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Constructions of Coastal Conservation in Ireland

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

With the 2023 judgement from the EU's Court of Justice declaring a failure in Ireland's environmental conservation measures, it is useful to unpack how conservation and space are defined in the state. With a specific focus on coastal and marine conservation due to the dynamics present between local communities, national government and EU actors, and the economic and cultural reliance on fishing, this thesis asks how the coastal space and its conservation are articulated within state legislation and the Biodiversity Action Plans. Through a discourse-material analysis, it is argued that the current conservation policy and legislation partakes in a sustainability discourse, which attempts to rectify the growing material pressures from habitat and species loss with continued economic growth. This is then further contextualised within the socio-historical and current dynamics of local and non-local actors, as they contend with the changes required to sustain the environment, and struggle over competing understandings of space. Through this analysis, future possibilities for conservation can be explored, with specific attention to collaborative work between multiple levels of governance and public actors that work to find alternative ways forward for conservation without alienating local communities.

Keywords

Ecology, Sustainability, Conservation, Material-Discourse Analysis, Ireland, Discourse Analysis, Marine, Coastal

Abstrakt

S rozsudkem Soudního dvora EU z roku 2023, který prohlásil, že irská ochranná opatření selhala, je užitečné rozvést, jak jsou ve státě definovány ochrana životního prostředí a prostor. Tato práce s konkrétním zaměřením na ochranu pobřežních a mořských oblastí, se souvislosti na dynamiku přítomnou mezi místními komunitami, národní vládou, a aktéry EU a ekonomickou a kulturní závislosti na rybolovu, tato práce se ptá, jak je pobřežní prostor a jeho ochrana formulovana v rámci státní legislativy a akčního plány pro biologickou rozmanitost. Prostřednictvím analýzy diskurzního materiálu se argumentuje, že současná ochranářská politika a legislativa se účastní diskuse o udržitelnosti, ktera se pokouší napravit rostoucí materiální tlaky ze ztráty biotopu a živočišných a rostlinných druhů s pokračujícím ekonomickým růstem. To je pak dále kontextualizováno v rámci společensko-historické a současné dynamiky místních a globálních aktérů, kteří se potýkají se změnami nutnými k zachování životního prostředí a bojují s konkurenčním chápáním prostoru. Prostřednictvím této analýzy lze prozkoumat budoucí možnosti ochrany přírody, se zvláštním důrazem na spolupráci mezi více úrovněmi správy a veřejnými činiteli, kteří pracují na hledání alternativních způsobů ochrany, aniž by si odcizili místní komunity.

Klíčová slova

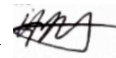
Ekologie, Udržitelnost, Ochrana, Analýza materiálového-diskurzu, Irsko, Analýza diskurzu, Mořská, Pobřežní

Range of thesis: 57 pages and 122 207 characters

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague ….

April 30, 2024 Helena Minsky 

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Main research question (max. 250 characters)**:**

1.) How is Ireland's coast and its conservation constructed in legislation and Biodiversity Plans?
   a.) How are they articulated in relation to state, EU, local, and environmental actors?
   b.) How are these articulations shaped by postcolonial and colonial history?

Current state of research on the topic (max. 1800 characters)**:**

Given that Ireland was brought to the European Court of Justice for failure to fulfill obligations to conservation Directive 92/43/EEC in 2023 (Case C-444/21), special attention should be given to the state. This thesis attempts to question why the Irish state's conservation failed EU standards, by undertaking a material-discourse analysis of Irish conservation policies. The analysis of policy as discourse has already been explored in many fields, including sustainability (Montessori, Farrelly, Mulderrig 2013), including research that pursues a theoretical-discourse analysis of international organizations' environmental policy (Methmann 2010). There are also those who have discussed marine spatial planning from a post-structuralist perspective, which will be instrumental in applying discourse theory to the case study of Irish legislation (Tafon 2018; Peel, Lloyd 2004).

The current state of research on the Irish coast itself will also prove useful. One article looks at the varied constructions of a coastal area in Ireland and how it was shaped by a nuclear power plant, (Brannigan, Crowe, & Cabana, 2019) which will help guide the understanding of constructed spaces on the coast. Finally, there is an article on the overall approach of Ireland to protected area management (Healy, Mcdonagh, 2009). Each of these works will further contextualize the legislation within the broader area management of Ireland. There are also many analyses of the effectiveness of maritime policy in the region (Schéré, Schreckenberg, Dawson, Jones 2021). However, the research has so far failed to look at broader trends within Irish maritime planning, and the ways it is shaped by discursive construction of the Irish coast and its conservation.

Expected theoretical framework (max. 1800 characters)**:**

The theoretical framework will be drawn from poststructural ecological and postcolonial studies to understand possible constructions of conservation and the Irish coast. One article that this thesis will work from deals with the discursive-material analysis of a documentary film written by Carpentier, Doudaki, and Pajerová (2021). This utilizes macro-textual discourse theory and applies it in combination with material approaches. By utilizing the application of discourse theory to an environmental subject, the paper makes use of several dominant environmental discourses that can help guide the research proposed here, most broadly, examining anthropocentric and ecocentric value systems, as well as solutionist and survivalist approaches to conservation (Carpentier, Doudaki, Pajerová 2021). There will also be the use of theories within political geography, including

Henri Lefebvre, for theories on the construction of space (Lefebvre 1974), as well as Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987), which looks to the imperialist production of space, and other postcolonial theories found in the work of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2013) to examine the convergence of the material environment and the cultural rewritings of space. By examining the case study in conversation with these theoretical texts, a more thorough framework will be built.

Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis (max. 1800 characters)**:**

To pursue my research, I will be undertaking a textual analysis of Ireland's maritime legislation and planning, available through the Irish Statute Book, and the National Parks and Wildlife Service website, which fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The method of analysis will be discursive-material analysis, in order to give special attention to the ecological components in the Irish coastal waters, and the materiality of the natural world within discourse theory (Carpentier, Doudaki, Pajerová 2021; Carpentier 2017). A reductive approach will be utilized, building a theoretical framework to identify how conservation and coastal spaces are articulated within the texts.

Expected research design (data to be analyzed, for example, the titles of analyzed newspapers and selected time period):

The data to be analyzed is drawn from Irish legislation and policy, including all of the National Parks and Wildlife Service's National Biodiversity Plans to date, from 2002, 2011, and 2017, as well as the Wildlife Act, 1976, Wildlife Amendment Act, 2000, and the most recent Wildlife Amendment Act, 2023. There will also be an analysis of the Whale Fisheries Act, 1937, and the Sea Fisheries Protection Act, 1933. While these documents encompass a rather broad time period, they are chosen to best represent an overview of national Irish policies and the legislative basis for the country's interior maritime and coastal conservation. This selection may also change if necessary, to include pieces from earlier in history to ascertain precolonial and colonial constructions. It is also important to note that the texts will not be analyzed as a whole, but only so far as they refer to coastal and marine spaces. By analyzing the changes in the updated legislation and most recent biodiversity plans, I hope to understand whether the dominant discourses in maritime and coastal policy and articulations of conservation and the coast have changed, and if so, to what degree, to better understand any underlying power dynamics that shape national conservation, including both human and non-human actors.

Expected thesis structure (chapters and subchapters with brief description of their content):

Introduction
- A brief introduction on the main research question pursued regarding the construction of Irish coastal spaces and the justification for said research in the ECJ court case, as well as methodology and key findings.

Contextualization of the Case Study: Irish Coast
- This section will dive further into the context of the Irish coast, looking at historic, economic, social, and ecological components that must be considered.

Conservation in the Irish Sea: Key Players and Practices
- This section will build on the contextualization by looking at the key players in conservation including international, national, local, and ecological actors.

Literature Review
- The literature review will look at the current research in maritime policy and communications, especially the state of research directed toward Ireland, as well as research directed toward policy and discourse analysis, and discursive-material analysis.

Theoretical Framework:
- The theoretical framework will build from the literature review to explore key theories of ecology and nature, especially inspired by postcolonial and poststructuralist theories in line with the methodological framework of this paper.

Methodology
- This will provide the methodological framework, outlining the macro approaches to discourse analysis, as well as discursive-material analysis and its application to environmental discourse and policy, followed by a discussion of the data selection and specific research design.

Analysis:

- In this analysis, the discourse of policy directives will be examined within the methodological framework, starting with the beginning of conservation with the Whale Fisheries Act, 1937 and Sea Fisheries Protection Act, 1933, followed by the Wildlife Act in each of its iterations from 1976, 2000, and 2023, and finally, the currently published National Biodiversity Plans of 2002, 2011, and 2017.

Conclusion:

- The conclusion will reiterate the main findings while contextualizing them among broader trends in coastal conservation, and discussing the limits and possible future of national conservation.

Basic literature list (at least 5 most important works related to the topic and the method(s) of analysis; all works should be briefly characterized on 2-5 lines):

Key works:

1.) ASHCROFT, Bill, Gareth GRIFFITHS, and Helen TIFFIN. *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts.* London: Routledge, 2000. http://staff.uny.ac.id/sites/default/files/pendidikan/else-liliani-ssmhum/postcolonialstudiesthekeyconceptsroutledgekeyguides.pdf.
   a.) Provides an introduction to postcolonial theories including environmental.
2.) CARPENTIER, Nico. *The Discursive-Material Knot: Cyprus in Conflict and Community Media Participation*. Peter Lang, 2017.
   a.) Outlines the use of discursive-material analysis that will be used in this text, through the case study of Cyprus and its conflict and community media.
3.) CARPENTIER, Nico, Vaia DOUDAKI, and Anna Rozsypal PAJEROVA. "Conflicting and entangled human–nature relationships: A discursive-material analysis of the documentary film Kiruna - A Brand New World." *People and Nature* 3, (2021): 1166–1178. https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10233.
   a.) An article outlining the use of discursive-material analysis in the context of ecological components, working from the framework of Nico Carpentier's 2017 *The Discursive-Material Knot*.
4.) CARPENTER, Carol. *Power in Conservation: Environmental Anthropology Beyond Political Ecology.* 1st ed. Routledge, 2020.
   a.) Provides a look into power dynamics in conservation and ecological theories.
5.) CARTER, Paul. *The Road to Botany Bay*. New York: Knopf, 1987.
   a.) Examines the creation of space and imperialist discourse.
6.) HUGGAN, Graham, and Helen TIFFIN. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment.* Routledge: London and New York, 2006.
   a.) Provides a closer analysis of ecocriticism within postcolonial theory.
7.) DRYZEK, John S. *The politics of the earth: Environmental discourses.* 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
   a.) Looks to environmental discourses and politics.
8.) LACLAU, Ernesto, and Chantal MOUFFE. *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy.* VERSO, 1985.
   a.) A founding work within discourse theory and post-Marxism from which discourse-theoretical and material-discursive analysis builds from.
9.) LEFEBVRE, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1974.
   a.) One of the founding works within political geography and poststructuralism that discusses the discursive creation and utilization of space, and the ways society constructs the natural and urban world.

Other Works Cited:

- BRANNIGAN, John, Frances RYFIELD, Tasman CROWE, David CABANA. The Languo of Flows": Ecosystem Services, Cultural Value, and the Nuclear Legacy in the Irish Sea. *Environmental Humanities* 1 November 2019. Vol. 11, no. 2, p. 280–301. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-7754456.
- Case C-4441/21 *European Commission v. Ireland* [2023] European Court of Justice. Available from: https://curia.europa.eu/juris/fiche.jsf;jsessionid=EA093EE54F29A7337B958E9B0737F719?id=C%3B444%3B21%3BRD%3B1%3BP%3B1%3B&nat=or&mat=or&pcs=Oor&jur=C%2CT%2CF&num=C-444%252F21&for=&jge=&dates=&language=en&pro=&cit=none%252CC%252CCJ%252CR%252C2008E

%252C%252C%252C%252C%252C%252C%252C%252C%252C%252Ctrue%252Cfalse%252Cfalse&oqp=&td=%3BALL&avg=&lgrec=en&lg=&cid=1285009.

- HEALY, Noel, and John MCDONAGH. "Commodification and conflict: What can the Irish approach to protected area management tell us?" *Society & natural resources*. 2009. Vol 22, no. 4, p. 381-391. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920801978622.
- METHMANN, Chris Paul. "'Climate Protection' as Empty Signifier: A Discourse Theoretical Perspective on Climate Mainstreaming in World Politics." *Millennium.* 2010. Vol. 39, no. 2, p. 345-372. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829810383606.
- MONTESSORI, Nicolina Montesano, Michael FARRELLY, and Jane MULDERRIG. *Critical policy discourse analysis*. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019.
- PEEL, Deborah, and M. Greg LLOYDl. "The Social Reconstruction of the Marine Environment: Towards Marine Spatial Planning?" *Town planning review.* 2004. Vol. 75 no. 3, p. 359-378. Available from: https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.75.3.6.
- SCHERE, Constance M., Kate SCHRECKENBERG, Terence P. DAWSON, and Nikoleta JONES. "It's Just Conservation: To What Extent Are Marine Protected Areas in the Irish Sea Equitably Governed and Managed?" *Frontiers in Marine Science.* 14 June 2021. Vol. 8. Available from: https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2021.668919
- TAFON, Ralph V. "Taking power to sea: Towards a post-structuralist discourse theoretical critique of marine spatial planning." *Environment and planning C: Politics and space.* 2018. Vol. 36, no. 2, p. 258-273. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654417707527.

