

**PERFORMING ‘GREEN EUROPE’?  
A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF  
EUROPEAN FISHERIES POLICY**

Stephan Engelkamp and Doris Fuchs

Contact: [doris.fuchs@wwu.de](mailto:doris.fuchs@wwu.de)

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**Institute for Political Science**

**University of Muenster**

**Scharnhorststr. 100**

**48151 Muenster, Germany**

**<http://www.uni-muenster.de/fuchs/en>**

### **Contact**

**Prof. Doris Fuchs, Ph.D.**

**Center for Interdisciplinary Sustainability Research and**

**Institute for Political Science, University of Muenster**

**E-Mail: [doris.fuchs@uni-muenster.de](mailto:doris.fuchs@uni-muenster.de)**

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
DFG	German Research Community
EU	European Union
MSY	maximum sustainable yield
RAC	regional advisory councils

## 1 Summary

In terms of the pursuit of sustainability objectives, the EU Common Fisheries Policy used to be a complete disaster, according to all scholars who analyzed it. While the EU appeared to seek to create and sustain an image as moral leader and vanguard in global environmental governance in a range of policy fields in the last decades, first and foremost global climate policy, the EU fisheries policy did not benefit from such efforts. Indeed, the EU fisheries policy seemed to fit critical observers' claims that EU environmental policy is dominated by narratives about efficiency, technological modernization and a notion of development that privileges economic growth over ecological sustainability rather than a "green leader" narrative.

In 2013/2014, however, the EU adopted a major reform of its fisheries policy, which, at least on the surface, suggests significant improvements in sustainability efforts. While the jury on the actual effects of these reforms is still out, one may wonder whether this adoption of the reform signifies that the green leader argument finally arrived in the EU fisheries policy. To investigate this presupposition, this paper aims to trace developments in the dominant narratives in the EU fisheries policy discourse.

It does so via a discourse analysis of relevant documents issued by European Union institutions. On that basis, the paper does indeed identify a shift in narratives, but also finds that not all aspects of this shift point towards sustainability. The early narratives are dominated by the policy objectives of rationality and improvements in efficiency and productivity. Then, ideas of sustainability appear combined with a focus on monitoring and controlling the fishing industry. Towards the end of the time frame analyzed in the paper, narratives of self-governance appear, emphasizing results as well as notions of rights and responsibilities of the fishing industry.

## 2 Introduction

Over the last decades, the European Union has appeared to struggle to create and maintain an image of a moral leader and vanguard of global environmental governance. Particularly in global climate policy, its efforts to set (at least on the surface) relatively ambitious emission reduction targets received scientific and political attention and contributed to this image. Scholars view the narrative associated with this image as indicating that Europe's environmental governance seeks to strike a balance between economic progress, scientific rationality, and normative principles of social and ecological sustainability (e.g. Lenschow and Sprungk 2010). After the failure of the 2009 summit in Copenhagen and in the wake of the 2008 Financial Crisis, however, the EU appears to be moving away from efforts to sustain this leadership image. Moreover, it has already in the past, more often than not, failed to actually implement and enforce ambitious environmental policies oriented at long-term goals, according to critical observers. The latter describe European environmental politics as firmly embedded in hegemonic narratives about efficiency, technological modernization, and a notion of development that privileges economic growth over ecological sustainability (Blühdorn 2013; Griffin 2013; Swyngedouw 2005). The EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) appears to fit these latter narratives particularly well. Given the continued failure of EU fisheries policy at a sustainable management of European (and global) fish stocks documented by all relevant scientific inquiries, a green leader narrative probably is not what anybody would associate with it.

In 2013/2014, however, the EU adopted a reform of its Common Fisheries Policy that appears to imply a major overhaul, entailing the gradual introduction of the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) aim, the prohibition of controversial fishing practices, specifically the discarding of large amounts of catch, and a reform of the structural policy (Linke and Jentoft 2013; Salomon, Markus, and Dross 2014). In this paper, we proceed from the assumption that European public policy is structured by policy narratives that situate environmental policies in a specific context of meaning. Policy documents, for example, do not simply describe the world out there with its problems and policy solutions, they are permeated with stories framing actors in terms of identities, interests, and responsibilities. These stories exercise a form of discursive power as they represent policy-makers' view of the world. Powerful narratives do not necessarily depict reality *as it is*; rather, they show how story-tellers interpret their own role in policy processes. Via narratives the story-tellers give meaning to their practices and decisions and relate a policy field to a wider moral order. Accordingly, this paper aims to identify and interpret developments in

narratives in the CFP on the basis of a discourse analysis of relevant official documents and statements by stakeholders.

