Bridging organizations and the role of information brokering in Caribbean coral reef governance networks

Angelie Peterson1, Rachel Turner1, Clare Fitzsimmons2, Johanna Forster2, Selina Stead2, and Robin Mahon1

1Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies, University of the West Indies (CERMES) – Barbados
2Newcastle University – United Kingdom

Abstract

Caribbean coral reefs are extremely important to the region’s tourism, fishing industries, and coastal protection, yet reef degradation continues due to a variety of threats. In the region many actors are involved in or related to reef use, research, management, and decision-making. The presence of organizations that can bridge among such diverse actors has been associated with enhancing adaptive capacity and achieving better management outcomes (Crona and Parker 2012). Social network analysis (SNA) is a tool that can be used to identify brokers, or actors in bridging positions (Gould and Fernandez 1989). However, structural properties of the networks identified through SNA will only tell a portion of the story. Insights allowed by the study of networks gain more value when additional information is added, such as the function of these networks or the outcomes produced by these networks. This study investigates information-sharing networks in coral reef governance using SNA alongside qualitative research methods to identify actors in structural brokerage roles and the function of the bridges they provide. Representatives (n=262) from multiple actor groups, including local and national government, NGOs, community organizations, and resource user groups from 12 communities across four Caribbean countries (Barbados, Belize, Honduras, and St Kitts and Nevis) were interviewed to determine their roles in reef governance. Results identify actors that hold significant brokering positions in the information networks. The structures of these networks are assessed with survey responses from resource users at each of the 12 study sites (n=545). Function of these bridges is significantly correlated to resource users’ perceived opportunity to participate in decisions made about coral reefs. Exploring the data found using SNA in this manner can help further the understanding of the roles and effectiveness of these organizations and can lead to better support of bridging organizations in facilitating collaboration for enhanced reef management outcomes.

Keywords: Social networks, Governance, Participation

*Speaker