Related theses and dissertations (list of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. theses defended at Charles University or other academic institutions in the last five years):

- JÍROVÁ, Anna. *Seal Hunting in the Canadian Arctic: Conflicting Perspectives on EU Regulation 1007/2009*. Diploma thesis, supervisor Fiřtová, Magdalena. Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Katedra severoamerických studií, 2019. Digitální repozitář UK, https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/111154/120342825.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
- NOVÁK, Vladimír. *Ecocritical discourse analysis of corporate environmental reports*. Diplomová práce, vedoucí Šaldová, Pavlína. Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta, Ústav anglického jazyka a didaktiky, 2019. Digitální repozitář UK, https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/107352.
- ORTEGA MEDINA, Ana Gabriela. *A Critical Discourse Analysis of Sustainability Narratives in the Baltic Marine Spatial Planning Forum.* Master's thesis, supervisor Ango, Tola Gemechu. Stockholm: Stockholms University, Human Geography, 2023. DiVa Portal. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1773549/FULLTEXT01.pdf.

Date / Signature of the student:
07/11/2023

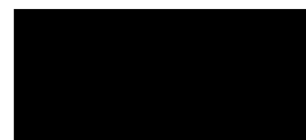
THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY THE ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR:

I confirm that I have consulted this research proposal with the author and that the proposal is related to my field of expertise at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

I agree to be the Thesis supervisor.

Surname and name of the supervisor

Nicoletta, Gerardo Costabile



Date / Signature of the supervisor 7 November 2023

Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis:

The proposal is rich and promising, well structured and with a sounding methodological approach. It could be interesting to explore the topic in relation to current debates about decolonial political ecology as well as postcolonial history of Ireland.
Further recommendations of literature related to the topic: **Livesey, James, and Stuart Murray. "Post-Colonial Theory and Modern Irish Culture." Irish Historical Studies, vol. 30, no. 119, 1997, pp. 452–61.** **Cleary, Joe, 'Postcolonial Ireland', in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire*, Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series (Oxford, 2005; online edn, Oxford Academic, 3 Oct. 2011),** **Ferdinand, Malcom (2022) Decolonial ecology: thinking from the Caribbean world. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022. (Chapter 1)** **Fletcher, Robert (2023). Failing Forward: The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Conservation. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.**

Contents

Introduction........ 2
1. Literature Review........ 3
1. Current Issues in Irish Marine and Coastal Conservation and Key Actors........ 3
2. Conservation and Colonial Re-Articulations........ 7
3. Discourse Approaches to Environmental Studies........ 9
3.1. Discourse Theory and Policy........ 9
3.2. Discourse-Material Approaches........ 10
Conclusion........ 11
2. Theoretical Framework........ 12
1. Discourse Theory........ 13
2. Materializing Discourse........ 14
3. The Dimensions of the Discursive-Material Knot........ 15
4. Spatializing Discourse and Post-Colonial Approaches to Space........ 16
5. Discursive Constructions of Nature........ 18
3. Methodology........ 22
1. Discursive-Material Analysis Key Concepts........ 22
2. The Application of Discursive-Material Analysis for National Environmental Policy........ 26
3. Data Selection........ 27
3. Analysis........ 28
1. Contextualization of the Case Study: The Irish Coast........ 28
1.1. Irish History: Colonialism and Coastal Localities and Management:........ 28
1.2. Earlier Irish Legislation, 1933-1937........ 33
2. Wildlife Act and Amendments........ 35
2.1. Wildlife (Ireland) Act, 1976........ 35
2.2. Wildlife (Amendment) (Ireland) Acts, 2000, 2010, 2012, 2023........ 37
3. National Biodiversity Action Plans........ 38
3.1. National Biodiversity Action Plan of 2002........ 38
3.2. National Biodiversity Action Plan of 2011........ 41
3.3. National Biodiversity Action Plan of 2017........ 44
3.4. National Biodiversity Action Plan of 2023........ 46
5. Discussion........ 51
1. How is Ireland's coast and its conservation constructed in legislation and Biodiversity Plans?........ 51
2. How is the coast and its conservation articulated in relation to state, EU, local, and environmental actors?........ 52
3. How are these articulations shaped by postcolonial and colonial history?........ 53
4. Ways Forward for Coastal Conservation........ 54
Conclusion........ 55
Bibliography........ 58

Introduction

In June 2023, the Court of Justice of the European Union made the judgement that Ireland had failed to fulfil the conservation measures dictated by the Habitats Directive (O'Sullivan, 2023). When bringing forward the case, the European Commission emphasised the importance of biodiversity, as not just for its "intrinsic value" but also as of the "utmost importance for human survival" (European Commission v. Ireland, 2023, sec. I.2). The campaigns officer from the Irish Wildlife Trust seconded that Ireland needed to do more, saying that "the State has put profit before clean water and healthy land and sea that we all depend on" (O'Sullivan, 2023, para. 16). If the Irish government is not doing enough, what direction should Irish conservation take going forward? And, what has been shaping it so far? Examining the discursive elements that define the importance of biodiversity, whether that be for food, aesthetic value, or capital, and the changing and endangered nature of biodiversity itself leads to questions about how we construct and value natural spaces and the biodiversity within. Additionally, the failure of Ireland to fulfil the Habitats Directive and the EU backlash that followed raises questions about *who* gets to dictate and shape conservation narratives. Which players shape the construction of conservation and decide what these natural spaces can and will be used for? This is further complicated by Ireland's position as a post-colonial space, where economic and social practices have been affected by British imperialism. This has been explored in the contexts of many Irish spaces, such as conservation and wetlands, but one area of land that has been neglected in this conversation is coastal and marine spaces, which are also cited in the European Commission's judgement with special attention to coastal lagoons (European Commission v. Ireland, 2023, section iii, art. 28). These are especially pertinent to the conversation due to the cultural and economic significance of fisheries to Ireland (Thompson, 2015). To rectify this gap, this thesis seeks to answer how the coastal space and its conservation are articulated within state legislation and the Biodiversity Action Plans. This is then

broken down further into two questions: a) How is the natural coast and its conservation articulated in relation to state, EU, local, and environmental actors, and, b) How are these articulations shaped by postcolonial and colonial history? To answer these questions, a discourse-material analysis of the state legislation and action plans that manage and protect the biodiversity of the Irish coastal and marine spaces is undertaken to determine how the space itself and the notion of conservation are constructed on the national level. This is combined with socio-historical and ecological contextualization, to bring to light the various components that contribute to the discursive construction of the coastal spaces and conservation in Ireland. Through this analysis, I argue that the legislation and action plans articulate the coast and its conservation through an anthropocentric sustainability discourse, where economic development remains central to conservation narratives. Additionally, I argue that through the policies that sustain this discursive construction, there is an alienation of local actors, as policies are dictated through international and regional directives, whose top-down directives of management can echo colonial and imperial practices of fisheries management that historically limited the growth of fisheries in Ireland.

1. Literature Review

1. Current Issues in Irish Marine and Coastal Conservation and Key Actors

In reaction to the European Court of Justice's judgement that Ireland had failed to properly establish and maintain areas of conservation, Eamon Ryan, the Irish Minister for Environment and Climate accepted the decision, stating that Ireland has "not prioritised the protection of nature and biodiversity in the way that we should" (O'Sullivan, 2023, para. 9). Instead, as argued by the Irish Wildlife Trust officer, the state prioritised profit (O'Sullivan, 2023, para. 16). But in framing the issue as one of conservation of state profit against the environment, other stakeholders are erased. For the coastal space, this is especially relevant to fisheries, who utilise the waters, and are held to

the conservation limits and boundaries enforced by the Habitats Directive and other EU initiatives, with Special Areas of Conservation, protected species, and fishing quotas. Because of this dynamic, there is a conception that the European Union is benefitting from Irish fish, while enforcing the European Economic Communities Common Fisheries Policies and other conservation methods on the Irish people (Hennigan, 2015). In the *Irish Times,* this sentiment against EU policies is voiced by a trawler in Donegal (Thompson, 2015). The trawler, Rawdon, notes that he has felt the effects of the Common Fisheries Policies, saying that while he "had reached [his] whiting quota in the first week. [He] had plenty of [his] quota left for hake and pollock, but [] couldn't find them" (Thompson, 2015). The limited fishing zones established through conservation are also discussed, placing the conservation lobby in conflict with commercial fishers. Rawdon states that "The staff in the Department of the Marine and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority get their wages every week. We are the only ones producing anything in this industry. They exist because we exist, yet we have become the enemy" (Thompson, 2015). This is especially pressing with the realities of Brexit setting in, as Irish fishers lose access to waters that were previously available through Britain (Specia, 2023). However, the ecological realities are just as important, with changing fish stocks and other environmental impacts (Thompson, 2015). These opposing pressures from the ecological concerns raised at the state level, and the economic and cultural importance of the coastal space expressed by local fisheries highlight the discursive struggle within the coastal space, as each stakeholder understands the space in a different way.

To address these conflicting understandings of space, and the stakeholders who sustain them, it is useful to look at previous work analysing the dynamics of the dynamics of the EU, local, and government actors in other conservation fields. In a study of Irish peatland conservation, O'Riordan et al. (2014) point to a transition in the 2010s to participatory discourses in Irish conservation, with efforts to include humans and nature in the considerations of conservation

without separating them, and increased attention to the concerns of local communities (pp. 123-124). However, O'Riordan et al. also reference the dynamics between scientific discourses pushed forward by the EU and active local participation, which can limit the latter by dictating and rationalising the top-down approach (2014, p. 131). They address how the National Parks and Wildlife Service of Ireland (NPWS) has faced backlash for an apparent top-down approach that uses science to legitimate decision-making and position it as apolitical (O'Riordan et al., 2014, p. 133-134). In response, the NPWS claimed that many of the decisions were due to the regulations they face from the EU, which have also been critiqued for their scientific rationality and the limitations it places on active local engagement (O'Riordan et al., 2014, p. 133-134). This demonstrates the difficulties of aligning the desires of different actors, and effectively creating an equitable and democratic approach to conservation.

In marine and coastal management specifically, Schéré et al. (2021) look to marine protected areas in Ireland and the UK, to determine whether local stakeholders are effectively able to participate in creating conservation policies. They note that one of the mistakes of marine protected areas (MPAs) is that they do not include key stakeholders in policy and practice decisions, especially those who rely on fishing and other marine resources (Schéré et al., 2021, p. 3). They argue that when equity for the local stakeholders is considered, it is alienated in measurable data, which may not appropriately address the issues faced by locals on the ground (Schere et al., 2021, p. 2). Their findings determined that locals felt alienated from the process of planning, without open communication for the general public to voice their concerns (Schéré et al., 2021, p. 12). This demonstrates that even within policies that claim participation, the realities can be very different, especially without easily accessible spaces for participation. By acknowledging this discrepancy, we can pursue a more nuanced understanding of how democratic and local participation is discursively represented, seeing the extent to which the legislation and Action Plans actively build or limit the creation of democratic spaces and how scientific

discourses may undercut participation. One way to do so is provided within the framework of an article from Ralph Tafon (2017) who takes post-structural approaches to marine spatial planning. Tafon (2017) advocates for a view of marine spatial planning (MSP) policy as political. Tafon's work looks specifically at the European Union, with a focus on the EU Marine Spatial Planning Directive, concluding that "in different MSP contexts, placed-based marine users and communities draw on different discursive strategies to forge political alliances that seek to challenge dominant MSP norms, but also how such alliances and challenge may be disarticulated and 'managed' by the powers that be" (2017, p. 270). This points to the limitations faced by local communities, and the importance of discourse in maintaining hegemonic articulations of spatial realities.

From this background, it is also important to understand what makes the Irish coast so important to local communities. Ryfield et al., explore coastal conservation through specific spatiality in the analysis of Dublin Bay (2019). They begin by placing Dublin Bay into the policy contexts it is subject to, including its positions as a national nature reserve as well as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the EU legislation, and outlining the organisms that make up the surrounding ecosystem and the pressures that the environment faces including various pollutants (Ryfield et al., 2019, pp. 4-5). They spoke with local communities, experts and decision-makers to ascertain the cultural values of the bay, and the challenges faced (Ryfield et al., 2019, p. 5). While this is more specific to a certain space rather than conservation and coastal spaces of Ireland as a whole, their inclusion and understanding of the Irish coast as a space that interacts with competing actors and discursive constructions, socially, economically, and environmentally is congruent with the aims of this thesis. The cultural inclusion rather than a focus on policy allows for an additional layer of context and discursive understanding, although because of its nature, requires a more narrow approach, and is thus limited in addressing the country's policies as a whole.

