structure, such as a forum or steering group, and have a mechanism for the implementation of goals. Partnership working has been heralded as a more inclusive form of governance and an effective way of developing and delivering policy intervention [1,2]. Yet questions remain as to whether this approach provides an effective vehicle for policy delivery in practice.

It is clear from the current literature on partnership evaluation that effectiveness is viewed as the cumulative end result of a set of variables acting on a linear process at a specific point in time. However, given that governance and participation are acknowledged as non-linear and multifaceted processes [3–5], this paper argues that applying a linear, rigid approach to evaluation does not adequately reflect the dynamic, multidimensional and geographically embedded nature of the collaborative process. What is needed is a mechanism, which allows the changing landscape of partnership activity, together with the shifting context in which it works, to be acknowledged as an integral part of the evaluation process [6].

This paper has two aims. First, in order to assess the effectiveness of a partnership at different stages in its development, a new framework for partnership evaluation based on policy narratives and indicators is proposed. Second, the potential of this framework is demonstrated using three case studies of partnerships focused upon marine nature-based tourism. The case studies provide evidence that the internal processes and external contexts within which partnerships operate vary over time. As a result, the performance and effectiveness of partnerships change. Such changes need not be a problem, as long as partners actively reflect upon them and respond appropriately. Using reflective practice, partnerships can continuously monitor achievements and make necessary changes to maintain their effectiveness through time. The insights from this research have direct relevance to the agencies and organisations responsible for delivering integrated coastal management and marine spatial planning.

2. The partnership approach in coastal zone management

The management of marine and coastal environments in Europe has been fragmented and undertaken by statutory bodies, public sector authorities and major landowners with little or no stakeholder participation or integration between actors [7]. During the

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1990s, the encouragement of a more collaborative approach to coastal management led to the establishment of new integrated coastal partnerships [8,9]. The shift towards collaboration was driven by a number of policy reviews, which called for closer integration between agencies and stakeholders in order to achieve more coherent management of the coastal policy environment [7,10]. Structural shifts in commercial fisheries and the resulting need for communities to diversify economies, often into niche tourism markets, as well as the development of marine renewable energy has increased the importance of partnership approaches in the governance of the coastal and marine environment.

Stojanovic and Barker [11] argue that the main contributions of these coastal management partnerships has been improved governance mechanisms through the introduction of integrated approaches to management and improved provision for participatory democracy. Partnerships have also raised awareness and understanding of coastal environments by developing links between statutory agencies and local communities, and through greater science–policy interaction, which has arguably led to a stronger focus on actions delivering coastal sustainability [12]. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of coastal partnerships has been questioned in terms of their efficiency, their legitimacy in representing all interests, their funding, and policy implementation [9,13–16]. Stojanovic and Barker [11] suggest that coastal partnerships will continue to have a marginal role unless they become embedded within the evolving institutional framework. Indeed, the effective engagement of stakeholders in environmental decision-making is being advanced as a policy approach by government actors, both at the European Union and national levels, and is a core principle, which underpins the processes and institutions within the Marine and Coastal Access Act [2,17,18]. Therefore, with the introduction of marine planning throughout UK waters, there might be a greater reliance on mechanisms such as partnerships to facilitate dialogue for successful adoption of plan proposals. However, there is an enormous variety in both form and function of coastal partnerships and ensuring that partnerships remain effective will become increasingly important, as the drive to collaborate becomes more deeply entrenched as the preferred policy approach. Ultimately, the acceptance of partnerships as an integral feature of coastal management and planning depends upon their ability to demonstrate their effectiveness.

3. Measuring the effectiveness of partnerships

Critical evaluation of the operation and achievements of a policy intervention is an accepted part of the policy process [19,20]. Evaluation provides an opportunity to determine whether an initiative has been successful in delivering its objectives; to review progress and make changes to ensure that targets are met; and to demonstrate accountability to those contributing resources. Evaluation is therefore a means by which partners can reflect on both the process and the achievements of collaboration, assessing qualitative as well as quantitative outcomes. However, measuring effectiveness is not straightforward. It is often difficult to separate out cause and effect: namely that a particular policy outcome was related directly to a specific policy action (attribution problem). Equally, problems also occur in asserting with any confidence that outcomes would not have happened without a specific intervention (counterfactual problem) [21–23]. The 'realistic' approach offers a systematic framework for evaluation by dividing the assessment of partnership performance into three components: *context*, *process* and *outcome* [24] (see Fig. 1).