The paper pursues its objectives in four steps. The next section provides some background on the EU fisheries policy and its institutional context. The section that follows places the paper in the relevant theoretical and research context and lays out the methodological approach. The subsequent section discusses the findings of the discourse analysis, before the final section summarizes our findings and points to possible avenues for further research.

### **3 Background: The EU fisheries policy and its institutional context**

After the Second World War, the core objective of the Community's fisheries policy was to rebuild the sector in order to more effectively provide fish for European consumers. In this context, the fisheries policy first was falling under the Common Agricultural Policy and managed by the respective directorate/commissioner. In 1970, the Council adopted legislation to establish a common market for fisheries products and to put in place a structural policy for fisheries with the goal of coordinating the modernization of fishing vessels and on-shore installations (Griffin 2013). The adoption of the Economic Exclusion Zones and the accession of new member states with substantial fishing fleets heightened the necessity for a common conservation policy aimed at regulating the use of fishery resources collectively. Consequentially, the Directorate for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries was created in 1982. Since then, the Common Fisheries Policy has been an object of exclusive competency for the EU institutions. Currently, it is organized under four areas: fisheries management, international policy, market and trade policy, and policy funding (European Commission 2015a).

Virtually all scientific assessments of the CFP, today, agree that the policy has largely failed in its aim of conserving fishery resources. Most studies conclude that there are still too many fishing vessels chasing too few fish (see for examples Barkin and DeSombre 2013, 66–67; Cardinale et al. 2013; Cotter 2010; Daw and Gray 2005; Griffin 2013; Khalilian et al. 2010; Kraak et al. 2013; Payne 2000; Raakjær 2011; Symes 2009). They argue that the system of subsidies, tax cuts and direct aid has supported over-capitalization, while the practice of setting annual quotas could not stand up to political pressure and, together with the equal access principle, contributed to decreasing the efficacy of conservation policy. This argument finds support in the inclusion of a provision on 'relative stability' that ensured member states the same proportion of a fish stock's TAC (total allowable catch) each year without regard for the absolute size and health of that stock in the Commission's regulation proposal for establishing the Common Fisheries policy in 1983. Scholars also blame the failure of the fisheries policy on the distribution of decision making power among the EU's institutions. They note that while the Commission may have the authority to regulate fisheries resources in EU waters through directives and quotas, it lacks the capacity to directly monitor or enforce these rules (Barkin and DeSombre 2013, 66–67), which placed the Council in the main, if not sole, driver's seat with respect to Common Fisheries Policy. The Lisbon Treaty expanded the involvement of the Parliament in legislation in the field of fisheries through the application of the co-decision procedure, which made Parliament a co-legislator with



veto power. However, ‘measures on fixing prices, levies, aid and quantitative limitations and on the fixing and allocation of fishing opportunities’ Council of the European Union (2008, Article 43.3; European Union 2012, 65) remained to be adopted by the Council on a proposal from the Commission (Griffin 2013, 31). With the failure of repeated policy reforms to lead to different results, scholars today consider some 80% of all species in EU waters to be overfished (Jarchau, Nolting, and Wiegler 2009; Kraak et al. 2013, but see Cardinale et al. 2013).

While the CFP’s goals were frequently amended and modified, the structure of its main stakeholders’ economic interests – the European fishing nations and their respective fishing industries – has changed negligibly. Big fishing nations like Spain, Portugal, Greece, or France, but also apparently more sustainable-minded countries like Great Britain or the Netherlands continue to support their fishing fleets with direct financial aid like subsidies or tax exemptions. The fishing industry, itself, appears to apply high discount rates, favoring smaller short-term benefits in terms of fish caught today over greater longer-term benefits that could result from adhering to maximum-sustainable yield targets. Indeed, the EU fishing game appears to represent a clear example of the tragedies of the commons (Hardin 1968), facilitated by political decisions and processes dominated by strong national and industrial special interests.