2. Conservation and Colonial Re-Articulations

It is also important to address that the power dynamics established in the coastal space do not exist in a historical vacuum, and are founded in and interact with the histories of Ireland and British imperialism. In regards to the question of colonial entanglement and re-articulation of imperial discourses, we can understand the issue through previous work in the marine and coastal space. Within this, it is important to note that the science of coastal conservation is not to be taken for granted but has been built through power negotiations and understanding of the material and social world. There is also not a natural break between coastal conservation and fishing, but these areas have been removed from one another through legislation and governance (Silver, et al., 2022, pp. 169-170). Therefore, work in fisheries sciences can inform how colonial power dynamics exist in conservation. To understand how this can be seen in a non-Irish setting, we can turn to a study focusing on fishing in British Columbia, Canada from Silver et al. (2022). They examine how fishing regulation was created through the competition of colonial fishing fleets (Silver, et al., 2022, p. 168). They specifically examine the theory of "maximum sustainable yield" also known as "MSY" that was built within this colonial context and continues to shape regulation and fisheries science today (Silver et al., 2022, p. 169). Within this theory, there was an encouragement to fish "under exploited" fish populations, and maximise global use, without enforcing international laws and territorial boundaries in the sea (Silver et al., 2022, p. 171). To limit fishing, evidence was required that the maximum limit had been reached and/or surpassed, allowing the legal exploitation of fishing from foreign powers (especially the United States) on 'scientific' grounds (Silver et al., 2022, p. 171). In the 1940s, the acknowledgment and understanding of ecological limitations pushed some US and British ships to obtain as many fish from their own waters, to supplement their numbers with fish further from home (Silver, et al., 2022, pp. 169-170). Silver et al., quote Finley and Oresekes in saying that "For both [US and British] governments, fishing was tied to the freedom of the seas, historic patterns of use, and

territorial claims" (2022, p. 170). This meant that the fishing practices of these countries were intrinsically linked to colonial power dynamics and understandings of use and ownership perpetuated through colonialism. While Canada and other further colonial states are more direct examples of such practices, these discourses also shape fishing policy as a whole, and the legality of coastal use, and thus conservation, and who 'owns' the oceans everywhere. By historicizing fishery management in Canada, Silver et al. provide the basis for navigating the current trends in fishery and overall coastal management from a decolonial perspective, although there are deviations from the specific case study of Ireland due to the variations of colonisation in the Irish and Canadian contexts (2022). The piece is also useful in that it highlights the economic and industrial elements in coastal conservation policy and the ways science can be mobilised to sustain existing power structures in legal frameworks (Silver et al. 2022, p. 174).

In the Irish sphere, there have been studies analysing the colonial impact on conservation, but these have been more occupied with bog and peatlands, as well as the countries built conservation, in the forms of buildings. To start, Parkinson et al. (2015) look at how and to what degree the colonial legacy of Ireland affects the built environment today, applying Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to interviews with national policy actors (pp. 3-5). Their findings touch on how the heritage linked to British imperialism and British elites can be seen as separate from "the heritage of the Irish people" (Parkinson et al., 2015, p. 19). Likewise, Bresnihan and Brodie (2023) look at how colonial logics of economic land use are persistent in the modern treatment of boglands as spaces for wind farms and other green economy industries, removed from the local Irish people (pp. 363-364). Both of these texts demonstrate how legacies of the colonial past persist in the Irish discourses of conservation and land use, and how bringing these histories to light can help unpack power dynamics and current land use.

One piece where the colonial legacies of Ireland *was* explored in relation to EU and Irish dynamics was in Betty Purcell's 1978 news article for *Magill*. In the article, Purcell examined the

Irish fishing industry within a historical context, to analyse fishers reactions to the European Economic Community (EEC) (1978). In the historical background, Purcell points to the threat of Irish fishing to the British industry, and the harm done through British policies enacted from the seventeenth century to curtail the growth of Irish fishing (1978). Purcell argues that while small-scale fishing was allowed, larger industry was blocked and infrastructures were built with the express purpose of not supporting larger-scale boats (Purcell, 1978). Because of this, Purcell advocated for a larger fishing mile limit, to preserve the shallow water fishing in Ireland, to help maintain and grow an industry which has been held back by British imperialism (1978). This demonstrates how colonialism interacts with current practices and realities in the country, and while the article is from 1978, it is still useful to understand the dynamics of Irish fishing, and to analyse the more recent practices of today. Along with the previously mentioned studies in Irish conservation and fishing regulations, this work provides the background to contextualise how colonial and imperial discourses can appear in conservation today.

3. Discourse Approaches to Environmental Studies

3.1. Discourse Theory and Policy

With these issues in conservation, the remaining question is how to approach the analysis of modern conservation without ignoring the historical realities, as well as the competing stake-holders. To maintain cultural specificity, and understand the competing discursive structures, it is useful to turn to poststructural approaches to environmental policy. In 2010, Methmann employed discourse theoretical analysis to analyse international organisations' environmental policy, finding that "globalism, scientism, an ethics of growth and efficiency" are discourses utilised in the organisations that use climate protection as an empty signifier (Methmann, 2010, p. 369). Likewise, Brown uses Laclau's discourse analysis in order to analyse sustainability as an empty signifier (2015). Brown begins by positioning their work within the broader definitions of

Laclau and exploring the history and current state of sustainability both within its initial environmental roots, and its later movement away from these roots to broader social and political applications (2015, pp. 116-125). Their main argument is that while the concept of sustainability has been abused by political elites who have pushed forward the hegemonic articulation of sustainable development, which does not actually address environmental concerns, the concept of sustainability can be utilised to garner wider support and connect social movements through its representation as "a generalised concern for the future" (Brown, 2015, p. 131). These applications guide the application of discourse theory to environmental concepts. Largely, this comes from Brown's analysis of discourse through a socio-historical approach, taking into account the changing nature of discourse and highlighting the significance of these changes, and both Methmann and Brown's application of Laclau's theoretical approach to discourse to analyse policy (Brown, 2015; Methmann, 2010).

3.2. Discourse-Material Approaches

By understanding ecological possibilities within a spatial and cultural specificity we can also allow more space for the consideration of material realities, and how they can invite or disinvite discursive articulations of nature and conservation. To do so, it is useful to examine the approach of discourse-material analysis which builds from the theoretical discourse of Laclau and Mouffe seen in the studies of Brown (2015) and Methmann (2010), but with a more purposeful inclusion of the material (Carpentier, 2017, pp. 6-7). It is this approach that is employed in this thesis, situating the discursive construction within a specific place to examine both the material and discursive roles in shaping the discursive-material knot. To start, Carpentier's work with Doudaki and Pajerová examines an environmental film about a north-Swedish mining city, looking at how the material and social actors are represented through the film (2021). Important to this study is the use of tertiary "sensitising" concepts, which can be used to guide research in qualitative analysis, including dualism which separates humanity from nature, prometheanism, which relies

on the idea that people will be able to solve environmental issues through knowledge and technology, and anthropocentrism, which places humans separate and above the natural world (Carpentier, Doudaki, & Pajerová, pp. 1169-1172). These concepts can be readily applied to the work of this thesis, as understanding how nature is valued and discursively constructed is useful to examinations of conservation and the Irish coastal space as a whole. The usefulness of this approach is further encouraged through the continued work of Carpentier in the ecological field, this time looking to the application of discourse-material analysis with Nicoletta (2022). Their work also looks at the interactions between people and nature, especially the technocratic solutionist discourse based in prometheanism, and how it is articulated (Nicoletta & Carpentier, 2022, pp. 117-118). The focus on the material and its agency is thus centred on the climate crisis, looking at how the material realities of climate change, including changing and degrading ecosystems, shape social understandings of climate change (Nicoletta & Carpentier, 2022, p. 121). While the focus of this thesis does not address the climate crisis in specificity, it does regard the changes of the coastal space, including degradation and collapse, as affecting discursive practices, especially in regard to conservation and coastal management. Take, for example, the prevalence of different fish and oyster species, and the human and natural practices which affect them. Overall, these approaches to the material and the discursive provide a solid base to examine the Irish coastal waters and its conservation.

Conclusion

By looking at the presented works, from the analyses of democratic participation and competing interests in conservation, to studies that examine the cultural and historical context of Ireland and the broader maritime world, and finally, to work that tries to unpack how policy and other forms of text and media represent the natural world, we can better understand how to approach issues of conservation, and understand what is missing in these considerations. While

there has been analysis in the Irish context, these have so far has failed to take into consideration the material realities that can invite or disinvite articulations of the coastal space, additionally, there is little work that examines the current marine and coastal conservation policy through a historical and sociocultural lens, instead analysing the policy in its implementation, or focusing on the coastal space in specificity without greater attention to the overall policy and dynamics set out through legislative and policy discourses. Understanding the dominant discourses of coastal management and how it is shaped can clue us into where conflict between actors arises, and how this is articulated through a struggle over the discursive construction of the natural space and resources. This is why the central research question of this thesis asks how the coast and its conservation are constructed in legislation and biodiversity action plans. Additionally, the sub-questions shape this investigation, asking who is involved in shaping conservation discourses, and where the discourses evolve from. This evolution is especially important given the colonial impact recognized in conservation efforts of peatlands as well as built heritage in Ireland, which may exist in other areas of the country's legislation. With these questions built from the existing literature, the theoretical framework and methodological chapter will further shape how issues of Irish conservation can be approached from a post-structuralist lens, with input from scholars in media, ecology, and political geography.

2. Theoretical Framework

Building from past research, the theoretical framework selected for this thesis is found within the post-structuralist approach of discursive-material analysis, primarily utilising the work of Nico Carpentier in his text, *The Discursive-Material Knot* (2017), and its later application in more ecologically based studies by Nicoletta and Carpentier (2022) and Carpentier, Doudaki, and Pajerova (2021). As stated by Carpentier, the discursive-material approach seeks to "to provide an understanding of how the material and the discursive interact, ... without segregating the material

and the discursive (2017, pp. 13-14). This makes it especially appropriate for the aims of this thesis, to understand the construction of ecological discourses in Irish state legislation and action plans. In the theoretical framework, the discursive-material approach is presented first through Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, which provides the theoretical base, and the new materialist approaches that inform the material aspects of discourse-material analysis. Following this, theories from political geography and ecology are presented which provide additional theoretical foundations for the understanding of discourses of space, history, and nature.

1. Discourse Theory

At the basis of the discursive-material analytical approach is Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, as it is presented in their 1985 text, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. This form of discourse, which discursive-material analysis is founded within, takes a macro-textual approach to discourse, going beyond discourse-as-text to understand discourse-as-representation (Carpentier, 2017, p. 15). Discourse theory also relies on the post-structuralist assumption that meaning and discursive constructions can never be closed, but are constantly changing and interacting with each other (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 6). As they are unfixed, there is a constant 'discursive struggle' wherein discourses seek to enforce their meanings over others, and gain hegemony (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 7). This differs from other approaches to discourse analysis, as Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis breaks discourse away from other social practices which he argues both play roles in building the social world, while Laclau and Mouffe see discourse as the builder of the social world with no separation of social practice (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 6-7). Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis is also less focused on the individual's production of discourse than other approaches such as that in discursive psychology, which allows for a broader and less individualistic analysis (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 7). By embarking with the macro-textual and macro-contextual approaches to discourse analysis, one can

understand discourse not just as it remains on a page, or in conversation, but how it acts on and in the world as a whole (Carpentier, 2017, pp. 16-17). This approach requires an inclusion of the material, because, as stated by Carpentier "Discourse is not the same as the material, but still very necessary to make sense of it" (2017, p. 19). It is because of this inclusion of the material that it has been selected for the analysis of conservation and the Irish coast, as while it is texts that will be analysed they affect and have been affected by material practices and realities. Additionally, the central aim of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is to examine how discursive structures are formed and changed through articulation, which aligns with the research questions proposed within this thesis, to examine how the coastal space and its conservation are articulated within state legislation and the Biodiversity Action Plans to understand the discursive structures that are upheld and contested in those texts.

2. Materializing Discourse

Building from the theoretical base of discourse theory, discourse-material analysis also adopts some of its theoretical base from 'new materialist scholars' in an attempt to include a more robust analysis and inclusion of the material world. However, there are key differences in the discourse-material approach. As explained by Carpentier, discursive-material analysis begins with a discourse-theoretical analysis and is then brought into discussion with the material, rather than the new materialist approach centering the material-semiotic actor from the beginning (Carpentier, 2017, pp. 6-7). Additionally, it is different in that the discursive-material approach, as defined by Carpentier, only looks to the human creation of discourse, understanding it as a "social-human process", but it also doesn't outright reject the agency of the material that is seen in Latour's Actor-Network theory (Carpentier, 2017, p. 7). In the approach of Bruno Latour, labelled broadly as actor-network theory, which also works to understand discourse and the material, "objects are suddenly highlighted not only as being full-blown actors but also as what explains the contrasted

landscape we started with, the overarching powers of society, the huge asymmetries, the crushing exercise of power" (Latour, 2005, p. 72). Under discursive-material analysis, material objects and spaces can shape discourse in their interactions with humans, adopted into and affecting discursive practice (Carpentier, 2017, p. 44). Where Carpentier borrows from Love (2013) and Foucault (1977) to explain this through the examples of a house and a prison, one can just as easily understand this in regards to the coastline, and the ships, nets, and communities people build there (Carpentier, 2017, p. 44). It is the materiality of these spaces that shape and can be shaped by human behaviour. To define this more clearly, Carpentier looks to the effect of the material as an "invitation," which can prompt a specific discourse from the social. In their own words,"[t]hese invitations, originating from the material, do not fix or determine meanings, but their material characteristics still privilege and facilitate the attribution of particular meanings through the invitation" (Carpentier, 2017, p. 45). In regards to the coast, the presence or lack thereof of certain fish or mussel species can invite different discursive constructions and interactions with the space, as could rough rocks or waves.