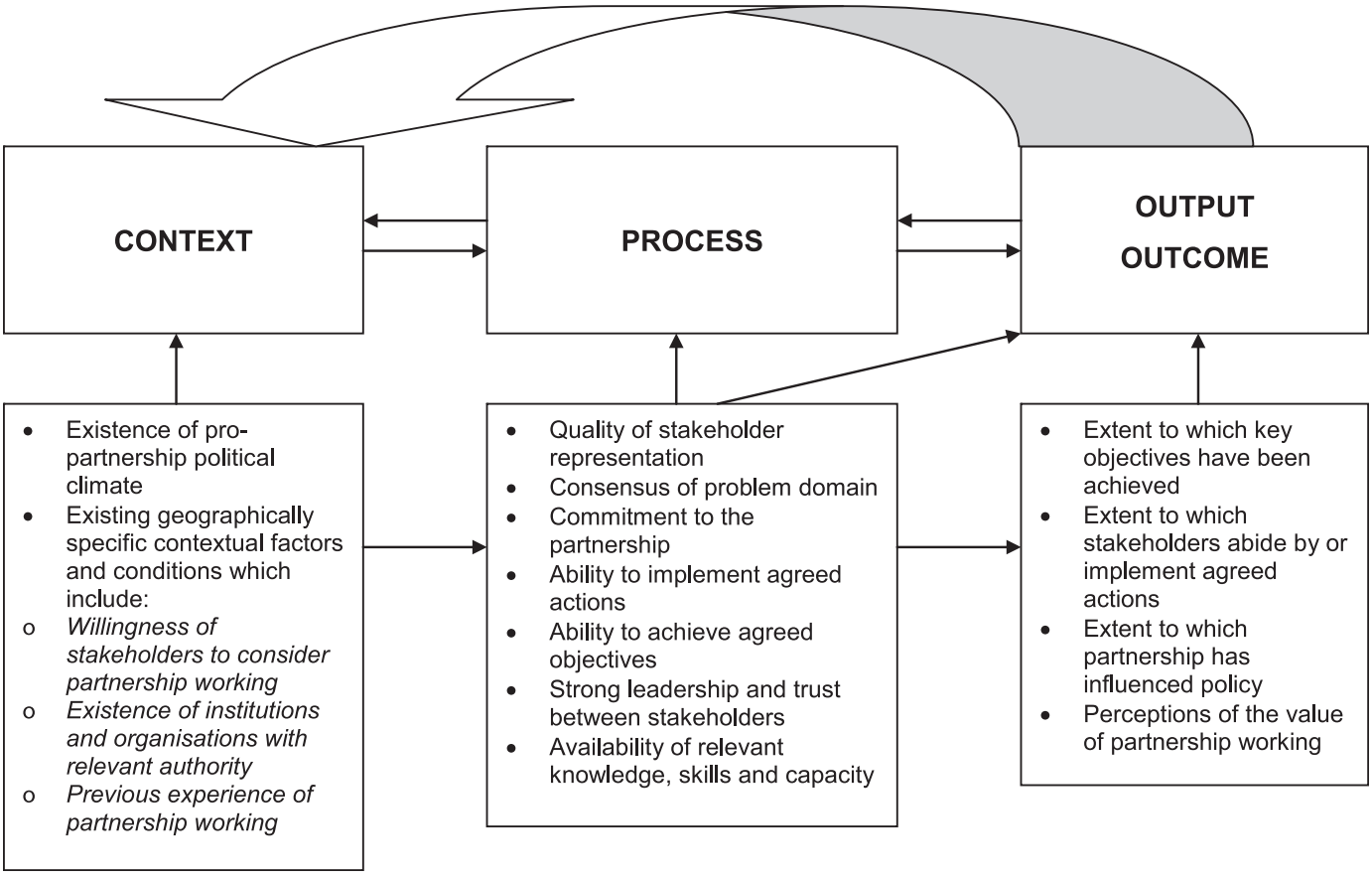

Fig. 1. Conceptual model of the determinants of partnership effectiveness.
Source: [39].

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The contextual determinants of effectiveness are particularly important in driving the early stages of partnership formation. A 'pro-partnership' political and cultural climate, in which partnership action is seen as the most appropriate method for dealing with the issue at hand, creates more favourable conditions for action. Determinants of effectiveness associated with the process of partnership include the degree to which all relevant stakeholders are included in the process, the level of commitment that stakeholders have to remain actively engaged in partnership activity and the degree to which levels of trust exist between stakeholders from different sectors. The important determinants of outcome effectiveness include the extent to which stakeholders are prepared to abide by agreed actions, the degree to which objectives have been realised and the ability of the partnership to shape and influence future policy [25].

Each individual determinant plays an important role in contributing to the overall effectiveness of the *process* and to the perceptions of effectiveness held by stakeholders within and outside of the partnership [26]. It should be noted, however, that there can be overlap between the elements, as benefits, which emerge from the *process* (such as increased levels of trust and understanding between stakeholders) may also be viewed as partnership achievements or *outcomes* [27]. This interconnectedness is shown in Fig. 1 by thin black arrows, which link the determinants of process effectiveness to the determinants of output/outcome effectiveness. In addition, a large arrow links the achievements of the partnership back to the context within which it operates. This connection highlights the notion that partnership activity is embedded within the places and spaces in which it operates, and will therefore have an impact on that context throughout its actions and achievements.

Attaining consistently high levels of achievement of the determinants of effectiveness through the lifetime of a partnership is difficult and it is unrealistic to assume that partnerships will achieve high levels across all determinants at all times. It is more likely that achievement will fluctuate throughout the life of the partnership. This variation in effectiveness could be problematic when considering the legitimacy of a partnership to represent a particular interest or area within a wider management context, such as marine planning. In assessing performance, the goal of evaluation should therefore be to identify where and why partnerships have achieved high levels, and to provide insight into how any decline in performance can be improved.

3.1. A new approach to partnership evaluation: policy narratives and indicators

There are currently two main deficiencies in monitoring the effectiveness of coastal partnerships. First, despite considerable literature identifying the key ingredients for partnership success, few authors have attempted to provide tools to measure the achievement of those ingredients. Second, there is a need for evaluation approaches which reflect not only the context, process and outcomes of a particular partnership, but also the *changes* in those three components over time. Current approaches do not enable the impact of changes to be acknowledged during the evaluation of partnership performance.

An appropriate way to record the temporal dimensions of partnerships is through the creation of a historical/chronological narrative, derived from multiple data sources such as minutes of meetings, reports and other documents as well as interviews with key personnel. In this way, significant landmarks in the development of the partnership can be established. From this 'timeline', a comprehensive narrative can be established to provide a detailed history of the partnership and also form the basis for systematic evaluation according to a suite of 'effectiveness indicators'.

The systematic analysis of partnership narratives utilises the stages or phases identified by Selin and Chavez [28]. These divisions are used here as a heuristic tool and should not be taken to imply rigid or distinct boundaries between events or stages of development. Indeed, the implication of fixed boundaries between stages, common in the literature, is problematic because it implies an inevitable sequence of partnership progress, which in itself, reflects limitations in current approaches to evaluation. Despite their limitations, however, the stages provided a useful structure to guide the application of the indicator framework used to assess the performance of the partnership.

The method described above was used to develop a timeline and comprehensive narrative for each of three case study partnerships. The quantitative assessment of the determinants of effectiveness at each key stage of partnership development was via detailed indicators applied to each narrative (see Table 1) [29]. These indicators were compiled from research on partnership working across a broad range of contexts, including health and social welfare [26,30], tourism development [31–34], rural and urban regeneration [35–37] and integrated coastal management [9,13,14,16,38]. The level of achievement of each indicator at each stage of partnership development was assessed using a subjective system. The scoring system provides a relational measure (as opposed to an absolute measure) of indicator achievement. It helps to identify changes in the achievement of specific indicators between stages within the same partnership, and allows comparison of achievement of the same indicator between different partnerships. The categories of achievement (1, 2 or 3) are deliberately broad (Table 1). From a detailed reading of the narrative, the level of each indicator (where relevant) was judged to be either at 1 (low level of achievement), 2 (medium level of achievement) or 3 (high level of achievement). This process of grading was repeated for each stage of development within each partnership. The scores for each indicator at each stage were compiled to produce a composite table, to assess the changing levels of achievement of each determinant of effectiveness.

There were a number of practical and philosophical issues associated with the methods chosen. Care was needed when compiling partnership narratives to ensure that small-scale subtle changes in partnership contexts or processes were not lost or overshadowed by more major ones. Risks also existed in terms of uneven bias by allowing one individual perspective, however striking, diverse or interesting it may have been, to receive more attention than it deserved because it was novel, or strongly expressed. Multiple sources of data were therefore used to set strong views into context and ensure that partnership narratives remained balanced, whilst also acknowledging particular personal standpoints. Although the partnerships in this study were situated in the marine environment, the methods developed can be applied to partnerships in any environment and at any stage of development.

3.2. Selection of case study partnerships

Three case study partnerships were used to assess the practical application of the methodology and to obtain some initial results from this approach. Partnerships were selected for case study on the basis of their specific focus on marine nature-based tourism activities. Tourism was appropriate because it represents a single issue; potential conflicts are managed on a voluntary basis and the industry represents an economic sector with opportunities for diversification of the rural economy. Given the complexity of the environments within which coastal partnerships operate, limiting research to single-issue partnerships enabled changes in the determinants of effectiveness to be identified, and the impact of such changes on partnership effectiveness to be assessed much more clearly than

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Table 1
Indicators to measure multiple aspects of partnership effectiveness synthesised and devised for this study.
Source: [39].