Still, a major policy reform of the common fisheries policy took place in 2013/2014, which according to Commissioner Maria Damanaki promises radical change in the form of an end to overfishing and discarding (Damanaki 2014). While the jury on the actual effects of these reforms is still out, this change in policy suggests that there may have been a major development in its underlying discursive structures of meaning. To substantiate this proposition, we propose to enquire the policy narratives (Wagenaar 2011) structuring the policy discourse on European fisheries over the *longue durée*, beginning in the 1970s and tracing its development to the actual policy reform in 2013/14. To be clear, we do not make a causal claim regarding a direct effect of the relevant narratives on the policy reform. Rather, we are wondering if the discursive shifts created some room for certain actors to more successfully push for change. Before we present our empirical findings, the next section will lay out our theoretical and methodological approach.

## 4 Narratives in Environmental Policy

Since the late 1980s, constructivism has made great strides in international relations analyses and debates (Kratochwil 1991; Onuf 1989). While the range of perspectives that fall under this label soon proved to be characterized by enormous variance in foci, theoretical interests and methodological approaches, all constructivist work shares the central assumption that our world is socially constructed and that, therefore, norms and ideas matter. Constructivists are not alone in this attention to the role of norms and ideas. Critical and neo-Marxist approaches, especially Neo-Gramscians, have equally and for an even longer time attributed an important role to the ideational dimension of politics (Cox 1987).

In environmental policy research, a number of authors have highlighted the role of narratives. Maarten Hajer and Karen Litfin, in particular, are to be lauded for the clarity with which they have pinpointed how story-lines and frames can influence developments in national, regional and global environmental policy (Hajer 1997; Litfin 1995). Numerous other scholars have focused on the role of environmental narratives specifically. Interestingly, a number of scholars - coming from a range of theoretical perspectives – have also included a focus on the role of ideational factors and strategies in environmental policy in their broader analyses (Fuchs and Glaab 2011; Fuchs and Kalfagianni 2010; Levy and Newell 2002; Princen 2005; Williams 2009).

What is a narrative and why should we study it? As Wagenaar (2011, 210ff.) argues, a narrative creates a coherent story around particular events, thereby attributing a specific meaning to them. The tellers of such stories, thereby, draw on culturally shared knowledge in order to “create plausible, coherent versions of events that have a wider meaning than the actual course of events that occasioned the story” (ibid, 211). But narratives do not only present an account of actions and for the situations in which these actions occur, they also give a rationale for these actions, thus conveying a particular normative message. Narratives help order social reality, they connect events into a coherent and meaningful story. As a matter of fact, we simply cannot *not* narrate. As Clifford Geertz (1973) has shown, culture is the ensemble of stories we tell about the world. Wagenaar (2011) emphasizes that these stories are by no means natural representations of the world out there, they are rather open-ended, subjective, value laden and action oriented. It is precisely for this reason that narrative analysis can show how policy-makers see the world they are regulating through their practices.

Narratives have also played a prominent role in EU environmental policy research. Scholars of environmental politics have argued, for instance, that the EU has sought to strengthen external influence and internal coherence by framing itself as a leader in global environmental governance. In this vein, Lenschow and Sprungk (2010) postulate that the political myth of ‘Green Europe’ supplied the EU with a successful narrative for the European project. This narrative holds that the “political rule of the EU is legitimate because it is needed to restore or uphold the environmental status quo in European nation-states” (Lenschow and Sprungk 2010, 136). Specifically, they argue that the narrative conveys the feeling that Europe is ‘something more than the common market’. Moreover, Lenschow and Sprungk (2010) contend that the storyline nevertheless connects to various environmental narratives in different ‘green’ member states. Looking at speeches from key policy-makers and relying on Eurobarometer data, they demonstrate that a narrative about an environmentally pro-active European Union resonates quite well with the European population.