3. The Dimensions of the Discursive-Material Knot

To understand how the material and the discursive fit together, it is useful to further deconstruct the components of the discursive-material knot. To do so, Carpentier breaks the knot into four parts: structure, discursive, material, and agency (Carpentier, 2017, p. 67). These are then grouped into two dimensions, the first being that of the discursive and the material, and the second, structure/agency (Carpentier, 2017, p. 7). As explored within the discussion of signifying and material practice, in agency, the actor works in adopting and engaging in discursive and material production or destruction (Carpentier, 2017, p. 69). The material comes into this dynamic for the way it can invite or dis-invite social action (Carpentier, 2017, pp. 70-71). To understand structure Carpentier largely builds from the work of Gidden's structuration theory wherein

structure is produced and used to produce social action(Carpentier, 2017, p. 24). As individuals, it is not that we do not have autonomy, but that we partake in structures that shape our actions at the same time we shape the structures. Under the approaches of Laclau and Mouffe, and Carpentier, discourses are understood as structured entities, as well as structuring (Carpentier, 2017, pp. 25-26). Returning to the earlier arguments of materiality and discourse, the discursive provides structures to understand and create the social and material (Carpentier, 2017, p. 26). Looking to conservation, as in this thesis, one can look at how dominant discourses shape the ways we as humans act on, shape, and understand the material world of the coast. How we perceive these spaces, through their anthropocentric use-values, their aesthetic qualities, or their role in the larger ecosystems, shapes human practice. As a broad space, the coast is built of many competing signifiers that are built and are built by policies and the social world. Carpentier also understands "assemblages of materials" as "structured entities" wherein when an object is made (Carpentier, 2017, p. 73). For example, one could look at a ship, from wood and other materials, as well as the knowledge and technical work of those who build it, adopting both the material and the discursive into its being. Concerning agency, structure "necessarily limits human subjectivity to the use of these building blocks, with the affordances they have, both at the material and the discursive level" (Carpentier, 2017, p. 73). Each of these components, from structure to agency to the material, is in some way tied and interacts with the discursive component.

4. Spatializing Discourse and Post-Colonial Approaches to Space

Apart from the base theoretical approaches found within discourse-material analysis, in order to apply discourse theory to the coastal space it is also useful to supplement this base by turning to the theoretical approaches of political geographers. In Kim Dovey's *Becoming Places* (2010), Dovey looks to the social constructions of space, though with a focus on urbanism, building from the work of Doreen Massey to construct space as open (pp. 31-33). This notion of

space is congruent with the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, and their consideration of the social as open (1985, pp. 95-96). In the text, Dovey defines space as “an inextricably intertwined knot of spatiality and sociality” (2010, p. 35), and suggests a multidisciplinary methodology that includes discourse theory, especially as it was expanded in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2010, pp. 52-54). This is similar to how the concept of materiality, although not space particularly, is taken up by Carpentier in *The Discursive-Material Knot*, who also used Deluze and Guattari to examine the interactions of the social and the material (2017. pp. 38-39). Situating a material analysis within a specific place, allows for a closer analysis of interactions of the material and the social, as it is possible to see the interactions play out to differing degrees. This is also congruent with the work of Henri Lefebvre, who states that space “is a product literally populated with ideologies” (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 171). Discursive struggles have been mapped onto the land, not just as it is, but as it was, and how it could be. In the same speech, he turned to nature itself, claiming that “in the process of being mastered, nature was ravaged and threatened with annihilation, which in turn threatened the human realm which, although still bound to nature, caused its annihilation” (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 173). To Lefebvre, it was necessary to understand urban planning in the context of nature scarcity, a line of thought that has only become more relevant today as natural spaces are under increasing threat.

But what has led to these iterations of space and state? And what are the alternatives? To understand this, it is useful to turn to the theoretical work done in postcolonial and palimpsestic considerations of space. Palimpsests refer to a type of layering, wherein even when past articulations are erased, they are still embedded in the landscape and can re-emerge and be rearticulated in the present (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 158). In Paul Carter’s *The Road to Botany Bay*, this is brought into the context of Australia, where Carter examines how space is changed through new renderings in the colonial imagination (Carter, 1988, p. xx). The idea of who belongs to a space, and what potential it has, is culturally constructed, even though it is shaped by material

realities. New maps brought land into the colonial reality, claiming a cultural hold on the physical space, and attempting to erase what was there before (Carter, 1988, p. 27). In Ireland, the colonial imaginings of space were realised similarly, with the renaming of spaces, the alteration of the land, and the implementation of English agricultural practices (Deckard, 2016, pp. 152-53). These practices reshaped the land, leaving echoes of colonialism in the spaces they adapted. By adopting a palimpsestic understanding of land, the discursive constructions of land of the past can be understood in how they affect the future, as they continue to exist and hold the potential to be re-perpetuated through policies and practices that maintain the same discursive structures that initially made up the colonial spaces.

5. Discursive Constructions of Nature

With these considerations of discourse and materiality, especially as they pertain to land, we can turn to the final theoretical base which is made up of ecological theories. These are important in identifying concepts to guide the analytical research conducted, to understand *what* is written into the land of the coast. The most accessible entry to these theories is through the previous ecological work based in discursive-material analysis, found in the work of Doudaki, Pajerová, and Carpentier (2021). They identified three hegemonic discursive clusters and three counter-hegemonic clusters that construct the human understanding of nature (Doudaki, Pajerová & Carpentier, 2021, p. 1169). The first are the value hierarchies which examine how nature and humanity are ordered in comparison to one another. The hegemonic anthropocentrism focuses on the use of nature for humans, whether that be for agriculture, building space, or tourism, and its counter, ecocentrism, seeing humans as equal to nature (Doudaki, Pajerová, & Carpentier, 2021, pp. 1169-1170). Following anthropocentrism are the interconnection discourses seeing how the relation between humans and nature is understood. Here, the hegemonic discourse of dualism creates a divide between what is human and what is natural (Doudaki, Pajerová, & Carpentier,

2021, p. 1169). It finds its counter in entanglementism (where humans and nature are entangled with one another and cannot be separated (Doudaki, Pajerová, & Carpentier, 2021, p. 1170). Lastly, they identify the problem control discourses, with the hegemonic prometheanism and counter-hegemonic survivalism (Doudaki, Pajerová, & Carpentier, 2021, p. 1171). Prometheanism is centred around the idea that technology and human innovation can tackle environmental issues, making up for the degradation done by the species, and allowing for continued exploitation, while survivalism sees the exploitation of the earth's natural resources as catastrophic, with the belief that degradation cannot be halted by technological advancements and human intervention (Doudaki, Pajerová, & Carpentier, 2021, pp. 1169-1170).

Part of their theoretical base is adopted from the environmental discourses identified by John S. Dryzek in *The Politics of Earth* (2017), who rather than splitting the discourses between value, interconnection, and problem control discourses, splits his identified discourses between what is prosaic and imaginative, and what is reformist and radical (Dryzek, 2017, p. 16). Dryzek begins with the assumption that environmental discourse must be understood alongside industrial discourse, as it functions within an industrial society (Dryzek, 2017, p. 14). Because within an industrial society, nature is commodified, environmentalism must remove itself, whether partially or wholly, from the industrial framing of nature (Dryzek, 2017, p. 14). The prosaic works within the industrial and state structures, seeing the environment and its degradation as a problem to be solved to continue along the same industrial-capitalist path (Dryzek, 2017, p. 14). Within this classification is the reformist 'problem-solving' (promethean) discourse, and the radical 'limits and survival discourse' (survivalism), which were also adopted by Doudaki, Pajerová, and Carpentier (2021) (Dryzek, 2017, p. 16). In Dryzek's definition, problem-solving looks to make changes to policies and actions without radically redefining the capitalist industrial landscape, while limits and survival discourses offer a more radical confrontation of power dynamics and the endless exploitation of nature, but still work within existing structures of state and industry

(Dryzek, 2017, pp. 15-16). The imaginative discourses are the reformist ‘sustainability’ and the radical ‘green radicalism’ (Dryzek, 2017, p. 16). They look for opportunities for change to the systems, although sometimes only minor changes (Dryzek, 2017, p. 16). Sustainability looks to rectify the conflict between nature and capital growth, attempting to find a balance between the two, and imagining a future where both can be present, while green radicalism seeks to completely move away from the industrial state (Dryzek, 2017, p. 16). In the sustainability discourse, economy and the environment are not opposed to one another, but can both be sustained with conscious decision making (Dryzek, 2017, pp. 147-148). Dryzek also directly includes the concept of “maximum sustainable yield” in this discourse, where economic use of the environment is maximised, but not beyond a level that can continue (Dryzek, 2017, p. 148). The other imaginative discourse, green radicalism, is broken down further into green consciousness and green politics. Green consciousness advocates for the valuing of nature for its own sake, and an understanding of the interconnectedness of nature which includes humans (Dryzek, 2017, pp. 187-188). Green politics focuses on how change can be achieved at a structural level, though different groups within this discourse advocate for varying levels of change (Dryzek, 2017, p. 207).

Dryzek also identifies environmental discourses that help understand who is responsible for conservation and sustainability measures. Economic rationalism, as an anthropocentric discourse where nature's value is in its ability to sustain socioeconomic structures, is shown as a market-led articulation (2017, p. 135). Democratic pragmatism looks to public consultation, alternative dispute resolution, policy dialogue and lay citizen deliberation, public inquiries, and right to know legislation (Dryzek, 2017, pp. 101-108). The emphasis is on including communities, and providing political agency to everyone (Dryzek, 2017, p. 115). Finally, administrative rationalism determines that scientists and administrators should take the lead in . One tool identified in administrative rationalism is cost-benefit analysis, wherein the potential effects of government action are articulated in currency amounts to determine the ‘best’ outcome (Dryzek, 2017, p. 84). This can

serve to rationalise the actions of the administration, and make it so these decisions are limited to expert groups (Dryzek, 2017, p. 86).

Inequality in conservation can also be addressed in this context. Dryzek includes this consideration in *The Politics of the Earth* (2017), noting that in the limits and survival discourse, “the appropriate slogan is "think globally, act globally"”, with embedded elitism and a lack of local consideration (Dryzek, 2017, p. 48). But to further understand who has access to conservation and environmental discourses, we can turn to the work of Malcolm Ferdinand. In *Decolonial Ecology* (2022) Ferdinand identifies a “double fracture” in the environmental space, with a fracture between nature and humanity, and a colonial fracture between the colonised people and the colonisers (Ferdinand, 2019, p. 4-6). Speaking on why the two fractures are difficult to bring together, Ferdinand states that “On the environmentalist side, this difficulty stems from an effort to hide colonisation and slavery within the genealogy of ecological thinking, producing a colonial ecology, even a *Noah's Ark ecology*” (Ferdinand, 2019, p. 8). This “Noah's Ark ecology” is the idea that only some people and places can survive, determined by power imbalances already present (Ferdinand, 2019, p. 82). Additionally, in this ecological construction, conservation and environmental protection are divorced from the cultural and lived realities of space, instead focused on ‘the bigger picture’ with little regard to how the implementation of policies affects the people they are enforced upon. One example Ferdinand provides is reforestation efforts in Haiti, where there are already marginalised communities that bear the weight of responsibility (Ferdinand, 2019, p. 92). This sheds light on the importance of bottom-up ecological considerations, which actively engage with and are informed by locals' understandings of nature and space, replanting efforts in the material and social contexts that will be most closely affected by them. In other words, environmentalism cannot be apolitical, which as argued by Ferdinand, environmentalist discourses tend to be (Ferdinand, 2019, p. 5). Coloniality and power dynamics of space, class, and race must be considered when examining ecological discourses.

These approaches to ecological and conservation discourses overlap one another, but their differing organisation allows for multiple ways to compare and contrast articulations of conservation and coastal spaces. By using these as tertiary sensitising concepts that guide the application of discourse-material analysis, it is easier to map out the discursive patterns present in the analysed texts, and bring them into broader conversations on conservation and human-nature dynamics.

3. Methodology

The following section maps out how the theoretical approach to discourse analysis will be applied to the case study, with specific attention to the tools and concepts utilised in discursive-material analysis.

1. Discursive-Material Analysis Key Concepts

To apply discursive material analysis, it is useful to define the parts that make up the discursive-material knot. To begin, the concept of articulation is central to both discursive-material and discursive theoretical analysis. Taken from Laclau and Mouffe, the concept of articulation provides a base for understanding the construction of discourse. Articulation produces discourses, wherein different nodal points (key signifiers) are related and articulated by and to one another, which in turn shapes the meaning and identity of one or more of these points. Over time, these are stabilised through continued use, and privileged nodal points emerge that are more closely tied together (Carpentier, 2017, p.19). Quoting Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Carpentier's text highlights that:

> The practice of articulation consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity. (Carpentier, 2017, p. 19).