Determinant of effectiveness	Type	Provides a measure of	Specific indicator	Criteria used to score indicator
1. Quality of stakeholder representation	Process	The quality of the partnership in terms of the equity and inclusivity of the stakeholder identification and inclusion process [9]	**1a**. The extent to which the range of participating stakeholders is representative of all stakeholders [49]	1. Few existing stakeholder groups participating 2. Some, but not all stakeholder groups participating 3. All relevant stakeholder groups participating
			1b. The extent to which individuals representing a stakeholder group are fully representative of that group [9]	1. Majority of representatives are self-selected 2. Some representatives are nominated by their organisation, others are self-selected 3. Majority of representatives are nominated by their organisation or through formal selection mechanisms
			1c. The extent to which stakeholders are actively engaged in decision-making [14,38]	1. Low levels of engagement, poor attendance at meetings 2. Satisfactory levels of engagement and attendance at meetings 3. High levels of engagement, good attendance at meetings
2. Consensus of problem domain	Process	The extent to which a shared agenda for the future direction of the partnership is developed [35]	**2**. The extent to which there is agreement among participants about the need for and intended scope of the collaboration [14,50]	1. Majority of stakeholders are not convinced of need for partnership 2. Limited consensus over the need for, and scope of, the partnership 3. Clear consensus over the need for, and scope of, the partnership
3. Commitment to the partnership	Process	The extent to which partners feel that there will be benefits to all partners from their efforts, that they are interdependent and that they add value to the partnership [35]	**3a**. The extent to which relevant stakeholders see that there are positive benefits to entice their participation [49]	1. No clear benefits to stakeholders by joining the partnership 2. Benefits of partnership are not entirely clear and some individuals are therefore reluctant to participate 3. Clear benefits to stakeholders by joining partnership
			3b. The degree to which participants accept that collaboration is likely to produce qualitatively different outcomes to those which could be achieved by working alone [49]	1. No clear or distinct advantage in partnership working 2. Some, but not all, participants recognise added value by working in partnership 3. All participants accept that partnership working produces significantly better outcomes than could be achieved by working alone
4.Implementation of agreed actions	Process	The extent to which partners are able to make decisions [32]	**4a**. The extent to which all stakeholders have access to the information needed to make effective decisions [51]	1. No information on which to base decisions 2. Limited availability of information on which to base decisions 3. Good availability of information on which to base decisions
			4b. The extent to which partners have the confidence and resources to make commitments and decisions [35]	1. Little confidence in making decisions and few resources available for implementation 2. Some confidence in making decisions, but actions limited by availability of resources 3. Confident decision-making and actions not restricted by resource availability

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	Context		**4c**. The extent to which partners have an institutional mandate to make decisions and accept responsibility on behalf of their organisation [35]	1. Individuals have limited or no authority to act on behalf of their organisations. Organisations with statutory responsibilities are not present 2. Majority of individuals have broad authority to act on behalf of their organisations. Some organisations with statutory responsibilities are present 3. All individuals have authority to act on behalf of their organisations. All relevant organisations with statutory responsibilities are present
	Output		**4d**. The extent to which stakeholders are prepared to abide by agreed management interventions [49]	1. Few stakeholders are prepared to abide by management interventions such as codes of conduct 2. Majority, but not all, stakeholders are prepared to abide by management interventions such as codes of conduct 3. All relevant stakeholders are prepared to abide by management interventions such as codes of conduct
5. Productivity	Output	The extent to which partners have progressed towards achieving specified target outputs [16]	**5a**. The extent to which key objectives agreed at the beginning of the partnership have been refined and delivered through the direct intervention of the collaborative action [13]	1. Some limited success in achieving objectives as a result of partnership action 2. Achievement of most objectives as a result of partnership action 3. All key objectives achieved as a result of partnership action
	Output outcome		**5b**. The extent to which the partnership has been able to influence policy at local, regional, national levels and above [34]	1. Little or no influence on policy outside of partnership 2. Some limited influence on local or regional policy 3. Strong influence on local or regional policy and/or some influence on national policy
6. Stakeholder qualities	Process	The role played by key individuals in the partnership process [52]	**6**. The extent to which key individuals (leaders or participants) shape, motivate or dominate the process and inspire others to participate[33,36]	1. No clear leader or individual partnership 'champion' apparent 2. One individual takes a more prominent role but does not dominate 3. One individual takes a strong leadership role and 'champions' partnership
7. Social learning	Process	The extent to which partners have gained trust and understanding from each other and the process [52]	**7a**. The extent to which partners have the capacity (technical skills and understanding) to make effective decisions on complex issues [9,53]	1. Individuals do not have key skills or knowledge to make effective decisions 2. Some individuals have key skills or knowledge but some gaps in areas of knowledge exist 3. Required range of skills and knowledge is available for decision-making
			7b. The extent to which levels of trust between stakeholders have improved [30,37]	1. Low levels of trust between stakeholders 2. Moderate levels of trust between stakeholders 3. High levels of trust between stakeholders
	Output outcome		**7c**. The likelihood with which partners would embrace the collaborative process in the future [26,32]	1. Partnership is perceived as poor and stakeholders are unlikely to participate in future collaborations 2. Mixed perceptions of the partnership and indecision over whether to participate in future collaborations 3. Strong recognition of the benefits of partnership and clear willingness to participate in future collaborations

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would have been the case if multi-issue partnerships had been studied.

Twelve candidate partnerships with a marine nature-based tourism focus were identified from a national database of 119 coastal partnerships in the UK and Ireland [39]. The most appropriate partnerships for use as case studies were then selected based on their meeting the following criteria:

- That they had been continuously active or operational for at least two years;
- That they had been actively engaged in managing marine nature-based tourism as a primary activity:
- That they were open to the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders:
- That they had no financial requirement for stakeholders to join at a basic level.

From the shortlist of 12, three partnerships met the criteria: the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation (SDWF) based in Ireland (Fig. 2A), the Dolphin Space Programme (DSP) based in Scotland (Fig. 2B) and the Pembrokeshire Marine Code Group (PMCG) based in Wales (Fig. 2C).

3.2.1. Case study background

The Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation on the western seaboard of Ireland were formally established in March, 2000 following a public forum held to discuss the potential for developing marine nature-based tourism in the area. For generations, local people had been aware of the wildlife living in and around the Shannon estuary and, in particular, the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus)* population. At that time, although dolphins were encountered during the course of normal maritime activities, little notice was taken of them and their potential value as a tourism resource was not recognised. The original aims of the partnership were therefore to raise local awareness of the dolphins and their potential as a tourist attraction, and to ensure that the dolphin-watching industry was developed sustainably.