Other scholars suggest, however, that the EU’s environmental performance might raise some doubt about its credibility as an environmental leader (Parker and Karlsson 2010). They identify contending and potentially stronger narratives focusing on efficiency, technological modernization, and a view of development where economic growth is privileged over ecological sustainability (Blühdorn 2013; Griffin 2013; Swyngedouw 2005). Accordingly, they question the extent to which the EU is practicing green leadership instead of merely performing the narrative.

Against this background, we examine the narratives in European fisheries governance. Admittedly, this is not the policy field one immediately thinks of, when it comes to the role of narratives in EU environmental policy in general, and green leadership narratives, in particular. While the EU’s proactive official stance on global climate policy, specifically its willingness to set (at least on the surface) relatively ambitious quantitative reduction targets and to push others to join it in such efforts, have received considerable scientific and political attention, its failure to make progress in the sustainability outcomes of its fisheries policy is just as noteworthy. It is for that very reason that the EU fisheries policy may be an interesting case to investigate the existence and use of specific narratives. Given the performance of the EU in this policy field as well as the field’s historical, institutional development in the EU, we would expect narratives focusing on (short term) economic growth, labor markets and (quantitative) consumer demand to dominate over long stretches of the development of EU fisheries policy. At the same time, the recent, supposedly dramatic reforms raise the question whether a shift in the relative dominance of narratives may have occurred so that economic narratives may have been partly usurped by sustainability-focused ones.

To this end, this paper focuses on narratives for constructing social reality. It looks at the political discourse of the EC/EU's Common Fisheries Policy and asks if and how the meaning or framing of governing European fisheries has changed since the inception of the CFP. Can we perceive a growing importance of (long-term notions of) sustainability from our material?

We begin with the assumption that political decisions are always embedded in larger discursive structures of meaning. These configurations can be analyzed by identifying the narratives visible in societal and political discourse. We employ an interpretive and qualitative approach in our analysis of the compiled material. Thus, we conduct a discourse analysis to uncover the meaning and knowledge structures and identify and examine narrative shifts in the discursive formations permeating relevant texts (Keller 2007; Wagenaar 2011; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). In order to highlight both the discursive changes and the continuities that took place in this policy field, our discourse analysis covers an extensive time span, ranging from the early 1970s to the most recent plenary debates in 2013 and 2014.

Our body of texts consists of selected policy documents, official European regulations, White and Green papers, plenary debates and various discussion papers from non-state actors. The material has been selected according to the criterium of political relevance for the initial formulation and the subsequent reforms of the Common Fisheries Policy and related policy regulations. This includes provisions regarding the Common Structural Policy, the establishment of various control measures on fishing vessels, directives on capacity reduction management, resource conservation measures, provisions for structural funds, and the Common Organization of the Markets in fishery products and aquaculture, as well as internal policy evaluations and policy assessments from the Commission and various non-state actors. The material also comprises the key European Parliament plenary debates on the CFP reform process since 2010, following the publication of the Commission's highly influential Green Paper on the CFP reform (2009). Where available, we have relied on official English translations of EU documents.<sup>1</sup>

Overall, the material is biased towards official European documents; this is especially the case for the selection period from the 1970s to the 1990s. There are two main reasons for this:

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<sup>1</sup> This is convenient for official regulations and many policy papers issued by the Council and the Commission. It is more complicated in the case of minutes of parliamentary debates, which are available online only since December 2001. In 2013, the European Union decided to stop translating plenary debates in every community language for financial reasons. This posits problems for a discourse analysis of the CFP reform. For the plenary debate in May 2013, we relied on the video tapes of the speeches that are made available online by the European Parliament's documentary services.

data accessibility and the need to limit the material. The EU makes its official documents available in the community languages via its legal documentary services. This makes them relatively easy to access. Our choice of method entails that our analysis covers a time period of over 40 years: this makes it necessary to limit the material in some respect. We do so by focusing on the official documents.