This understanding of the social as being 'open', allows for the analysis of the actors, events, and practices that are involved in creating and contesting various discourses, and questioning the hegemonic positioning of some discourses over others, finding alternative ways of being. As stated by Carpentier (2017), "discursive fixations are not given; they are the result of social interventions that produce particular articulations of particular discourses" (p. 20). Drawing from the "field of discursivity" and the multiple signifiers that exist, articulations attempt to create a stable and dominant meaning and identity (Carpentier, 2017, p. 20). Floating signifiers also exist which are included in multiple discourses, and are shaped by their inclusion in each differently (Carpentier, 2017, p. 20). In order to analyse these points, it is useful to also define 'sensitising concepts', which are key to the application of discourse-material analysis, as they can be used to focus and direct research in such a way that it is open to movement and adjustment (Carpentier, 2017, p. 77). While in other discursive approaches, the sensitising concepts are seen mostly in the discursive, the discursive-material approach makes room for sensitising concepts that are in the material, as well as the discursive-material knot (Carpentier, 2017, p. 78). The concepts can be found through analysing texts and materiality and attempting to draw out and identify concepts, as well as through utilising established theories and bringing them into discursive-material analysis which are quantified as the "tertiary sensitizing concepts" (Carpentier, 2017, p. 79). In the following application of discursive-material analysis, these tertiary sensitising concepts are identified through research into postcolonial understandings of the Irish space, as well as ecological theories.

In the articulation of discourse, and its struggle to create meaning, there are also dominant discourses that become hegemonic. Drawing from the work of Antonio Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe see hegemonic discourses as those that have "social dominance" over others (Carpentier, 2017, p.21). This dominance is seen when the discourse is perceived as a given and concrete formation, wherein the subjectivity of the discourse, and the very idea that it was formed through

articulation, are forgotten (Carpentier, 2017, pp. 21-22). Differing from the hegemonic discourses, there are also antagonisms that combat and challenge the hegemonic discourses (Carpentier, 2017, p. 23). This is central to the argument put forward by Laclau and Mouffe, who state that "antagonisms are not objective relations, but relations which reveal the limits of all objectivity" (2001, p. xiv). To them, understanding hegemonic constructions and the idea of objective truth must be done by looking at the elements that contradict and stand against the dominant structures. Within this theorization, following other post-structuralist theories, the political is "an ontology of the social" rather than a "superstructure" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xiv). This is adopted into discursive-material analysis, with special attention paid to the destabilising and identity-building role of antagonisms, wherein both conflicting discourses build their identity through the conflict (Carpentier, 2017, pp. 162-163). This is also tied to the concept of the "chain of equivalence": wherein discourses and materials are brought together through their contradiction to the antagonism (Carpentier, 2017, p. 163). Agonism is similar in that the contradicting discourse remains, but is not seen as an enemy, but rather as an alternative and valid construction (Carpentier, 2017, p. 176). While this is more readily applied to theories of war and violence as Carpentier employs it, (2017, p. 176), I argue that it can also be used to understand the construction of conservation and coastal spaces and the competing private, public and natural interests which converge over the land.

To adopt human agency into the discussion of discourses, the concept of signifying practices is used (Carpentier, 2017, p. 31). While people can use textual or visual or behavioural languages in certain ways, participating in signifying practice by utilising, participating, and at times contradicting dominant discourses, discursive production itself is, as defined by Carpentier, "is an act of power, highly dependent on the context of the speaker, the signifying practice itself, the medium and the audience, and not an automatism that is to be taken for granted" (Carpentier, 2017, p. 31). It is only through society that these discourses can become stabilised and utilised by

individuals, who largely claim agency through the choice of invoking and identifying with these discourses through signifying practice (Carpentier, 2017, p. 31). There are also material bodily practices that focus on the physical ability of the human body to enact physical change in the environment and other bodies and be affected by it (Carpentier, 2017, pp. 53-54). For example, looking at the specific interaction of the fish-human, wherein a person can catch and eat a fish in a behaviour that affects the body and the fish, and on a larger scale, can affect the environmental make-up of the ocean and its species. Again, returning to the concept of the material and its 'invitation' to shape discourse, the material in this understanding can un-seat or dislocate discourses or invite them (Carpentier, 2017, p. 57). Additionally, there can be investment, which can be defined as the "engraining of meaning into the material" as people understand the rod or net as tools, and associate them with discourses of fishing for leisure, sport, business, or sustenance (Carpentier, 2017, p. 46). One can also look to the investment of economic and cultural meanings into nature itself, as humans continuously rely on the resources found in the natural world. Finally, another way to understand how discourse is produced and stabilised is through entextualization*,* where meaning and discourse is embedded into text, looking especially to media, and through this, gives semi-permanence and materiality to the discourse (Carpentier, 2017, p. 57). This is important to the structure of this thesis, wherein it is the entextualization of other discursive elements and practices which is analysed. With each of these practices, there is instability, and therefore the concept of contingency is key (Carpentier, 2017, p. 59). Each of these concepts is central to the application of discursive-material analysis, working to understand how these interact to make up the discursive-material knot.

2. The Application of Discursive-Material Analysis for National Environmental Policy

With these definitions, examples of how to actively apply the discursive-material approach are seen in the analysis of Cypriot radio stations (Carpentier, 2017, pp. 77-78), as well as the thematically closer examples done by Doudaki, Pajerová and Carpentier (2021) studying a documentary based on a north-Swedish mining city and those that live in it, and the analysis of the Swedish TV series, *Hållbart näringsliv*, which translates to 'Sustainable business' from Nicoletta and Carpentier (2022). These articles provide a view into the application of discursive-material analysis and nature, although rather than looking at governmental texts, as will be done here, the articles both review film and television, and deal with the analysis of images as well as text. While the analysis of governmental policy requires a slightly varied approach, it can still rely on the same logics and methodology that shape these analyses of media, as both represent an entextualization of discourse, and governmental texts have the added understanding of the power of these texts due to the governments privileged ability to enforce articulations in signifying and material practices in the position of "the leader" (Carpentier, 2017, p. 31; 57; 107). It can also rely on the same qualitative coding strategies seen in the two studies, borrowed from Saldaña (2013), as well as build from the same ecological theories, especially those of Dryzek (2013), to identify tertiary sensitising concepts to shape the analysis (Doudaki, Pajerová, & Carpentier, 2021; Nicoletta & Carpentier, 2022).

To apply the theory, initial work was done to provide historical and social context to the Irish coast and the social practices that have existed there, as well as the effects of the British imperialism. This was important to establish the palimpsestic and discursive understanding of land, in order to contextualise how current understandings of land and resource use were formed. Land (including coastal and marine spaces), as well as policy, are layered with meaning, some of which persists through multiple re-articulations, and by unpacking this history, one can work to

understand the social practices and power dynamics that have contributed to present understandings of the material and the social (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 158). This was done with special attention to fisheries policies from Britain, as they provide one of the more visible ways to track the articulation of coastal discourses in writings, and are also greatly affected and affect social practice.

In the analysis of the current Irish legislation and Action Plans, the qualitative coding methods of Saldaña (2013) were used, with the primary texts noted and highlighted through analytic memos in an initial reading to determine a rough overview of the contents and then organised in conversation with the tertiary sensitising concepts established in the theoretical framework, most notably from the ecological discourses identified, as well as the inclusion of economic and historical concepts relevant to Ireland (pp. 50, 229). In order to organise the analysis of the Biodiversity Action Plans more easily, three subsections were created, 1.) Valuations of biodiversity 2.) International and local stakeholders, and finally, 3.) The Construction of the Marine and Coastal Space. While the sections overlap, the separation of valuation discourses for overall biodiversity, key actors, and the discursive construction of the marine and coastal spaces specifically allowed for a clearer consideration of each action plan. The final discussion addresses the ways the texts as a whole articulated the coastal space and its conservation, and also returns to work from the literature review and theoretical framework to understand the findings in the broader scope of Irish conservation and ecology.

3. Data Selection

Utilising discursive-material analysis, the texts examined are chosen from the governing legislation and policies that shape conservation and coastal management today, specifically the Wildlife (Ireland) Act, 1976, and its amendments, as well as each of the Nature Parks and Wildlife Service's (NPWS) National Biodiversity plans, including the first one published in 2002, the plans

of 2011 and 2017, and the most recent one from 2023. These action plans outline the policies and practices of conservation and sustainable development for the people, defining biodiversity and its importance, and addressing key actors and national obligations. These will also be placed alongside the Whale Fisheries (Ireland) Act of 1937 and the Sea Fisheries (Ireland) Act of 1933 were central to coastal management before the Wildlife Act, and continue to be in use. Conservation and coastal management have been built and continue to exist within multiple facets of government, so the inclusion of each of these acts, as well as the biodiversity plans, seeks to provide a cohesive narrative to the disparate and changing nature of coastal conservation and management (Silver et al., 2022, p. 171). While there are some limits to this method, in that it does not necessarily follow conservation in practice from non-governmental actors, it is useful in that it understands the legislation surrounding coastal management as a whole, to understand how conservation interacts with other historical and current management practices, as they cannot be wholly separated due to the entangled nature of the environment. Overall, by applying the methodology of discursive-material analysis, utilising signifying concepts to understand the make-up of conservation discourses in Ireland, the analysis serves to understand what has become entangled within the 'knot' of governmental coastal conservation policy in the country, taking into account the sociohistorical, sociopolitical and material components.

3. Analysis

1. Contextualization of the Case Study: The Irish Coast

1.1. Irish History: Colonialism and Coastal Localities and Management:

Before diving into the legislation that shapes the coastal and marine spaces today, it is useful to look at the history of colonialism in Ireland, and how it affected local coastal practices. From at least the twelfth century, Ireland and England were intertwined, with Anglo-Norman settlements

on the Island trading and interacting with the Gaelic clans, and exporting some raw materials to England (Horning, 2013, p. 19). In this network, fishing served as an important resource both for exports and for sustenance, especially herring and hake (Trinity College Dublin, n.d. b, paras 4-5, Trinity College Dublin, n.d. a, paras 4-6). By the sixteenth century, trading posts and urban developments were established by Old English merchants, who relied at least partially on Gaelic merchandise to trade with England and Spain through the sixteenth century (Horning, 2013, p. 20). This trade to Spain was perceived as a potential threat to the British crown who sought the resources of the water for themselves, and state oversight in the shape of garrisons and mapping increased (Horning, 2013, p. 21-22). The wariness of English authorities to this trade can be seen in an article from the time, published in 1535, that claimed that "'the fishing of Ireland is a great commodity which strangers haunt and carry away into Spain, France and Scotland'" (Trinity College Dublin, n.d. b, para. 12). This demonstrated that fishing was not only a key economic resource to watch but also one that the English wanted to control. Along with the push for control, conflict in the region driven by the English also hurt the fishing industry of the times, driving some towns that relied on it, such as Carlingford, into poverty (Trinity College Dublin, n.d. b, para. 13). Further into the island, urban development was Gaelic led, with the town of Sligo exporting fish under the O'Crean family, and other Gaelic lords overseeing fishing in other ports, sometimes building castles to regulate the use of maritime resources and enforcing fees (Horning, 2013, pp. 21-22). There was not one central Irish state, but instead separate entities led by Gaelic elites, who had differing relationships with each other, the English, and other trading partners (Horning, 2013, p. 29).

It was in the mid-sixteenth century that there was a greater change to Irish-English relations, with Henry VIII of England claiming Ireland as king, and attempting to take greater control over the island while also splitting from the Catholic church (Horning, 2013, p. 25). This was furthered under Elizabeth I of England, who sought to anglicise Ireland and gain control of Gaelic

communities, as well as the Old English communities who did not want to split from the Catholic Church (Horning, 2013, p. 27). Historian Audrey Horning argues that from this point in the sixteenth century, the Irish people were more heavily constructed in the English imagination as uncivilised, which worked to discursively justify colonial settlements and exploitation on the island (2013, p. 17). In part, this came in the painting of Irish life as pastoral, cattle-based, and nomadic, in need of help from the English and their methods of agriculture and urbanisation (Horning, 2013, pp. 31-35). This stood in contrast to the reality, with varied structured urban spaces and political divisions established under Gaelic rule as well as cultivated crops, although some people did move in different seasons and cattle were important (Horning, 2013, pp. 33-36). The push for the adoption of the English farming practices had another purpose as well, as with more structured land parcels under English jurisdiction it was believed that it be easier to take control of the Irish people (Horning, 2013, p. 32). Cited in the work of Cathcart (2019), Elizabeth I made this clear, saying she desired the plantations to "trayn the people from the unordinat tyra[n]ny of the Irishe captens And to cause them feele and tast[e] … civile order and iustice" (p. 95). However, the control from the English was not linear, and resistance and independent Irish life continued. For example, the River Bann, while technically under the control of the British Crown and Elizabeth I, was actually controlled by locals (Cathcart, 2019, p. 99). However, it was eventually taken over by a Highland Scottish family, the MacDonalds, who had a "maritime lordship" (Cathcart, 2019, p. 99). This was a double threat to English power, who had to counter both the Irish and Scottish holds on the land and Elizabeth I was willing to ally with each to get rid of the other but did so unsuccessfully (Cathcart, 2019, p. 100-101). To protect the land more easily, and with fewer costs, colonies were suggested, planned by Sir Thomas Smith near the sea in 1572 under approval from Elizabeth, although it failed (Cathcart, 2019, p. 101). Cathcart notes that while failed, the plantation, and attempts after it, were positioned in such a way that acknowledged the importance of the coastal space as a military one, where fishing could be done

just as easily as boats could be mobilised for protection, especially from the Scottish (2019, p. 101-102). However, the sea also led to difficulties, when supplies and military support could not be easily transferred from England on their ships, as they faltered where Scottish-style ships did not (Cathcart, 2019, pp. 103-104). It was only once the ship technology was improved that England was able to protect their hold on Ireland from Scottish Highlanders, but even then, they were involved in other maritime conflicts that pulled resources away from Ireland (Cathcart, 2019, p. 105). From 1600 onwards, plantations from the English were once again pushed forward, this time with more success, but the Scottish settlements remained, and with little choice, they were at least partially accepted (Cathcart, 2019, p. 106).