The Dolphin Space Programme, launched in 1995, is situated within the Moray Firth, a large coastal and estuarine area in north eastern Scotland. The DSP does not operate within distinct geographical limits, but is centred on the Firth itself; an area that is home to the only known resident population of bottlenose dolphins in the North Sea, as well as common, white-beaked and Risso's dolphins, harbour porpoise, minke, pilot and killer whales [40]. The purpose of the partnership was to introduce voluntary management agreements with commercial dolphin watching operators in an attempt to prevent disturbance to the resident dolphins and other marine wildlife and ensure that the industry was developed sustainably.

The Pembrokeshire Marine Code Group operates along the length of the Pembrokeshire coast from Amroth in the south east to St David's in the north and includes the islands of Caldey, Skokholm, Skomer and Ramsey. In response to projected growth in the marine wildlife and adventure tourism sector, the PMCG was established in 2005 to promote a sustainable approach to the use of the marine environment for tourism and activity-based recreation, including wildlife watching, diving, sea kayaking and coasteering.

4. Results

Although the partnerships selected for case study shared a similar purpose in that they were developed as a response to the perceived threat of unregulated growth of marine nature-based tourism, they were embedded within different policy contexts, social networks, economic and environmental conditions [41]. The comparison of similar partnership processes and activities, in differing contexts and conditions, provided insights into the way in which contextual factors had shaped the trajectory taken by each partnership by enabling or constraining decision-making [42]. The next section of this paper assesses the 'narratives' of each partnership and draws on interviews with key players before relating the analysis to the indicator criteria.

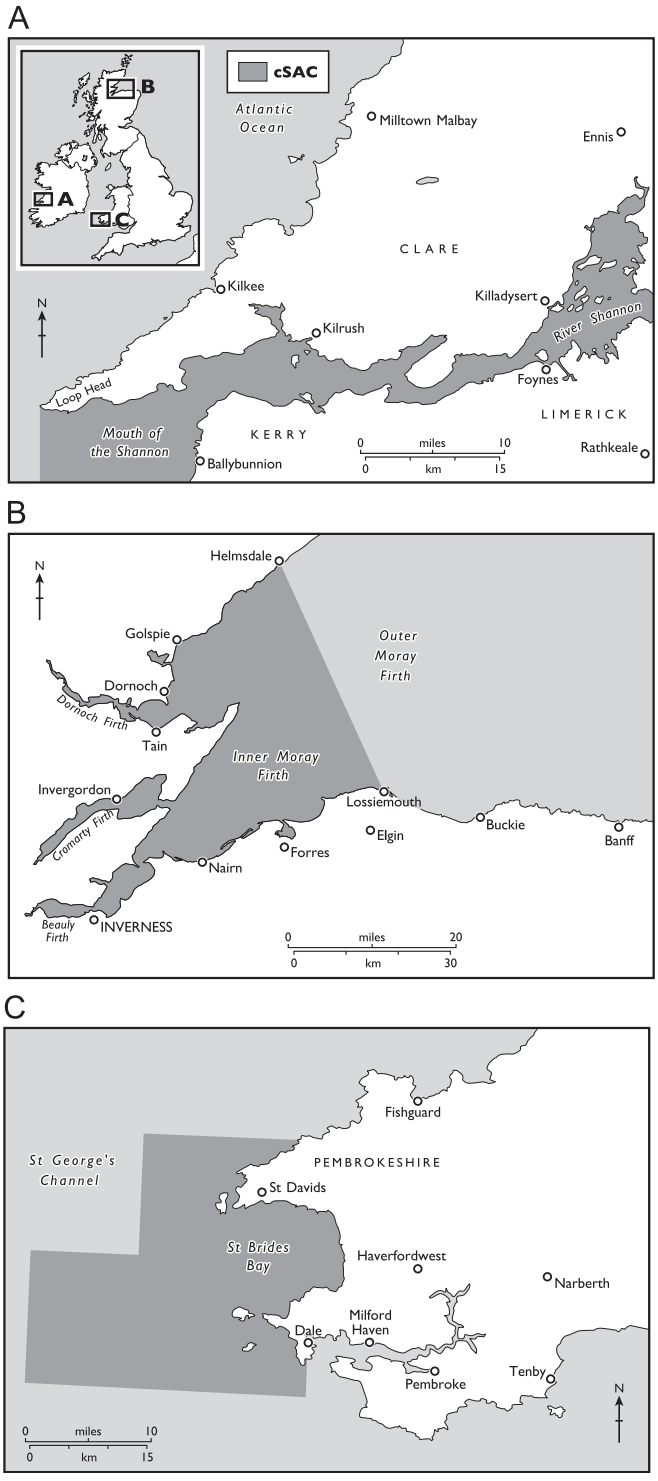

Fig. 2. Location of case study partnerships.
Source: [39].

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4.1. Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation

The seeds of the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation (SDWF), formally established in March 2000, lie in events nine years earlier. During 1991, an academic undertaking fisheries research (later to became the project manager of the partnership), met a commercial fisherman, who was also the Chairman of Carrigaholt Development Association (CDA) during a fisheries research trip. The appearance of a pod of bottlenose dolphins during the voyage led to a discussion between the two men about the potential economic benefits of commercial dolphin watching in an area with a weak economy. Both men were keen to ensure that any development was carefully and sustainably managed. At this point, Dúchas, the state agency responsible for environmental protection, showed little interest in the venture. By 1992, funding had been secured from Shannon Development (a semi-state agency established to support the economic development of the region) for a research project to assess the feasibility of commercial dolphin watching. The industry grew steadily during the 1990s and, by 1999, a formal partnership had emerged driven by two factors.

First, there was a strong desire from within the private sector, public sector and semi-state agencies involved in dolphin-watching to prevent species and habitat degradation and a collaborative approach was seen as the best vehicle to achieve this goal. Second, the estuary was formally designated as a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) under the EU Habitats Directive in April 2000, which introduced a statutory requirement for commercial wildlife tour operators to obtain permission for any activity, which might potentially damage the protected bottlenose dolphins [49]. Although Dúchas was the agency responsible for managing the proposed new cSAC, it was clear that, in practice, it wished to have minimal involvement in policing the industry, preferring operators to regulate themselves. The partnership therefore offered a vehicle for the state to deliver its responsibilities under the new statutory instrument without having to invest heavily in local staff and infrastructure. The changing external conditions within which the partnership was developing created further justification for partnership action.