In our analysis, we paid particular attention to references to long-term sustainability and to the narratives in which they are embedded. One disclaimer may be in order here: in analyzing shifts in narratives and discursive formations over a longer period of time, we are not making a simplistic causal argument. In other words, we are not taking a side in the above debate on identities versus strategic framing. We are interested in the conditions of possibility that enable social change in the first place, and both dynamics, i.e. actors believing in new norms and actors strategically promoting new norms, would contribute to such conditions of possibility. Moreover, 'green narratives' are often interwoven with other stories. For example, in Lauber and Schenner's study on the discursive struggle over support schemes for renewable electricity in the EU (Lauber 2011), it seemed, at first glance, that the Commission pushed for 'green' electricity. The authors argue, however, that it was primarily the Commission's neoliberal reliance on market-oriented mechanisms and the principle of policy harmonization that influenced its choice. Similarly, the authors argue that the rejection of the suggested support schemes for renewable electricity by Parliament and Council underlined their reliance on the then-opposing principles of subsidiarity and good governance as a discursive counter-narrative rather than their rejection of 'green arguments' (op.cit.). For our analysis, this implies the need to caution against too easily representing a narrative in terms of a 'clean' and single story.

Our focus on meaning and the discursive does, of course, not mean that we consider institutional and material contexts unimportant. On the contrary, we view economic interests and political opportunity structures as interwoven with the larger narrative and discursive environment in which a policy is situated (Epstein 2008). For the present article, however, we limit our focus to (shifts in) narrative structures that make processes of change possible.

## 5 Reforming the Common Fisheries Policy

Our discourse analysis shows a number of recurring and interconnected patterns. First and foremost, however, there is a narrative of efficiency and progress that pervades the whole body of texts, but this narrative appears to be increasingly threatened and changes its form over time, thereby making room for and integrating other stories. In the early European documents, we find a rather typical modernist story of rationality and efficiency positing that problems are to be rationally analyzed and can be solved through political intervention, often a technical one. In the end, however, there is a move within the efficiency narrative away from planning and micro-management towards an increasing governmentalization of fisheries policy. This latter aspect of the narrative advocates a growing reliance on market-mechanisms and “self-governance” by “stakeholders”. It operates mainly through more active participation (of the fishing industry) in the implementation and pursuit of the CFP’s goals. Fishermen need to take more responsibility for sustainable fisheries. In this respect, the narrative is closely related to demands for good governance and transparency. In contrast to earlier versions of the good governance narrative, however, the new version entails less detailed micro-management and central planning of the CFP, but a move towards *governing at a distance* (see also Walters and Haahr 2005). Importantly, this move is associated with the re-articulation of agent positions within the discourse, in particular of the fishing industry. The narrative unfolds in three discernible stages within the discourse; we will elaborate on each of them in turn.

### 5.1 The rational-efficient policy-maker and the passive beneficiary

The early policy documents of the Common Fisheries Policy posit ‘the problem’ in fisheries as one of re-structuring the fishing sector towards more efficiency in order to ensure food supply for the European population. The narrative places confidence in policy planning, which is endorsed as the solution to a specific policy problem, the provision of food for European consumers. This can be illustrated in the 1970 regulation on the establishment of a structural policy, which states the policy’s overall aim as to “promote the rational development of the fishing industry within the framework of economic growth and social progress and to ensure an equitable standard of living for the population which depends on fishing for its livelihood” (The Council of the European Communities 1970, Art. 10.1; in 1976, we have almost a verbatim formulation The Council of the European Communities 1976, Art. 9.1). Note the emphasis on

economic growth that is linked to social progress for “the population” (The Council of the European Communities 1970, Art. 10.1).

The common policy consists of the narrative of rationally acting European member states, at this stage: member states exchange information about their respective domestic laws, they coordinate their political measures, and they provide financial aid for the domestic fishing industry. The Commission collects data and makes them available to the main actors, the states. If at all, the industry and local societies appear as passive beneficiaries of the institution’s policies: common rules are laid down and specific measures adopted to “promote harmonious and balanced development” (The Council of the European Communities 1976, Art. 1) of the fishing industry.

“Increasing productivity” and “keeping with technical progress” become key features of this narrative that are advocated as aims of the CFP (The Council of the European Communities 1976, Art. 9.1). The slowly emerging problem of shrinking fish stocks is framed in terms of a need “to intensify the search for new fishing grounds and new methods of fishing” (The Council of the European Communities 1976, Art. 9.1). However, in the course of the following years, and especially during the 1980s and 1990s, this feature of the narrative becomes more and more elaborate and eventually feeds into an increasing micro-management of tasks. There are two main sites where the narrative identifies a need for political action: the market and the process of fishing itself. The fisheries industry needs to grow, to become more productive and to be re-structured according to so-called “market requirements”. Apart from increasing the fleets’ productivity, the texts advocate seeking new sources of fish, especially in the form of aquaculture and non-Community fish stocks outside European waters (The Council of the European Communities 1986). At no point finds one the need to challenge the dominant story of economic progress through beneficial and rational policy-making, for example, by challenging the growing levels of resource exploitation.