The seventeenth century continued the English intrusion, with more Protestant settlers sent to the North of the island, funded by the British crown (Kennedy-Pipe, 2013, p. 39). There were also increased limitations to local fishing pressed forward, with a law passed that made it so English fishing fleets had reign over the sea, with local Irish fishermen unable to leave the port when they were active (Purcell, 1978, para. 2). Much of this legislation sought not only to limit Irish industries from threatening English stocks, with the natural limits of resources, but also to keep it economically dependent on England, and thus keep the island subordinate (Horning, 2013, p. 312). In the eighteenth century, fishing industries were again curtailed, as high duties were placed on imported salt, making it difficult to cure fish (Purcell, 1978, para. 2). This persisted into the nineteenth century, despite efforts to increase local Irish fishing industry from the Irish Parliament from 1785 in the form of a bounty to encourage herring production (Roney, 2019, p. 2).

In the nineteenth century, the regulations continued under the Acts of Union passed in 1801, which further enforced British power by adopting Ireland into the U.K (Kennedy-Pipe, 2013, p. 41). Some fishermen believed that once properly a part of the U.K, subsidies would supply much-needed boats and equipment to bolster Ireland’s fisheries (Leazer, 2021, p. 51). In 1819, this

materialised in a bill that financially incentivized fishing through bounties (Roney, 2019, p. 2). Specifically, the bill was made to promote bigger boats for deep-sea fishing, and encourage larger catch numbers, and it worked (Leazer, 2021, p. 52). By 1830, the number of boats had risen from the 4,889 that were registered in 1821 to 13,119 (Leazer, 2021, p. 52). But the disparity still existed between Irish and British industry, with Ireland receiving 163,376 pounds compared to Britain's 927,000 (Roney, 2019, p. 3). By 1830, the bounties were stopped (Roney, 2019, p. 3). This was due in part to the new laissez-faire economic policies of Britain, which were based on the idea that the economy should run without interference or direct aid, and the fisheries took the hit, with the number of boats at 10,761 in 1840 (Leazer, 2021, p. 52). With the famine starting in 1845, fishing took more hits, with many having to sell their boats and equipment to survive (Leazer, 2021, p. 53). When loans were requested from the British government to help the Irish fisherman, they were turned away on the grounds that loans would promote reliance, and the economic ideology of laissez-faire persisted (Leazer, 2021, p. 53).

In 1845 a new Act was passed to control fishing, which granted a great deal of jurisdiction to Commissioners of Public Works, who subsequently limited salmon fishing for the public, and decreased the lengths of fishing seasons (Roney, 2019, p. 3-4). Additionally, infrastructures continued to curtail some fisheries, without the ability to sell their stocks due to poor transportation, and little investment in ship harbours (Roney, 2019, p. 4). There was a small attempt to rectify this with the Public Works (Ireland) (No. 1) Act, 1846, but the plan never went through as the local investors that were needed to access the funds were already suffering from the famine, and did not participate (Roney, 2019, p. 4). Where larger industry failed, small fishing boats continued to be used for sustenance in coastal spaces, working closer to the land, and catching much smaller numbers with little incentive to catch more without the means to preserve the stocks (Roney, 2019, p. 7). The same communities also relied on shellfish for sustenance, as well as seaweed (Roney, 2019, pp. 7-8)

It was only in the 1900s that Ireland regained some of its autonomy, with the passing of the Home Rule Bill on its third attempt in 1912 (Kennedy-Pipe, 2013, pp. 47-48). However, the Bill created conflict between those who supported it, and those opposed (Kennedy-Pipe, 2013, pp. 47-48). This eventually led to a separation of the island in 1920, with the Government of Ireland Act granting a separate parliament to the South, setting up the Irish Free State, but having the North continue with a separate Parliament with closer ties to Britain (Kennedy-Pipe, 2013, pp. 51-54). In 1937, Ireland passed its own constitution, and in 1948, it was decided that it would leave the British Commonwealth, becoming the Republic of Ireland (Kenny, 2004, p. 21).
Even then, with a semi-autonomous parliament, it wasn't until 1949 that the Irish state fully separated from the U.K., leaving the Commonwealth under the Republic of Ireland Act (Kennedy-Pipe, 2013, pp. 70-71). From 1920, the regulations of the country were its own, but they still contended with centuries of colonial involvement, a sentiment emphasised by sociologist Bill Rolston who argues that this legacy continues to harm the Irish economy (2019, para. 1). In this history, it is possible to trace the local practices of Irish fishermen, and the ways in which a top-down governance led by colonial-imperialist economics from Britain stifled Irish fishing.

1.2. Earlier Irish Legislation, 1933-1937

In the context of the early twentieth century, as Ireland gained independence, two relevant acts which still serve today were the *S*ea Fisheries Protection (Ireland) Act of 1933 and the Whale Fisheries (Ireland) Act of 1937. The Sea Fisheries Protection Act, 1933 claims the jurisdiction of the Irish waters, and the sea fishing within it (sec. 2-3). The Act also allows the Minister to limit trawling or seining in specified spaces (Sea Fisheries Protection Act, 1933, sec. 4.1). Overall, the Act has a focus not on the natural space itself and how it is affected by fishing, but on the protection of the coastal area and the resources from outside threats, establishing a controlled and nationalised use-value iteration of the coast. The Whale Fisheries (Ireland) Act, 1937 was passed just a few years later, but with a more direct protection of nature. The Act effectively limited the

hunting of whales within exclusive Irish waters, although outside of the Irish boundaries, it was not an offence (Whale Fisheries Act, 1937, sec. 3) The Act also made it so right whales, immature, or female whales with a calf could not be caught by Irish boats whether they were outside of the Irish waters or not (Whale Fisheries Act, 1937, sec 4). The consequences were forfeiture of whale fishing gear, possible fines and/or imprisonment (Whale Fisheries Act, 1937, sec 1.3, second schedule). If whales were to be caught, the person would require a licence, which would also be required for treating or processing the whale after it had been caught (Whale Fisheries Act, 1937, sec. 5). It was also a requirement that factories treating whales keep records of the whales caught, from the type, size and sex of the whale, and the resources they produced (Whale Fisheries Act, 1937, sec. 15). Additionally, workers on the ships could not be paid in reference to the economic value of the whale caught (Whale Fisheries Act, 1937, sec. 17).

These limitations to fishing did not come out of a vacuum. At the time, whale stocks were under increasing threat, and the need to limit whale hunting was facing global pressure. In 1931, there was a Convention for Regulation of Whaling to address the over-hunting of whales in the years prior, as the material reality of diminishing whale populations became apparent on the global scale (Fitzmaurice, 2017, p. 1). This was also at the same time that the whaling industry was no longer economically sustainable, with a global financial crash making it impossible to sustain (Fitzmaurice, 2017, p. 1). This presented one of the earlier examples of the balance between sustainable-use and conservation and economic pressures, where conservation won-out to limit the exploitation of the natural resource.

2. *Wildlife Act and Amendments*

2.1. Wildlife (Ireland) Act, 1976

Turning to the legislation of today that is focused on conservation, the main legislative act in Ireland for this purpose is the Wildlife (Ireland) Act of 1976. According to the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) website, the acts role is:

> to provide for the protection and conservation of wild fauna and flora, to conserve a representative sample of important ecosystems, to provide for the development and protection of game resources and to regulate their exploitation, and to provide the services necessary to accomplish such aims. (NPWS, n.d.a)

Already, one can see the emphasis on conservation comes from promoting balance of use rather than completely removing human interference. Human and nature are not necessarily in conflict with one another, but in a hierarchical relationship which sees humans as the overseers of ecological health, protection, and exploitation. Within the sentence, there is also a sustainability discourse, wherein regulation is pursued to sustain the environment and economic actions together. Additionally, as a legislative act, it takes part in administrative rationalism, granting governing bodies the right to control land use, with conservation defined as the "management and regulation of the use of land in relation to the interests of wildlife and, where appropriate, development and improvement of land having regard to those interests;" (Wildlife Act, 1976, sec. 2).

While the Act itself is not limited to coastal conservation, it does overlap with the aims of coastal management. Section 23 of the Act, the "Enforcement of protection of wild animals (other than wild birds)" protects seals, whales, dolphins, and porpoises, as well as land mammals (Wildlife Act, 1976, fifth schedule). Other animals not directly stipulated can be included, but only with consultation with the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, which has been used to include

animals such as the Basking Shark, which was added to the protected list in 2022 after consultation with the Irish Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Statutory Implement No. 485/2022 - Wildlife Act 1976 (Protection of Wild Animals) Regulations, 2022, sec. 23). This articulates the coast as a living space for these animals, and blocks the use of them as a direct economic resource. However, the section 23 excludes actions that hurt, kill, or destroy breeding habitats of the species if they do so unintentionally, “while engaged in agriculture, fishing or forestry, or in zoology or in any other scientific pursuit”, or in the construction of roads, archeological operations, or other building and engineering endeavours, or to kill or rehabilitate an injured or disabled animal (Wildlife Act, 1976, sec. 23). This caveat serves to protect businesses from fear of acting. Furthermore, there is also a caveat that except for seals and whales, the other fauna can be captured or killed if they prove a risk to the infrastructures aforementioned (Section 23). The valuing of these infrastructures as above those of the mammals takes part in a persisting anthropocentric hierarchy in conservation. This is further enforced in chapter II of the Wildlife Act, where the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, as well as the Minister for Transport and Power, are required regarding consultation to create nature reserves on state land (Wildlife Act, 1976, ch. II, sec 15). This again places the needs of fisheries and agriculture as above those of wildlife conservation. The Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries is also necessary to consult in order to include new species of fauna into the act for protection and in regards to any fish or aquatic invertebrates, the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries must sign the regulations if they are to be included (Wildlife Act, 1976, sec 23.3). Additionally, sections 52 and 53, which regard the importation and exportation of flora and fauna, are declared in section 52.5 to not “restrict, prejudice or affect the functions of the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries” (Wildlife Act, 1976), clarifying the importance of the economic valuation of nature, and the need to sell or import these stocks. With the analysis of these sections, the dynamics of governance within the

Wildlife Act of 1976 reaffirm the anthropocentric valuing of space, making conservation plans contingent on economic approval.

2.2. Wildlife (Amendment) (Ireland) Acts, 2000, 2010, 2012, 2023

The Wildlife Act from 1976 has been updated several times, the most substantial of which being the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000, with only small changes in the later amendments. Under the 2000 amendment, section 30 was amended to include the banning of hunting without permission on the “accretion from the sea where such land is owned by the state which can be applied to species both specifically protected and not (Wildlife Amendment Act, 2000, sec. 38). This was one of the main changes of the act, which allowed for increased protection for Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) (NPWS, n.d. b). There was also an increase in species protected by the 1976 Act, especially those in the coastal space, with the addition of aquatic invertebrate and fish species (NPWS, n.d. b).

An international discourse was also embedded into the Act, with a commitment to biological diversity due to a participation of Ireland in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (NPWS, n.d. b). The European Union was also included further into the legislation, with section 51 of the act stating that anyone without a wildlife dealer licence could not sell or purchase “fauna, at any stage of its life, whether alive or dead, set out in Part I or II of the First Schedule to the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations” (Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2002, sec. 2). The 2010 amendment was much smaller, but included a repeal of the right to hunt deer with hounds with a licence (Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2010, sec. 2), and the amendment of 2012 only adjusting the applicative date for firearm certificates (Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2012, sec. 1). The 2023 amendment was also light, but included a change to bolster the protection of raised bogs, and introduced legislation regarding the publishing and of the National Biodiversity Action Plan (Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2023, sec.4, sec. 58C).

Overall, the Wildlife Act, 1976, and its later amendments, demonstrate the increasing presence of international actors in legislation, as well as an overall administrative rationalism which leads with a government approach to conservation. Additionally, it is notable that for an Act specifically regarding conservation, economic interests are not ignored entirely, but are included with considerations of sustainable use, rather than the outright protection and completely halted use of natural resources, although the introduction of SACs and NHAs demonstrates an increasing trend toward completely protected spaces and resources, rather than exploitation.

3. National Biodiversity Action Plans

While the legislation is a useful starting point, the legal discourse and positioning of the Acts limits the inclusion of non-state actors. While still published by the state, from the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), a more detailed textual representation of the Irish government's approach to conservation, and one that is directed toward the public, can be found in the National Biodiversity Action Plans. The plans also provide a consistent and up-to-date overview of conservation practices, and expand on marine and coastal conservation with reference to specific actors and material realities. To analyse the plans, three subsections are established to discuss the overall valuations of biodiversity and the dynamics of stakeholders, and finally, the articulation of the coastal and marine spaces, including the actors mentioned, and the specific valuations attributed to the space.

