

# A matter of human-sea relations

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Insights from leisure boating in Bohuslän, Sweden

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## Abstract

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Global environmental governance increasingly seeks to establish sustainable use of the oceans. This PhD thesis asks what we can learn about this issue by exploring leisure boating in Bohuslän, Sweden, as both a *perceived* and as a *practiced* human-sea relation.

The thesis analyses governance agencies' perceptions of human-sea relations based on the texts produced in relation to the implementation in Sweden of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). Boaters' perceptions about their boats and the seas are explored through interviews and a survey that drew inspiration from theories of consumption. Boating practices are explored through practice and affordance theories as related to interviews and participant observations.

As regards perceptions, the thesis finds that governance actors mostly see leisure boating and the seas as economically valuable and thus worth preserving. Boaters' perceptions acknowledge that boating causes environmental impacts on the seas, but their consumer role prevails, whereby they aspire to obtain progressively larger recreational boats. This tendency emerges from economic abilities, emotional drives, and social aspirations – all of which are supported by market forces, such as the production of cheaper boats and the increase in coastal real estate prices.

Exploring practices of home-making demonstrates that the materials today included in boating afford comfortable housing at sea. Analyses of touring and painting practices demonstrate how boating performances emerge through a process of negotiation, so that different affordances that exist in relation to the Swedish archipelago are tapped into or avoided.

The study makes several contributions. First, it offers valuable new evidence for the empirically under-researched field of leisure boating in Sweden. Second, it contributes to tourism research by showing how practices change over time and how, through the equipment that tourists use, affordances of the environment can be negotiated. Third, the thesis finds that what boaters do in nature does not necessarily reflect their more general perceptions about nature. Instead of focusing merely on how people perceive or value nature, this study suggests that it might be effective also to highlight socio-material practices. Materials can importantly shape practices at sea that are environmentally problematic; and yet, at the same time, material-based solutions can also promote sustainable use of the seas.

Keywords: Sustainable use of the seas, leisure boating, Sweden, perceptions, practices

Lepoša N. and Knutsson P. (n.d.): The MSFD framing of human-sea relations: a case of marine tourism in Sweden (under review for *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*)

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