## **5.2 The industry as object of governance control**

The turn of the millennium sees the advent of new terms in the discourse on European fisheries: in the material, we find, for instance, “precautionary approach”, “sustainable exploitation of stocks”, or “eco-system approach” (Council of the European Union 2002). This new terminology heralds a slow change in narratives towards resource conservation. This shift is laid out most clearly in the 2002 reform of the CFP. Its primary objective, according to the reform legislation, is now to ensure a “sustainable future for the fisheries sector” by “guaranteeing economic prosperity” while “preserving the fragile balance between sustainable ecosystems and

consumer supply” (Council of the European Union 2002). The new CFP is situated within the Community’s larger policy on sustainable development and designed to give equal priority to environmental, economic and social aspects of Community fishing. Sustainability, in turn, has to be based on “sound scientific advice” and on the precautionary principle. However, the texts also note that the sustainable use of aquatic resources should be conducted in a “balanced manner” (Council of the European Union 2002).

The story of efficiency does not disappear during this time. Rather, when promoting the development of resource conservation and control management in the fishing industry, the focus of the efficiency narrative emphasizes a need for the use of more and better technologies as well as better controls. Thus, fishermen are to intensify their search for new fish and adopt new methods of fishing as rational solution to the problem of decreasing fish stocks (The Council of the European Communities 1986). At the same time, “vessels” need to be “monitored”.

This second focus, actually, is an early indication of a changing role of the fishing industry itself, in the narrative. While the fishing sector previously was regarded as (passive) beneficiary of Community policy, it is now identified as part of a growing problem. The fishing sector emerges as the antagonist of the European institutions: their short-sighted practices create problems hitherto unforeseen. As one Member of the European Parliament remarked in the February 2013 plenary debate on the basic regulation: “Fishermen can be their own worst enemy in looking only to the short term rather than planning for the long term, and urging ministers to exceed quotas even if it reduces fish stocks in the long term” (Davies, quoted in EP 2013).

Increasingly, the array of technologies and measures at the disposal of the authorities is applied to monitor and control the fishermen. This process is accompanied by an increasing informatization and technicization of control measures: skippers are required to keep logbooks, and soon the introduction of new data gathering techniques and even of a satellite-based monitoring system are promoted as supposedly more efficient solutions (see for example The Council of the European Communities 1986; Council of the European Union 2002). Moreover, new techniques like the fishing effort system and specific regulations, for example on fishing gear, are devised to implement control over the fishing industry. Social and economic considerations still dominate within the narrative in this stage, but resource depletion becomes a growing problem for the EU’s Common Fisheries Policy.

### **5.3 The turn to self-governance**

The third stage of the narrative, then, sees a radical shift in the agent positions: this concerns the role of the fishing industry, but also the self-understanding of the institutions



regarding the overall policy. European fish stocks are over-fished, the policy failed, even worse, the CFP is partly responsible for this failure. This development is most clearly spelled out in the Commission's 2009 Green Paper on the Common Fisheries Policy. The text starts by recognizing the previous "failures" to reform the CFP and acknowledges that the fisheries sector can "no longer be seen in isolation from its broader maritime environment" (European Commission 2009, 6). This document is often cited as a reference point for reformulating the three dimensions of sustainability in the CFP. In this respect, it is stated that economic and social viability of fisheries can only result from restoring the productivity of fish stocks. While positing that there is no conflict between ecological, economic and social objectives in the long term, these objectives can and do clash in the short term. What the paper *does* is even more interesting in our reading. The text performs not only a discursive shift towards more sustainability; it promotes a new rationality of governance in the CFP. It uses two strategies to that end.