3.1. National Biodiversity Action Plan of 2002

3.1.1. Valuations of Biodiversity

In the first National Biodiversity Action Plan, published in 2002, the goal of the Action Plan was “to secure the conservation, including where possible the enhancement, and sustainable use of biological diversity in Ireland and to contribute to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity globally” (NPWS, 2002, p. 6). This immediately situates Ireland within the global context, and

also highlights the use of nature when possible, taking on a limits and survival position, as well as one of sustainability. Nature is addressed as a finite source, but also one that can be utilised for human needs. Apart from the overall goal, the principles the plan claims are also useful to understanding the discursive constructions of conservation present. Conservation is seen as "essential for sustainable development, and for maintaining the quality of human life" (NPWS, 2002, p. 6), demonstrating a discourse of entanglementism, wherein humans and nature cannot be separated and must rely on one another, but again reiterating a sustainability discourse, which assumes continued growth, and an anthropocentric valuation of nature as necessary for human survival. However, the second principle of the Act combats this, claiming that "Each form of biological diversity is unique, and of value in its own right" (NPWS, 2002, p. 6). This takes part in recentering nature for nature's sake, but is contradicted by the positioning of the anthropocentric phrasing of the principle before it. The next principle claims that "All sectors and actors are responsible for advancing the conservation of biological diversity in their respective areas" (NPWS, 2002, p. 6). This positions humans as the caretakers of the environment, needed to take care of and sustain the environment. Finally, the last principle states that "The 'polluter pays principle' and the 'precautionary principle' will be supported" (NPWS, 2002, p. 6). This introduces an economic discourse into the fold, with payment as an exchange for pollution, but it also requires a polluter to be identified. The 'precautionary principle' is also important in that it allows actions for what could be harmful in the future.

3.1.2. International and Local Stakeholders

The Action Plan of 2002 also situates Irish conservation in the international context, and outlines the international agreements and plans that Ireland has agreed to (NPWS, 2002, p. 6). This is done with specific reference to the Convention on Biological Diversity (NPWS, 2002, pp. 8-9). The plan identifies that the state is bound to "refrain from acts which could defeat the object and purpose of the Convention. By ratifying a Convention, a State agrees to be bound by the

Convention" (NPWS, 2002, p. 8). By placing this international context in the first chapter of the plan, it could be seen as displacing some of the actions prescribed to a higher-up governing body, and thus justifying the actions of the Plan as above the NPWS and Irish government. This is also seen in the section discussing the designation of protected areas, wherein it is stated that "The framework for site protection in Ireland, both in terms of what should be protected and how it should be protected, is determined by national policy and by EU policy" (NPWS, 2002, p. 17). Locals are also included, with plans for appeals procedures and consultations, as well as economic compensation for those affected by site protection (NPWS, 2002, p. 17). It is stated that it is "essential to involve interested parties and especially farmers and others who are likely to be directly affected" but this is undercut by the overall designation through national and EU actors (NPWS, 2002, p. 17). The inclusion of the public is also present in the development of the action plan, with published notices inviting participation from the general public, as well as invitations sent to economic organisations, as well as those working in the environment and conservation (NPWS, 2002, p. 6).

3.1.3. The Construction of the Marine and Coastal Space

In the section of the Action Plan directly addressing marine and coastal spaces, the realities and threats the marine and coastal environments face are immediately stated, including the rising human population and overuse of resources, as well as pollution. The plan also specifically references the changes in fish stocks, especially with a decline in commercial species, and the threats faced by whales living in the Irish waters (NPWS, 2002, p. 34). This quantifies the resources within economic terms as well as ecological, emphasising the practices important to the space. This is reaffirmed in the final sentence of the section, which claims that "In light of the threats to marine biodiversity, there can be little doubt about the need to promote a greater appreciation of the importance of such biodiversity and of its value both in ecological and economic terms" (NPWS, 2002, p. 34). The emphasis on both demonstrates the valuing of the

coastal environment in a sustainability discourse, where environment and economy are not made mutually exclusive. This is also seconded in the inclusion of the Central and Regional Fisheries Board in Action 86 of the plan, who are defined as actors who will be involved in " advanc[ing] the conservation, as well as the sustainable use, of biodiversity, through the establishment of biodiversity units, the provision of appropriate legislative responsibilities and other measures" (NPWS, 2002, p. 35).

Another actor included within this construction of the coastal and marine space is the EU. Action 89 states the need to "Introduce national measures to research and reduce adverse effects of marine fisheries on biodiversity, and within the EU, continue seeking to ensure the Common Fisheries Policy and marine fisheries provide for the conservation of fish species and marine biodiversity generally" (NPWS, 2002, p. 35). The EU is also mentioned in Action 91, to "Continue, and where necessary, enhance, in line with relevant EU and international instruments (e.g. OSPAR Convention), existing programmes and measures to control and monitor pollution of coastal and marine ecosystems" (NPWS, 2002, p. 35). These actions are based within scientific and administrative rationalism, taking on the measures dictated by a larger international body, in a top-down approach.

3.2. National Biodiversity Action Plan of 2011

3.2.1 Valuations of Biodiversity

The 2011 Action Plan opens with the vision "That biodiversity and ecosystems in Ireland are conserved and restored, delivering benefits essential for all sectors of society and that Ireland contributes to efforts to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems in the EU and globally" (NPWS, 2011, p. I). This again places humans as entangled with nature, but still looks to the societal benefits of biodiversity, reaffirming an anthropocentric valuation. In the section expanding on biodiversity, this is furthered by the representation of "a moral duty to

endeavour to look after the planet and its habitats and species for our own benefit and that of future generations" (NPWS, 2011, p. 2). Conservation is not done for the sake of the planet itself, but for the need of the natural world for its position to humanity, in terms of both in the present and future.

The 2011 plan also directly addresses the economic value of biodiversity. This is invited by the economic realities of the country at the time, where it is stated that "Ireland is currently facing a difficult economic climate and the restoration of the national economy is a priority" (NPWS, 2011, p. 4). In this context, the plan adopts an ecosystem services approach, which economically quantifies biodiversity. For example, the marine and coastal space is measured through fish catch, at 180 million euro a year, and a promise is given to double the amount should fisheries be properly and sustainably managed (NPWS, 2011, p. 5). The benefits to conservation are also articulated through the capital discourse, with a promise given to double the available monetary amount should fisheries be properly and sustainably managed (NPWS, 2011, p. 5). In this framework, there is added pressure to economically value biodiversity, and as argued by Ryfield et al., this can ignore aspects of the environment which benefit organisms and natural spaces other than humans (2019, p. 283). The approach even quantifies the cultural aspect of biodiversity, by including it as an asset to the tourism sector (NPWS, 2011, p. 5). This continues the sustainability discourse approach to conservation, wherein capital economies and the natural world are envisioned as co-existing, without radical changes to industrial state structures, but a movement to be more cognisant of how actions will affect the broader ecological health of the space, with the belief that this can be sustained into the future.

3.2.2. International and Local Stakeholders

In terms of international actors, the 2011 plan follows the trend of the 2002 plan by displacing some of the requirements to international bodies. It states that under the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ireland is required to act to conserve biological diversity, and pursue

sustainable use (NPWS, 2011, p. 8). In regards to the EU, this is continued, with Ireland positioned as part of the broader global and European community, with policies "strongly influenced by the EU" (NPWS, 2011, p. 9).

Administrative discourses are also present, with scientific rationalism utilised to justify the ecosystem approach, with the claim that it is "based on the application of appropriate scientific methodologies focused on levels of biological organisation which encompass the essential processes, functions and interactions among organisms and their environment" (NPWS, 2011, p. 5). This abstract claim on 'scientific grounds' serves to create a professional discourse around conservation management, and may aim to reaffirm a top-down approach to conservation. However, it also includes the principle that "[m]anagement should be decentralised to the lowest appropriate level" but without a clear definition of what the lowest appropriate level means, this does not necessarily translate to local participation (NPWS, 2011, p. 6). It also contains the principle that states that "all forms of relevant information" should be included, from scientific to indigenous forms of knowledge, but again, this lacks concrete examples (NPWS, 2011, p. 6).

3.2.3. The Construction of the Marine and Coastal Space

In relation to the coast, the EU and other international organisations are positioned as responsible for the plan, stating that "Ireland's marine conservation policy is strongly influenced by the European Union and international conventions such as the OSPAR Convention" (NPWS, 2011, p. 38). This includes the displacement of sustainable fisheries use as the responsibility of the EU Biodiversity Strategy (NPWS, 2011, p. 37). Whereas the 2002 Action Plan focused less on how the EU was involved in the coastal environment specifically, the plan from 2011 specifically references EU initiatives, removing the responsibility of the NPWS and other national organisations. This is also followed up by a discussion of failures in the EU Common Fisheries Policy, and notes that it will be reformed (NPWS, 2011, p. 37). There is also the discussion of Special Areas of Conservation, with reference to the protection of coral reef sites, and seabirds

(NPWS, 2011, p. 38). In terms of fishing, maximum sustainable yield is used, which reiterates the coastal space as an economic as well as ecological resource, where humans should utilise the natural resources as much as possible (NPWS, 2011, p. 39).

3.3. National Biodiversity Action Plan of 2017

3.3.1 Valuations of Biodiversity

Like the 2011 plan, the 2017 is situated within an ecosystem services framework. It states:

> "For many years, we have sought to conserve nature for its own sake, purely for moral and ethical reasons. This rationale remains as valid and relevant as ever. More recently, additional arguments for nature conservation have emerged, based on the social, cultural and economic value of biodiversity and the benefits or "ecosystem services" it provides to society" (NPWS, 2017, p. 10).

This continues the anthropocentric valuing of nature as for human use, but again addresses the entangled aspect of the human/nature relationship, as well as the use of capitalist discourses to understand and quantify biodiversity. Also within the initial discussion of biodiversity is a survivalism discourse that understands the limits of exploitation, stating that "future generations will inherit a diminished and degraded environment unfit to support them and provide them with a wide range of benefits to society and the economy" if the use of land and natural resources continues as it has been (NPWS, 2017, p. 11). The catastrophizing of the potential future creates a demand on the industrial and economic construction of space, calling for more radical changes to address climate change and the degradation of biodiversity. However, this still competes with the overall valuing of nature through an economic and anthropocentric understanding.

3.3.2. International and Local Stakeholders

Again, as with the earlier plans, the plan is situated within the broader EU regulations, stating obligations to the Nature Directives (NPWS, 2017, pp. 26-27). However EU involvement also

recognizes the need to work with local businesses. This is shown in the inclusion of the European Maritime Fisheries Fund, which aims at investing in better fishing gear that will prevent by-catch, as well as supporting other investments into more sustainable practices (NPWS, 2017, p. 56). In this way, while the EU efforts can be understood through a top-down view, there are conscious efforts to support changes to protect biodiversity for local groups, although in the efforts of policy implementation, rather than creation.

The 2017 plan also looks back to the first 2002 plan, claiming it "as the main vehicle for meeting commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and EU Biodiversity Strategy" (NPWS, 2017, p. 23). Additionally, when discussing key partners to sustaining biodiversity, the 2017 action plan references Irish government departments, and government officials at all levels, as well as international and national independent bodies, and finally, the public (NPWS, 2017, p. 20). As the plan discusses the public players, they affirm their importance, claiming the "Landowners, farmers, and local communities are in many aspects the most important players in biodiversity issues" (NPWS, 2017, p. 24). It also determines the consultation process for the 2017 plan, through a Biodiversity Working Group and Forum, followed by a draft plan available for the public (NPWS, 2017, p. 24). This privileges the official groups within government, but still provides space for active public engagement. Overall, the plan continues trends established in 2002 and 2011, taking overall direction from international and EU bodies, as well as national state-actors, but making some space for local participation.

3.3.3. The Construction of the Marine and Coastal Space

In the introduction to the ecosystem services, the marine environment is articulated as an ecological space, "home to whales, dolphins, vast colonies of seabirds, abundant fish and cold-water coral reefs, as well as rich algal and invertebrate communities (NPWS, 2017, p. 10). But under the ecosystem service framework, the marine and coastal space is quantified through fishing and other industries, to equal 800 million euros for 2012 (NPWS, 2017, p. 12). The coast is

further articulated in objective 5: to "Conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the marine environment" (NPWS, 2017, p. 55). Here, the coast is quantified in its economic terms, boasting "a wealth of marine biodiversity" and a large marine Exclusive Economic Zone (NPWS, 2017, p. 55). This is furthered by mentions of the worth of marine industries, quantified at 1.3 billion each year, and the 17, 000 jobs within it (NPWS, 2017, p. 53). But this is followed by a recognition of habitat and species degradation in the following paragraphs, which address pollutant pressures, as well as fisheries impact on the coastal space, demonstrating the costs of some of the economic reliance on and positioning of the marine and coastal environment (NPWS, 2017, p. 53). However, improvements are noted in fishing sustainability, attributed to the changes referenced in the EU Common Fisheries Policy, as well as the use of Maximum Sustainable Yield, which finds the highest possible amounts of fishing that can occur without offsetting the local environment (NPWS, 2017, p. 53). This demonstrates the struggle over the discursive construction of the coastal space, with the desire to understand it through economic terms, and the dislocation of these economic discourses that is forced in the face of decreasing fish stocks. Marine Protected Areas are also addressed in the plan, with their designation attributed to EU actors. There is also scientific rationalism in the discussion of the designation, where "Ongoing scientific research, marine spatial planning and biodiversity priorities will help to identify those sites that represent the best candidates for future MPA designation" (NPWS, 2017, p. 60-62). This rationalises the EU actions, and justifies the top-down approach to MPA designation.