The SDWF partnership was initially established with two committees: a Management Committee (comprised of commercial operators, a representative from Dúchas and the Project Manager), to focus on the day to day management of dolphin-watching activity; and a Steering Committee (comprised of the Project Manager and representatives from Shannon Development, Dúchas, Bord Faílte, National University of Ireland, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, the Marine Institute, Clare County Council and the Shannon Estuary Port Company) to focus on more strategic objectives, including the development and promotion of marine wildlife tourism in the area. The Management Committee developed a draft voluntary code of conduct for commercial dolphin watching activities. The code was based on controlling boat speed and direction of travel and importantly, included a maximum time limit of 30 min per vessel per trip of close proximity to dolphins. The committee also agreed to establish an accreditation scheme which embodied a requirement to comply with the voluntary code of conduct, together with an undertaking to abide by any additional conditions that may be laid down in the proposed cSAC Management Plan. Initially, levels of consensus surrounding the details of the two schemes appear to have been high with all operators expressing their support for the schemes and indicating their willingness to comply with the new code of conduct (indicators 2, 3a and 3b at direction setting stage, Fig. 3).

The initially high level of consensus over partnership actions began to dissipate, however, as the realities of partnership working and the operation of the code of conduct and accreditation scheme became apparent. While operators were included in the Management Committee, they were not invited to participate in the Steering Committee because of their 'vested interest' in the development of the industry. Inevitably, this rather divisive organisational structure, together with poorly defined roles and responsibilities, resulted in considerable tension and led to strong feelings of exclusion by operators as reported by an operator and the project manager. The effect was to reduce the performance in a number of linked indicators, although support for the general principles of the project remained high (indicators 1a and 1c at direction refinement stage, Fig. 3).

Other tensions began to emerge as the partnership became more established. The issue of private sector representation was compounded by an imbalance in geographical representation on the Steering Committee. Some operators based in Carrigaholt felt that the town of Kilrush was over-represented within the partnership and resulted in more prominent promotion of dolphin watching activity in Kilrush to the detriment of more rural areas such as Carrigaholt and the Loop Head (Management Committee minutes 10 November 1999). Other actions exacerbated these concerns. The naming of the accreditation scheme in April 2000 (Saoirse na Sionna, which means Freedom of the Shannon) by the Project Manager without consultation with other stakeholders further entrenched the existing conflict because the name was felt by some to be too closely related to one of the existing commercial dolphin watching businesses (Saoirse Seasports). In addition, in late 2000, a project interpretation and education centre was established in a redundant building on the quayside in Kilrush. These events compounded the conflict over geographical advantage and eventually led to the accreditation scheme being abandoned in 2004. As a result, levels of commitment to the partnership dropped (indicators 3a and 4d at realignment stage, Fig. 3).

After many years of division and much wrangling, the Management and Steering Committees were finally merged into one single body in late 2003. One individual summed up the process:

> '*Well as soon as the [partnership] formalised into and under that name, we were excluded from the Steering Committee. […] we had to fight for it but we eventually got our own representative from Carrigaholt. They were told that the County Council could represent Carrigaholt as well, but we felt that we needed our own representation*'. (Operator 1).

Finally, in 2008, the partnership had reached a stage of relative calm. Since 2006, four regular committee meetings had been held per year and all stakeholders had taken the opportunity to participate. Conflicts and tensions appeared to have gradually abated and the minutes reflected a greater desire amongst stakeholders to work together towards improving and expanding the education and interpretation activities of the partnership, in line with revised partnership objectives. The indicator scores (eleven of the 16 indicators had undergone both positive and negative change) reflect a dynamic variation in the achievement of key determinants of effectiveness during the period of evaluation (column 1, Fig. 3).

4.2. Dolphin Space Programme

The Dolphin Space Programme (DSP) in Scotland emerged from a series of top-down actions led by a statutory conservation organisation, which attempted to mitigate potential disturbance to marine wildlife in the Moray Firth. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the state body responsible for securing the conservation and enhancement of Scotland's natural heritage, had been formed in 1991 and had a remit not only for wildlife conservation, but

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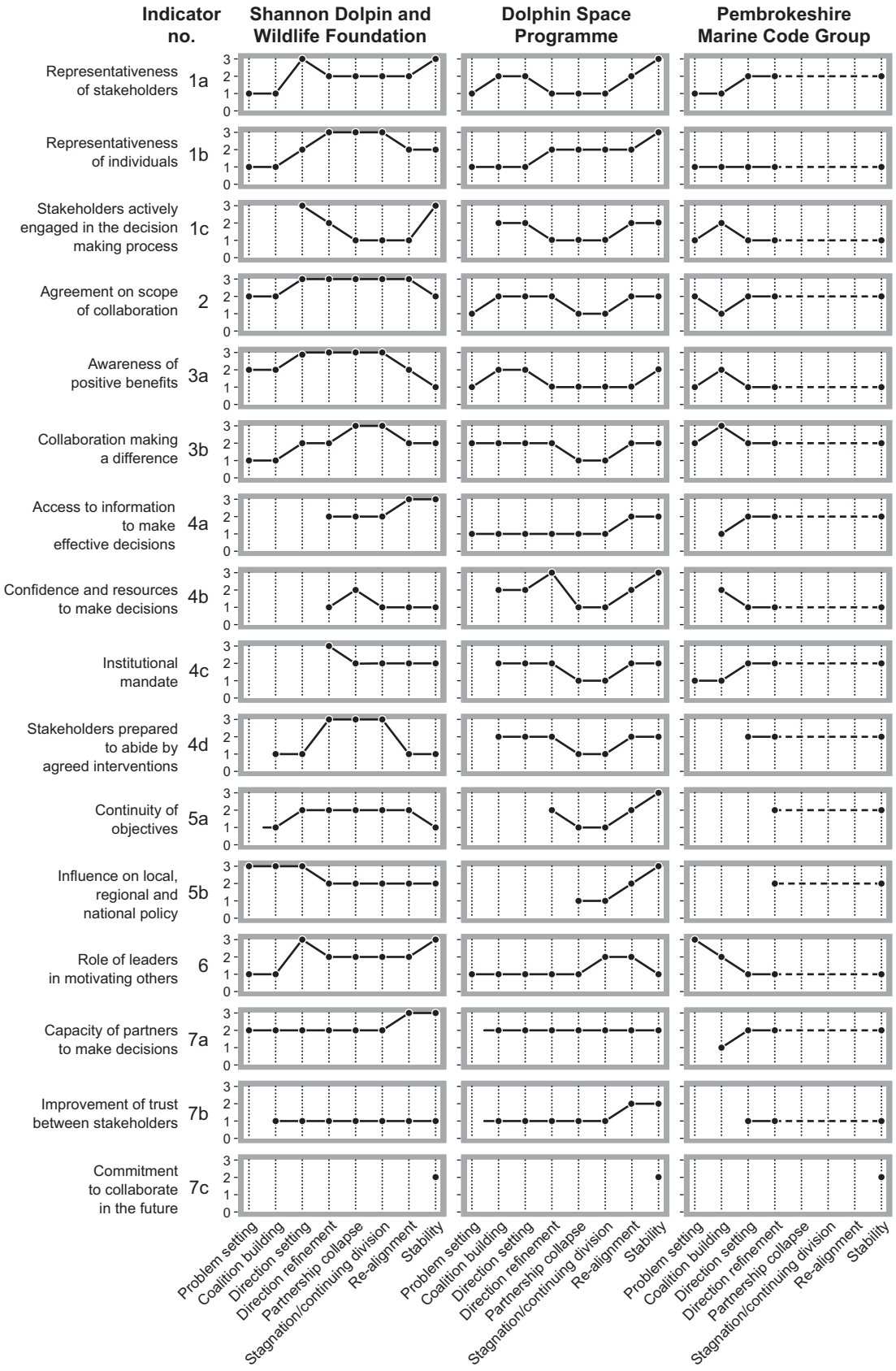

Fig. 3. Indicator scores for each partnership.
Source: [39].