Firstly, and in contrast to the previous reform, the Green paper advocates a "result-based approach". In this regard, the text promotes fishing within the so-called maximum sustainable yield (MSY) as the desired policy outcome, together with eliminating discards and ensuring a low ecological impact of fisheries (European Commission 2009, 9).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the text indicates a shift from a focus on the security of consumer supply and the economic well-being of the industry towards an increasing emphasis of the ecological and the resulting social-economic sustainability of European fisheries. Knowledge, and scientific knowledge, in particular, is to be used here as a benchmark for setting particular policy goals. In contrast to earlier documents, it is not the member states or the Commission who determine what the desired policy outcome should be, but scientific experts.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly and relatedly, in its move towards the results-based approach, the paper leaves the implementation and actual pursuit of the CFP's aims not just to member states but especially to the industry itself. Therewith, the efficiency narrative changes its form once again: from 2009 on, we find demands for a more decentralized policy process in fisheries that also advocate increasing self-management by the industry. This would not only lead to a "simpler and cheaper policy", as the Commission paper argues, but also to a policy implementation that would be

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<sup>2</sup> Both the MSY concept (by 2015 "where possible" and no later than 2020 for all stocks) and a 95% discard ban have been approved in the trilogues in May 2014 by representatives of the Parliament, Council and Commission.

<sup>3</sup> This aspect is controversial. In Parliament, critics of the CFP reform frequently challenged knowledge claims of "science", calling for more and better research and pointing to the supposed "knowledge gaps" that would make decision-making based on scientific knowledge problematic.

“more sensitive to specific local conditions” and “give the industry more responsibility in shaping its own destiny” (European Commission 2009, 11). Moreover, such a strategy would arguably “enable governments and the industry to adapt the implementation of the policy to their needs and to find the best solutions both technically and economically” (European Commission 2009, 11). The open method of coordination is to be applied to identify ‘best practices’ among national policy measures to improve the competitiveness of the sector (European Council 2013). Decentralization and self-management subsequently also become important topics in the plenary debates in Strasbourg (for examples see the European Parliament resolution of 25 February 2010 on the Green Paper or the parliamentary debate on 5 February 2013 on the CFP reform).

In this new version of the narrative, then, the industry ceases to be regarded as a passive beneficiary or the cause of the problem of over-fishing; rather, it becomes its solution. The Green Paper (European Commission 2009) uses a language of “responsibilities” and “rights” that are to be accorded to the fishing industry in order to incorporate them into the governmental system. However, to the extent that “short-sighted” fishermen remain uneasy partners, the “higher insights” of the institutions are still needed to ensure long-term oriented policy-making (see for examples the remarks by Commissioner Damanaki and several speakers in the aforementioned plenary debates).

In its final stage, our narrative of progress undergoes a dramatic catharsis: the fishing sectors needs to take responsibility for the sustainability of fisheries. At the same time, the European Parliament enters the stage in the 2013/14 reform process and with it environmental NGOs that bring more ecological voices to the debate. The narrative has still a decidedly progressive undertone, yet, in contrast to the early story of rational planning for economic growth and industry support, we find a more long-term oriented policy narrative that draws on ideas of participation and self-governance accompanied by a continuing high level of confidence in market-based mechanisms.

## 6 Conclusion

Our paper traced narratives in the EU fisheries policy. In this endeavor, it identified a dominant but changing narrative of efficiency and progress as a red line in the text, which eventually integrated a rising sustainability narrative. Importantly, the analysis allowed us to detect the combined presence of a discernable sustainability focus and a new discourse focusing on governance *at a distance*, i.e. relying on stakeholders' self-governance. In fact, one may be inclined to consider the new rationalities of governance the more prominent narrative. This finding corroborates research in other fields of EU governance, such as migration (Aradau, Huysmans, and Squire 2010), neighborhood policy (Pijpers 2009), economic and labor market policy (Haahr 2004) or gender mainstreaming (Wöhl 2010). Importantly, in the case of the CFP, the subject and object of power are private companies. In this discourse, the fishing industry is treated almost like human beings; they have to make a living, be supported, aided, steered, they have to learn and take responsibility, and they may also be granted rights in exchange.

