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Further Reading:

O'Connor, E. Hynes, S., Chen, W., Papadopoulou, N. and Smith, C. (2021). Investigating societal attitudes towards marine ecosystem restoration. Restoration Ecology [early view online].

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/rec.13239>

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Understanding the public's knowledge of marine ecosystem restoration important to develop effective management policy

Ecological restoration is now regarded as an important management tool to reverse the degradation of many marine ecosystems. The United Nation has launched a new initiative entitled the "Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030)" that aims to halt further degradation and to accelerate existing restoration efforts for land, aquatic, and marine ecosystems. The need for restoration is also stressed in EU legislation such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Birds and Habitats Directive, the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive and the Common Fisheries Policy. This research, as part of the EU Horizon 2020 MERCES (Marine Ecosystem Restoration in Changing European Seas) Project, involved comprehensive national level surveys of the Norwegian and Italian publics' knowledgeability of, and attitudes toward marine restoration activity in their country's respective marine waters.

Research Findings

The results of the survey provide insight into attitudes toward restoration in maritime countries affected by both current and future policy programmes on restoration. The comparison of results also provides insight into regional variation in public attitudes. The analysis of the survey responses showed that among both populations, there is broad support for restoration despite a lack of awareness of actual marine restoration activity. Differences in responses to the attitudinal questions across countries were tested using standard statistical independence tests and multi-group confirmatory factor analysis. Based on these tests significant differences were found between the two country samples in attitudes toward the completion of restoration and attitudes toward how restoration should be funded. Examining within-group variation, for both samples, regression analysis indicates that a mixture of socio-economic and context-specific variables are significant predictors of awareness and attitudes toward restoration, while environmental awareness is a positive and significant indicator of attitude toward restoration.

Policy Implications

This research is one of the first in-depth empirical examinations of attitudes toward marine restoration among the general public. By developing an understanding of the attitudes of the public toward ecosystem restoration, policymakers can be better informed as to how future policy interventions in this regard should be designed. Also, as taxpayers are likely to fund much of the needed restoration efforts, effective public participation and public support will be key success factors for marine restoration projects. The results of this research suggest that public support could be increased through campaigns to increase awareness of marine restoration activity. Recognising the public's current level of knowledge with regard to marine ecosystems and restoration can also assist in the development of educational tools and effective management policy that might also influence behaviour that in turn may help reduce future damages to marine ecosystems.