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also for promoting the sustainable development of rural coastal communities [43]. In the absence of statutory management tools, collaborative and partnership approaches were the only viable management option open to SNH to achieve its multiple objectives. During the early 1990s there was a fear that dolphin watching activities in the Moray Firth had begun to focus attention on the potential exploitation of the marine environment for economic benefit at the expense of conservation. In June 1994, SNH took the first steps towards collaborative working when it invited local operators, together with representatives of local tourist boards, enterprise companies, local authorities and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, to a workshop to discuss possible mechanisms for managing the growth of the industry and preventing disturbance to cetaceans [44] . The idea was to implement a voluntary code of conduct, which commercial operators would agree to follow when operating dolphin-watching trips. In return, those operators who agreed to abide by the code would be 'accredited' and could advertise that they were operating in a 'wildlife friendly' and 'sustainable' manner. Despite the potential impact on their businesses, commercial operators were broadly supportive of the proposals.

Scientists from the University of Aberdeen were commissioned to produce a code of conduct linked to an accreditation scheme. Their view was that the Kessock Channel and the narrows off Chanonry Point were the areas that would be most likely to need tight access controls if the industry continued to grow. The restricted topography of the channels tended to amplify noise from vessel traffic and reduced the ability of animals to manoeuvre. Dolphins using these areas were therefore felt to be very sensitive to disturbance. The development of shore-based wildlife watching sites in these areas were seen by the scientists as a preferred alternative to boat-based dolphin watching [44]. It was decided that cetacean watching vessels should behave in a similar manner to routine traffic transiting the Firth by following a fixed route at a standard speed. By adopting a fixed route, cetaceans could 'choose' whether to approach the vessels or to avoid them [44]. An agreed limit on the number of trips per day or per week was also recommended, together with a programme of training for all skippers, which focussed on boat handling skills [45]. Importantly, the researchers recommended capping the total number of commercial operators in the Firth at the 1994 level (approximately ten operators) and suggested that the total number of trips allowed in the Kessock Channel and Chanonry areas be reduced from nine trips per operator per day to a maximum of four per day, shared between the two existing operators working out of Inverness [45]. In the absence of clear data on the 'carrying capacity' of the Firth in terms of levels of boat traffic in relation to dolphin disturbance, the recommendations seem to have been based on the precautionary principle. The operators themselves had little, if any, input into the development of the guidelines.

All aspects of the approach to collaboration and partnership had been heavily 'top-down'. Commercial operators felt that, as well as having been given little opportunity to influence the code of conduct, they were being dictated to by 'do-gooders'. One operator noted:

> '*Like there was a lot, in the beginning, of do-gooders meddling with people's jobs …At one stage it was a war going on, you know, we were being lectured to, sort of like that at the time, I mean, we're still lectured, but it was ideas that they had that they wanted us to do and we just didn't have a say in it*'. (Operator 5).

The implementation of the code by the Steering Committee showed little understanding of the financial realities of the boat operators:

> '*Well I [wouldn't] go out with less than four people. It used to be a two hour trip but I'm trying to cut it down to an hour and a half. So July and August, I might try to get two trips on one tide to make it viable. But you couldn't make a living from here doing it*' (Operator 5).

One individual reflected on the way that operators' local knowledge and experience was seen as of little value:

> *'A lot of the skippers along here maybe have been from a fishing background before and have moved into this, that's certainly the case with the skipper that I work with here, so he's got a lot of knowledge, a long knowledge of working on the sea and he just wants to be listened to, you know?'.* (Conservation NGO Manager (Moray)).

A particular concern to the operators was the apparent unfairness of the Code of Conduct, which was not applied to scientific research vessels in the Firth. These research vessels, from a number of different organisations, were carrying out cetacean research. It seemed to operators that these vessels were able to approach and interact with dolphins and other wildlife without restriction, which operators felt was unfair. One interviewee explained how an operator had witnessed several incidents, which he felt were unacceptable:

> '*..he saw [xx] fleeing about in their RIB [Rigid Inflatable Boat] in the Cromarty Narrows there [..], chasing dolphins and basically they were [..] trying to photograph certain ones [dolphins] to build up a dossier [..] and name them all, for God's sake*'. (Operator 4).

Despite these tensions, the DSP was launched in 1995 by SNH and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. The partnership was jointly funded by SNH and the EU LIFE programme, with a Project Officer appointed on a six month temporary contract (from 1 February to 31 July 1995) [44]. A Steering Committee was formed to guide the development of the partnership, consisting initially only of representatives from the public sector. Despite recognition that any scheme would need to be based on collaboration, commercial operators were not invited to participate, which was a situation that lasted until late 2002. Inviting all operators onto the Committee was thought to be impractical and no single operator was felt to be in a position to represent the others, as they were in commercial competition. Difficulties were also envisaged where penalties over code breakage were to be discussed.

In early 1996, the full time Project Officer's post came to an end and a new contract was issued on a part-time basis for a few more months only, due to a lack of funding. In late 1996, funding for the Project Officer position ceased completely. As a result, day to day running of the partnership fell to a member of SNH staff as an adjunct to his existing workload and progress in developing the partnership came to halt. What little time the officer had for the partnership was spent administering the annual renewal of accreditations. Without a Project Officer to negotiate and arbitrate between operators and other stakeholders, the partnership inevitably began to collapse.

In 2003, as an attempt to gain access to the Steering Committee and to participate equally with other members, operators took the initiative and formed their own industry-based association, called the Wildlife Tour Boat Operators Association (WTBOS). In July 2003, WTBOS wrote to the Steering Committee and requested that two operators, elected by their members (one representing the Inner Moray Firth and one representing the Outer Moray Firth), be invited to join, to represent the interests of all operators. The Steering Committee agreed and the two representatives were invited to attend the next meeting on 9 December, 2003. Finally,

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operators could participate on an equal basis. As operators began to participate more, so other stakeholders, including public and voluntary sector representatives, recognised that the partnership was making progress and established more than a partial consensus. As a result, an air of confidence was created and a broader range of stakeholders began to commit more of their time and resources to support the development of the partnership. Eventually, these struggles lead to a more equitable allocation of power and more inclusive decision-making.

