

Overcoming Institutional Barriers in Marine Plastics Governance

Lessons from the PERMAGOV Diagnostic Tool as Explored in the Baltic and Mediterranean Regional Seas

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Key messages

- Institutional barriers are deeply rooted in governance structures and institutional design and hinder effective marine plastics policy implementation.
- The PermaGov diagnostic tool helps link specific institutional barriers to institutional design attributes.
- Case studies in the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas illustrate practical challenges and potential solutions.
- Addressing institutional barriers requires data transparency, stakeholder collaboration, legal reform, and economic incentives.

Institutional barriers are “impasses in governance processes that are rooted in the institutional context of the adaptation situation” (Oberlack, 2017: 807; Eisenack et al. 2014). Institutional barriers hinder the achievement of policy targets, are symptoms of deeper governance issues, and their root causes must be identified and understood to increase governance performance.

The PermaGov Diagnostic Tool is based on a literature review and insights from end-users and selected stakeholders. It helps to identify and analyze institutional barriers and design attributes within marine governance issues, and enables researchers to connect specific barriers with the institutional design attributes that cause them.

Institutional Attribute	Description of barriers pertaining to institutional attributes and related governance issues
 Actor eligibility	Lack of (appropriate) boundary rules that regulate the set of eligible actors in action situations. This can lead to a lack of clarity about actor eligibility, actor exclusion, or over inclusion of non-Key actors.
 Actor roles and responsibilities	Inappropriate rules that regulate the positions available to participants and the set of required, prohibited and allowed actions assigned to positions. This can lead to a lack of clarity about actor roles, limits on actor capacity, and actors taking roles for which they are not authorized.
 Actor control (power distribution)	Lack of (appropriate) rules that establish the kind of control actors have over outcomes of action situations. This can cause inappropriate control by powerful actors, inability to influence institutions by weak actors, weak provisions for leadership, and unclear distribution of responsibilities.
 Actor accountability	Inappropriate institutional provisions for monitoring, evaluating, rewarding, and enforcing responsibilities. This can lead to a lack of clarity in decision making processes, absence of feedback mechanisms, and ineffective compliance and enforcement mechanism.
 Actor connectivity	Inappropriate structures that connect actors within and across multiple tiers of social organization. This can result in poorly networked actors within and/or across tiers of social organization.
 Conflict mechanisms	Lack of appropriate institutional provisions for regulating, preventing or resolving conflicting values, preferences and actions among actors. This can cause conflicts among actors, disputes over rules in use, and lacking or ineffective dispute settlement mechanisms.
 Development & use of knowledge	Inappropriate institutional attributes that shape how information, knowledge claims and values are constructed, communicated, accepted, and used. This can cause weak processes for reflexivity and institutional learning, inappropriate science-policy interfaces, too many or too diverse data providers, and data fragmentation.
 Scale of institutions	Inappropriate spatial and temporal implications of institutions. This can cause a mismatch between temporal or spatial scale of issue and institution, disintegration or lack of coordination among different institutions or levels of governance, leading to inefficiencies and gaps, and insufficient division of institutions into manageable problem areas.
 Rigidity of institutions	Change in the rules-in-use is inappropriately constrained by higher-order rules, transaction costs and path dependence. This can lead to stickiness of institutions, path dependence, and institutional drift.
 Formality of institutions	Inappropriate degree to which rules-in-use are embedded in written laws, plans, documents. This can cause over- or under-formalized institutions.
 Institutionalized incentives	Inappropriate provision for institutionalized incentives for actors. This can cause a lack of incentives of actors to take engage in governance processes, mis-alignment between incentives and objectives, over-ambitious policy goals, poorly specified objectives.

Mediterranean Sea: Findings on Mar Menor and Agri-plastics

- **Institutionalized incentives:** A lack of innovative business practices to prevent plastic waste generation in line with EPR.
- **Actor connectivity:** Need to increase awareness raising for all citizens as well as industry-targeted trainings to reduce plastic consumption and emission.
- **Rigidity of institutions:** Need to revise the current legal framework at the national levels.
- **Development and use of knowledge:** Need to develop a data-base on the production and consumption of plastic products.

Baltic Sea: Findings on Abandonnd, Lost or Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG)

- **Actor connectivity:** Insufficient communication across sectors inhibits a common framing of the problem and promoting distrust between actors.
- **Actor connectivity:** Cross-policy (i.e. between ministries) coordination is largely absent, reducing actor engagement and policy effectiveness.
- **Rigidity of institutions:** Implementation of recently adopted policies is still in progress in several sectors, increasing the operational uncertainty for multiple industries and reducing policy effectiveness.
- **Institutionalized incentives:** Inconsistent funding limits long-term planning and policy effectiveness.
- **Development and use of knowledge:** Insufficient data and mechanisms to share and leverage information limits stakeholder understanding of the seriousness and scope of the issue as well as impedes the ability of decision-makers to design targeted actions.



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