This reminds us of Streeck's (2013) diagnosis of EU governance in the current financial crisis, where he distinguishes between two competing audiences to which the authorities' pay attention: the society of people and the society of business (cf. also Cheneval and Schimmelfennig 2013, who propose the concept of democratic *demoi*). In the case of the CFP, it seems that the well-being of societies is represented as a mere epiphenomenon of the 'well-being' of the fishing industry. The role of the industry morphed, however, from a silent *beneficiary* of the structural policy via that of a *cause* of over-fishing to the current position as both governmental *object* and *partner*.

Our results leave us with two possible interpretations regarding the future and actual impact of the current CFP reforms. On the one hand, critical observers are likely to be inclined to distrust the focus on self-governance and expect the reforms to be just another example of the EU's performance of its environmental ambitions, accompanied by a failure to achieve any substantial improvements in the actual sustainability of fish stocks. In the critical literature, we can notice growing weariness of simplistic arguments that increased participation will generally lead to improved sustainability outcomes. After all, one needs to look very closely at who effectively gains from a move towards 'participation' (Griffin 2013). Indeed, studies focusing on

'good governance' and the move towards regional planning show that the development of stakeholder driven regional advisory councils (RAC) has not per se led to more democratic or more sustainable policies (for examples from fisheries, see Griffin 2013 and Bailey et al. 2013).<sup>4</sup> As the general literature on interest group influence has shown, not every stakeholder has comparable resources to participate in the same manner (Fuchs 2005). Thus, a more decentralized policy-formulation process and opportunities for stakeholder dialogue in the EU fisheries policy will tend to privilege particular stakeholders (Griffin 2010). As a result, the EU turn towards "openness" and "participation" in the wake of the 2001 *White Paper on Governance* (2001) sparked substantial critical research that scrutinized the impacts of this turn (Hajer 2003; Howlett and Rayner 2006; Jordan, Wurzel, and Zito 2005; Shore 2011). Specifically, scholars have associated the so-called open method of coordination with an introduction of neo-liberal market logics to deliberative policy processes (Dale 2004; Haahr 2004; Walters and Haahr 2005; Wöhl 2010) and highlighted its de-politicizing effects (Blühdorn 2013; Jordan et al. 2003; Rose and Miller 1992; Swyngedouw 2005).

On the other hand, more optimistic observers may stress the advancement of sincere sustainability objectives in the texts besides the identified changes in the rationalities of governance. Under certain circumstances sustainability and (a certain form of) efficiency narratives may become intertwined. Again, critical observers would probably still expect efficiency aspects to triumph over sustainability ones in this situation. After all, the pursuit of efficiency improvements has been a popular political objective for many decades now with little improvements in the actual sustainability of societies, partly because an efficiency focus tends not to hurt the dominant economic model of mass production and consumption much (Lorek and Fuchs 2013). But the CFP may prove an interesting challenge to this pattern, resulting from a – to critical observers counter-intuitive – dynamic associated with the pattern of participation in the process of policy development, as can be illustrated with the rise of the NGO coalition during the recent reform.

Interestingly, the identified shift in the discourse on fisheries governance seems to follow a neoliberal pattern. And yet this discursive change preceded the so-far most fundamental reformulation in the EU's fisheries governance. It is tempting to speculate that the move away

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<sup>4</sup> The RACS were set up as a result of the 2002 reform of the CFP to increase its legitimacy among stakeholders; however, their meetings seem to be rather dominated by the fishing industry (see also Griffin 2010).

from the rationality of control towards a more indirect form of governance opened a space, in this particular case, in which social and political actors were able to use a window of opportunity for sustainability reforms. As such, overall constellations of interests and actors in the fisheries policy field may not have changed observably, then, but changes in the process of policy development may have allowed certain actors and ideas more influence, after all. If that is the case, further inquiries will have to return to the question under which circumstances participatory processes may, in fact, allow social and environmental actors and ideas to accompany (or even subvert?) processes of governmentalization and neoliberal efficiency norms, in spite of the predominance of business power especially in EU governance, which earlier studies found (Fuchs 2005). At the same time, it is important not to forget: we may still see the failure of CFP reforms in making significant progress towards sustainability, which the identified rise of the new rationalities of governance narrative would lead many critical observers to expect.

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