A further improvement in the fortunes of the partnership occurred in late 2004, when funding was provided by SNH and WDCS for the employment of a part time Project Manager. The new Manager was appointed in May 2005. Having been without paid staff for eight years, this appointment was a major step forward for the project and one which engendered a great deal of hope and expectation for the improvement of all aspects of partnership activity. The new Project Manager visited all accredited operators and Steering Committee members to discuss ideas for developing and promoting the DSP more widely. New promotional material and a dedicated partnership web site were developed and, as a result, the partnership began to regain the enthusiasm and commitment of operators and rebuild trust (transcripts; Operators 6 and 7). One Steering Committee member explained the difficulties that the new Project Manager faced:

> '*And I think her first year was very difficult because we'd lost quite a lot of ground. Well we never really had that much ground, and then we lost it because we didn't have many resources to keep it going. So about the first year, or two even, of [the new Manager's] post was trying to build the trust back up with the operators and involve them more in the group*'. (Statutory Conservation Agency Officer (Moray)).

Employment of a dedicated member of staff with direct responsibility for dealing with issues and carrying out day-to-day administrative duties provided new energy and a focus on progress. In addition, despite it being part-funded by the public sector, the post was perceived by operators as somehow independent from public sector agencies and this independence enabled the Project Manger to begin to resolve some of the deeply entrenched problem that had been preventing progress [11]. The indicator scores for this partnership show how the achievement of key determinants of effectiveness fluctuated considerably over the evaluation period (Fig. 3).

4.3. Pembrokeshire Marine Code Group

In common with the two foregoing case studies, the Pembrokeshire partnership (PMCG) emerged out of a concern over disturbance to cetaceans and other marine species from rapidly expanding marine wildlife tourism activities [46]. In 2002, there were 14 commercial operators offering marine wildlife boat trips from various launching points around the coastline of Pembrokeshire, and at least 50 per cent of those operators were planning to expand their businesses, with one particular company planning to operate up to 51 trips per day during the 2003 season [47]. In contrast to the Irish and Scottish case studies, however, the concerns that had stimulated individuals to act were not confined to commercial wildlife tourism activities. From the outset, there was recognition by wildlife NGOs, such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), that disturbance to cetaceans and seals were also caused by recreational vessel traffic, including jet skis and power boats.

As a result of the concerns expressed by conservation agencies, three meetings were held in 2002 to establish a Working Group as a forum to debate the mechanisms needed to manage the marine wildlife tourism industry. The main difficulties in protecting marine species from recurrent disturbance were the absence of strong, species specific legislation, together with a lack of resources to enable monitoring and enforcement out on the water. The Working Group had no source of financial support other than in-kind resources from the participating organisations, such as officer time and space to hold meetings. A voluntary, collaborative approach was therefore seen as the only option open.

The need to include all relevant stakeholders within decision-making structures was recognised early in the partnership establishment process. Despite operator engagement at the open meetings, some stakeholders were concerned at the lack of private sector representation on the strategic Working Group. The partnership therefore agreed that one operator should be sought from each part of the county, north, south and west, to represent private sector interests. In both the DSP and SDWF case studies, operators were excluded from strategic decision-making structures because they were perceived as having a 'vested interest' in the issues being discussed. In the Pembrokeshire case, in contrast, commercial interests were not viewed as a mechanism to prevent inclusion, but rather were seen as important in securing a locally workable solution to the issue of disturbance to marine wildlife.

Paradoxically, given the willingness to foster the participation of the operators, no mechanisms were put in place to ensure that representatives reflected the views of their constituents and the partnership therefore took no part in ensuring the quality of representation. Given the lack of homogeneity of views within stakeholder groups noted above, there must be some doubt as to how well, or even whether these representatives could represent the views of their constituents, or whether, in fact, they simply represented their own perspectives. Additionally, although one operator had been nominated from the north, south and west of the county, only the representative from the northern area attended the meetings. The lack of attendance by the south and west representatives might have been a result of other business commitments. During their interviews, a number of operators alluded to the practical difficulties of attending meetings during the tourist season. August was a particularly busy time for their businesses and they therefore had little time to attend Working Group meetings. Curiously, the Working Group took the absence of the representatives from the south and west sectors as a signal that trial implementation of the codes was presenting no difficulties in their areas.

Attendance at partnership meetings by public sector representatives also declined at this stage. According to one interviewee, it was not linked to a poor perception of the need for the partnership, but rather was seen as a vote of confidence by members of the Working Group that, on the whole, the partnership appeared to be working well. The interviewee explained the lack of attendance at meetings:

> '*But my little theory is, [..], that perhaps the reason why you get such a drop off in [the] working group is that 'excellent, we've got an officer in post now, we're quite happy with how they're getting on, and we can, phew, take a backward seat and let them get on with it'. And [..] I'm certain that is the case with [this] partnership*'. (Marine Protected Area Officer (Pembrokeshire)).

There was general acceptance amongst most operators of the need for a code of conduct, and there was more open discussion than in the DSP about the form that the proposed scheme should take. Participants suggested that the codes should apply to all vessels, and not just commercial operators. Guidelines should be flexible enough to enable the skippers of wildlife tourism vessels to react to the changing weather and tide conditions under which

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they operated. The code included an implicit trust in operators to operate without causing disturbance. Commercial operators were given an opportunity to trial the new codes before they were adopted fully. Issues raised from the trials included the appropriateness of speed limits in certain areas at certain states of the tide, changes needed to the proposed zones and no-go areas (based on handling vessels safely in treacherous waters), and the differing needs of powered and non-powered craft. Achieving negotiated outcomes was a key factor in helping to gain wider operator 'buy-in' to the partnership and in ensuring that solutions were tailored to local needs and conditions.

The Pembrokeshire Marine Code Group (PMCG) was formally launched on 29 May, 2005, but suffered from the need to constantly search for core funding, which diverted the Project Officer's time from monitoring and development activities.

> '*Number one, definitely, is the lack or core funding, I chase my tail around [..]. I feel I need to get out there more and there are operators out there who are members of the marine code who wouldn't recognise me if they saw me [..]. I haven't been out to have that one to one individual meeting with everyone because I haven't had time. Because if I had done that, I would have run out of money and I'd have been out of a job and the project would have ceased to continue*'. (Project Manager (Pembrokeshire)).

Latterly, some criticisms of operator compliance with the code of conduct began to be aired, most notably from a conservationist [48]. An escalation of conflict had begun to erode the willingness of operators to participate, which threatened the stability of the partnership. Several interviewees alluded to the growing conflict. One particular operator indicated the frustration that he and others felt at the lack of trust placed in them by the conservationist, and expressed the fear that it would eventually lead to the operators disengaging completely from the partnership:

> '*I mean, [the conservationists] sort of came up with a loose idea, we helped [them] put the idea together, we managed the idea, we've reached a perfect partnership, but it's not enough, they want more […] It's pretty good, it's been pretty good for the last few years [but] we're going back to the same old thing [..]. The risk [to the partnership] now is [from] those who distrust us… taking it a step too far, and they will cook it, they will cook it*'. (Operator 9).

Several interviewees indicated that, as a result of persistent accusations of code breakage, a number of operators were considering withdrawing from the voluntary agreement. Interviewees suggested that losing the support of operators could lead to significant weakening of the codes of conduct, and could lead to their disengagement from the partnership.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In terms of context, all partnerships were a local response to environmental concerns raised by the growth of ecotourism. In the PMCG, the conservation implications of a long-established tourism industry were the main concerns, whereas the SDWF wished to develop ecotourism using the principles of sustainability as a means of revitalising a weak rural economy. In the DSP, the instrumental role played by a statutory agency (Scottish Natural Heritage) in the formation of the partnership reflected a motivation to exert its influence on local environmental policy and management.

Changes in external variables have been described as 'transitional ruptures' [42]. These 'ruptures' are changes in the contextual conditions that comprise the boundaries within which partnership decision-making is circumscribed, that lead to new opportunities, and/or curtail existing opportunities. Transitional ruptures may represent 'partnership snapping zones', where institutional realignment takes place and partners must work to retain stakeholder support and adapt to new or altered conditions if they are to persist and succeed. Partnership responses to exogenous change serve to highlight the dependent relationship between context and processes, and the achievement of outputs and outcomes.

The most obvious example of a positive impact resulting from a change in context occurred in the SDWF. Under Irish statute, the new cSAC designation required commercial operators to obtain permission on an annual basis for dolphin watching activities and obliged Dúchas to administer such permissions and monitor activities. In the absence of resources to manage or police the new regulations, Dúchas changed its view of the SDWF, from one of little interest to an understanding that the partnership offered an opportunity to enable it to discharge its statutory duties more effectively. Change in legislation in the Shannon estuary therefore acted as a transitional rupture, which had a positive effect on partnership performance. The formation of this partnership was therefore not totally dependent upon solely 'bottom-up' or 'top-down' pressures.

All partnerships faced a common dilemma about how to incorporate commercial operators in the process of partnership formation and management. In many respects, this issue reflects the 'top-down' nature of environmental regulation and management. While boat operators were clearly key stakeholders in the operation of the partnership initiatives, it was seen as impractical for all to be involved directly. A further difficulty was the issue of whether a single operator could represent all interests and there were ethical dilemmas to be addressed if they were to be involved in dealing with breaches of the code of conduct. The partnerships took a different approach to these issues. Both the SDWF and DSP initially excluded boat operators from strategic decision-making structures. The approach taken by PMCG was more inclusive, with commercial operator representatives appointed from the outset.

These arrangements led to very different stakeholder experiences of the partnership process. Stakeholders in both the SDWF and DSP openly challenged their exclusion from decision-making. In the SDWF, conflict had arisen early on over a lack of private sector representation and was compounded by ill-feeling over the geographical allocation of resources. Levels of engagement later improved when the separate Management and Steering Committees were amalgamated and all operators were given access to the single decision-making body. In the DSP, as a direct result of being excluded from decision-making for many years, operators formed an industry-based association (WTBOS) specifically to gain seats on the Steering Committee. As a result, previously excluded stakeholders gained opportunities to participate in negotiation and engaged with the partnership on a more frequent basis. As operators began to participate more, so other stakeholders, including public and voluntary sector representatives, recognised that the partnership was making progress. An air of confidence was created and a broader range of stakeholders began to commit more of their time and resources to support the development of the partnership. Eventually, these struggles lead to a more equitable allocation of power and more inclusive decision-making in both the SDWF and DSP. The evidence from these case studies shows that partnerships can become sites of *power brokerage*, with stakeholder groups challenging the persistence of more traditional styles of working and the dominance of power elites, such as statutory agencies and other public sector bodies [36].

From documentary and interview transcript data, it was clear that one of the main difficulties for all three partnerships was securing adequate financial resources to support activity and implement agreed actions. The lack of secure finance led to a

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climate of uncertainty, which constrained forward planning and hampered the achievement of long-term goals. The financial difficulties faced by the partnerships studied here are also shared by coastal management partnerships. Project staff often find themselves in a continual search for funding to secure their ongoing employment; what McGlashan [8] refers to as the 'hamster wheel syndrome'. Clearly, if coastal planning and management partnerships are to use available resources more effectively to achieve their stated objectives, a secure and consistent funding basis must be a priority. The issue of secure resources is particularly relevant to debates surrounding the role of coastal partnerships in delivering the marine planning agenda from 2011.

Fig. 3 indicates that each of the partnerships experienced very different trajectories in the achievement of the indicators of effectiveness. While the SDWF achieved some early successes in seven out of 16 indicators, ten had taken a downturn in performance by the end of the evaluation period. The DSP was the partnership that experienced the greatest fluctuation in effectiveness. Although nine indicators had declined in performance during earlier phases of the evaluation period, all but one indicator (leadership) had improved by the end. In this respect, the DSP was the most successful partnership of the three in this study. The PMCG is characterised as having achieved steady progress through the evaluation period and was the only partnership of the three not to have experienced a collapse. Five indicators had remained stable, four had improved, four had fluctuated (with three experiencing a downturn) and two had declined in performance.

The findings from this study also have important applications beyond the evaluation of performance by offering a mechanism for partnership staff and members to reflect on good and bad practice within their partnerships. The construction of a detailed narrative of evolution and development offers a useful and reflexive tool to enable partnership staff to identify periods of difficulty as well as success, and to pinpoint the underlying reasons for these. The production and ongoing maintenance of detailed partnership narratives could therefore be embedded within the day-to-day management of a partnership, as a key element of internal short- and long-term monitoring and evaluation activities. For larger, multi-issue partnerships, narratives may need to be developed on a project-by-project or sub-group basis, rather than at the whole partnership scale. For partnerships or projects that are funded by, or working with external agencies, such an approach may also help in providing the necessary evidence of achievement of specific targets and objectives and therefore that they can fairly represent their partners.

The use of the indicator framework, to provide a scoring mechanism to measure the achievement of key determinants of effectiveness, should also not be limited to use as a retrospective evaluation tool. The criteria used to score indicator levels shown in Table 1 for example, provides clear guidance on the steps that partnerships need to take in order to achieve a score of indicator level 3, the highest level of achievement. So, for example, if a partnership wishes to ensure that it achieves good quality stakeholder representation, it will need to work towards achieving level 3 criteria for indicators 1a, 1b and 1c (Table 1). Similarly, if a well established partnership has completed a detailed narrative on its evolution and development and has identified a lack of commitment to implement agreed actions as a particular problem, steps can be taken to ensure that good information is available on which to base decisions; that decision-making is not limited by a lack of resources; and that decision-making bodies include representatives from those agencies with the necessary authority to make decisions. Using the indicator framework as a model of good practice, partnerships can take steps to move towards more effective operation and, just as importantly, ensure that they maintain that effectiveness.

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