3.4. National Biodiversity Action Plan of 2023

3.4.1 Valuations of Biodiversity

The newest Action Plan sets out the Irish focus for seven years until 2030 also maintains some of the trends established in the valuation of the environment from the earlier plans. Continuing with the ecosystem services framework, biodiversity is understood through its benefits

to different social and economic sectors. The plan claims that "biodiversity underpins the sustainability and productivity of the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors, as well as the many businesses and industries which depend on the natural environment or on natural raw materials" (NPWS, 2023, p. 61). It is not only human well-being that relies on biodiversity, but also economic prosperity. The positioning of biodiversity and why it matters partakes in a entangled understanding of the nature-human relationship, with a graphic claiming "We all depend on healthy ecosystems", and discussing cultural, medical, and ecological benefits to biodiversity (NPWS, 2023, p. 12). In this understanding "The whole of the Earth's surface can be described as a network of interconnected ecosystems" (NPWS, 2023, p. 13). This includes humans alongside other organisms, as a part of the larger nature-structure. The understanding of humans as within the broader ecosystem is also situated in terms of future sustainability, with the claim that "Today, it is understood that the economy and society are wholly embedded within the environment and biosphere, rather than separate to it" (NPWS, 2023, p. 21). This emphasises the reliance on humans, but again returns to what is provided to them by the natural world. In this way, the plan takes part in the broader understanding of nature based on what it can provide, through an industrial mindset that sees nature as resources for human development.

3.4.2. International and Local Stakeholders

The 2023 Action Plan centres local people more than the previous plans, with objective 1 aiming to "Adopt a Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society Approach to Biodiversity" taking a more consciously inclusive approach to the policy process, with more direct references to participatory practices (NPWS, 2023, p. 28). This is argued to be at least partially based on the "unprecedented levels of public awareness at the national level and an elevated global and regional policy landscape" (NPWS, 2023, p. 28). As people become more aware of the importance of biodiversity, there is more desire for democratic engagement with the policy making process. This is seen especially in the inclusion of different public assemblies for biodiversity. As a part of

this, and in relation to the plan's future outlook, the 2023 plan introduces a Children's and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, which aims to provide agency to young people in conservation and sustainability matters (NPWS, 2023, p. 48). The vision they presented was "An Ireland where we are connected to, and care for, the rights of nature (and each other) so that biodiversity is restored and protected and we live and grow up in healthy and fair environments" (NPWS, 2023, p. 48). This vision reiterates the values of the rest of the plan, with a forward-looking and entangled understanding of nature, viewing it as integral to valuable in its own rights, but also in terms of human necessity. There was also the addition of the Business for Biodiversity Planform Steering Group that was given a role in the production of the National Biodiversity Action Plan, which sought to include business in the process, and emphasise to them the need to protect biodiversity, as well as an introduction to the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (NPWS, 2023, pp. 45, 47). The Citizens' Assembly joined with the Children's and Young People's Assembly, calling for the need to take action for the sake of the future (NPWS, 2023, p. 45). Additionally, included in the Citizens' Assembly was a call to understand the value of local knowledge, specifically farmers (NPWS, 2023, p. 45). The plan also attempts to be more transparent, with a breakdown of the Action plans development process, which included two stages of stakeholder consultation, and a public consultation that had over 300 responses (NPWS, 2023, pp. 44-45). Additionally, the Local Biodiversity Action Fund, and the Biodiversity Fund, support local initiatives to protect and sustain biodiversity (NPWS, 2023, p. 33). The inclusion of these groups demonstrates a structured effort to include a larger pool of Irish community members in the policy process, as well as efforts to promote biodiversity within local communities.

Even within the more structured spaces for community engagement, there is still a top-down approach to other aspects of biodiversity conservation. The conservation and sustainability efforts are understood through levels, with global, regional, and national initiatives and responsibilities to

shape the action plan (NPWS, 2023, p. 24). Ireland's biodiversity plan is understood through the EU's Biodiversity Strategy, and the targets set out for member countries, including a call to adopt at least 30 percent of the seas into Marine Protected Areas, and to address by-catch in fisheries (NPWS, 2023, p. 25). Additionally, the EU Nature Restoration Regulation "will set legally binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems" (NPWS, 2023, p. 26). While the EU framework provides limitations, there is some autonomy allowed for state actors in this space. The plan to reach those measures is attributed to the NPWS, and they promise to include "a broad and deep public participation process, informed by robust ecological and socio-economic impact assessments" (NPWS, 2023, p. 26). This demonstrates the possibilities for participation at all levels, but also the ways that participation can be limited through legally binding regional and international agreements. However, there are also benefits to this participation, with wider global cooperation, and a focus on overall biodiversity health, as well as possible investments and collaborations with the larger international and regional structures. For example, the European Innovation Partnership Scheme supports efforts to develop sustainable practices at the local level (NPWS, 2023, p. 29).

Through these initiatives at the local, national, regional, and global level, efforts can be seen to address concerns of biodiversity at all levels, in order to ensure equitable and democratic implementation and policy planning. As summarised by the plan itself, "Action for biodiversity has increased significantly in recent years, with a strong emphasis being placed on collaboration with landowners and local communities to enable a collective response to the challenge" (NPWS, 2023, p. 28)

3.4.3. The Construction of the Marine and Coastal Space

In the construction of the marine and coastal environment, the space is still introduced as "support[ing] vast colonies of seabirds, abundant fish and cold water coral reefs, whales and dolphins, as well as rich algal and invertebrate communities" demonstrating a recognition of

communities outside of the anthropocentric understanding (NPWS, 2023, p. 16). But economic values are still key to the understanding of the space later in the plan. The efforts under the EU's Common Fisheries Policy are presented, to sustain "long-term conservation of fish and shellfish stocks and marine biodiversity" (NPWS, 2023, p. 84). Additionally, like the 2011 and 2017 plans, the 2023 plan reaffirms the use of maximum sustainable yield in regards to fish and shellfish, based on the regulations of EU Common Fisheries Policy (NPWS, 2023, p. 84). This approach to sustainable exploitation is consistent with earlier plans, as is the inclusion of EU directives and actors to shape the regulations and policies regarding the marine and coastal spaces.

Another approach to marine conservation is also seen in the discussion of Marine Protected Areas, as a national government project to increase legislative protection on specific marine areas (NPWS, 2023, p. 31). The plan is justified through its inclusion of public and administrative actors, stating that "[t]he legislation comes on foot of expert recommendations from an independent advisory group and a substantial public engagement process" (NPWS, 2023, p. 31). The Marine Protected Areas also reaffirm the forward looking approach to sustainability, arguing that through the implementation of MPAs, "the marine environment can continue to support our climate, our economy, our coastal communities, our cultural traditions and heritage, and our health and wellbeing" (NPWS, 2023, p. 31). This positions the wealth of the marine environments as economic, socio-cultural, and as necessary to human health, continuing the anthropocentric understanding of the space, but also addressing the entangled nature of human and environmental health and prosperity.

5. Discussion

1. How is Ireland's coast and its conservation constructed in legislation and Biodiversity Plans?

Addressing the main question of what makes up the discursive-knot of the coastal space, the action plans, as well as the current legislation point to an articulation of the coast as a space made up of both economic and environmental nodal points. These discourses are both entangled and in conflict with one another, as economic pressures put a strain on the natural environment, which translates into habitat degradation and species loss. With this loss, the levels of economic exploitation cannot be continued, forcing a reckoning with liberal-industrial logics, and enforcing the need for overall regulation and protection. While economic constructions of nature persist through this reckoning, it is done in conjunction with an understanding of the balance needed, demonstrating a discursive understanding of conservation through sustainability. The resources are not understood as solely for human consumption, nor is there an assumption that people can exploit the natural world indefinitely, but there is a belief that with correct measures taken, economic growth can continue alongside the protection of biodiversity. This positioning must also contend with the realities of changing the social practices which are interlocked with the economic understanding of nature, which requires participation at multiple levels. In the coastal space, this means adapting fisheries, and contending with changes to coastal communities who rely on resources from the now increasingly protected spaces. There is also an understanding within these changes that should they not occur, the future will have to deal with the consequences, as practices directly affect the ability of marine ecosystems to sustain themselves. This understanding of the coast and its conservation allows for the anthropocentric construction of nature to persist, where it exists in order to sustain human life and economies, while addressing the material realities of nature, and its limitations.

2. How is the coast and its conservation articulated in relation to state, EU, local, and environmental actors?

In the process of adapting social processes, the dynamics of different actors are especially important. At the regional, international and national levels, organisations sometimes quantify sustainability and conservation as a whole, without necessarily paying attention to local specificities, which can cause an alienation of local communities and their needs. This can lead to a top-down initiation of conservation, as communities are held to these regional and international agreements. This can be seen in the action plans, with the framing of conservation as something that heavily involves and is overseen by EU legislation and procedures. These findings align with the analysis of bog conservation from 2014 from o'Riordan et al., who argued that while participatory discourses are present in bog conservation policies, acknowledging local stakeholders, they are also undercut by top-down requirements from the EU and state actors, and the scientific rationalism they adopt to qualify the administrative decisions (O'Riordan et al., 2014, p. 131-134). These same tools can be seen in the discursive representations of EU actors in the action plans, where some of the plan's initiatives are justified due to their ability to fulfil EU directives. Additionally, the plans utilise scientific and administrative rationalism to justify national level decisions, using expert groups to justify the implementation of quotas and other conservation methods.

This top-down approach to conservation is not the only one present, as there does appear to be attempts to encourage more public participation. The plans make use of participatory discourses, with each of the action plans using a public consultation process for policy, but further efforts are needed to actively include actors of all levels in the policy making process. In 2023's plan, steps seem to have been taken to include a broader inclusion of local community actors through specific public and local assemblies to address biodiversity needs, but whether these translate to effective participation has yet to be seen. This is especially pertinent given the findings

of Schéré et al. (2021), that discussed how local communities and stakeholders can feel alienated from the process of policy making in the context of Marine Protected Areas (p. 12). In light of these findings, a vertical and non-hierarchical approach to all aspects of conservation are recommended, which actively works to rectify splits between local and international actors, and engage local communities at all levels of policy development and decision making.

3. How are these articulations shaped by postcolonial and colonial history?

Finally, it is useful to articulate these dynamics within the specific socio-historical context of Ireland. Discussing the EU and local communities positioning in the action plans, the colonial history can be brought up through limitations to Irish fishing, as the top-down restrictions echo the British actions that kept the Irish fishing industry from growing in the country's earlier history. As argued by Purcell (1978), with the previously stunted Irish fishing industry, the EU can be perceived as further stunting an economic space that has just begun to prosper in recent history. At the same time, the material realities of the decreasing fishing stocks re-affirm the need to take action. However, in trying to find a sustainable way forward, and rectify the needs of the natural environment and the economic needs of fishers, another imperialist discourse is reaffirmed in the use of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) in the action plans of 2011, 2017, and 2023. As argued by Silver et al. (2023), MSY arose in the postcolonial industrial context and comes from the desire to maximise the amount of fish taken for economic gain, both in waters close to the state, and in waters determined 'underutilised' (p. 170). In the Irish context, the use of the waters by other EU states, and the quota of fish allotted to Ireland puts pressures on Irish fishers, and can affect individuals who make their living through it (Thompson, 2015). MSY also takes part in administrative rationalism, wherein decisions are made by state actors, utilising a scientific discourse to justify quotas, instead of consultation with local actors (Dryzek, 2017, pp. 76-77).

This is especially important as frustrations continue to mount among Irish fishers over water-access, especially in the context of Brexit, with 25 percent of British fishing rights previously shared with the EU through the Common Fisheries Policy removed (Specia, 2023). For Ireland, this means a potential hit to the fishing industry of 43 million euros, which could force many fishers out of business (Specia, 2023). By 2023, the change had already affected the industry, with 64 whitefish boats withdrawing from active work (Carter, 2023). Some of the frustrations felt by fisheries were articulated in an article from 2015, where a fisher stated that "There is plenty of fishing Irish waters if the EU gives us the quota – we shouldn't be begging to go to someone else's waters –" noting frustrations with the EU, and the competition in the Irish coast (Roche, 2020). In order to address the echoing of colonial and imperialist discourses in conservation, and the frustrations felt by fishers affected by the top-down and sometimes alienated approach of conservation directed from regional organisations, there should be further efforts to include fishers on all policy and legislative matters at the EU and national level, while also addressing the value that the coastal space brings to coastal communities. This is seconded by the conclusions of Silver et al., as they discuss the Canadian context of MSY, advocating for an inclusion of local knowledge and active participation in decision making (Silver et al., 2022, p. 168).

4. Ways Forward for Coastal Conservation

Given these critiques of policy, the final section looks to where else conservation can go, both to improve on the dominant sustainability discourse that is present in the legislation and action plans of Irish conservation, and to create a more democratic and inclusive space for policy creation. Dryzek offers up some alternatives in his discussion of green politics, suggesting possible ways forward including radical municipalism (which would recenter politics to the local level), and community activist networks (2017, pp. 210, 229). For sustainability, Dryzek suggests

a "decentered sustainability approach" that focuses on local movements and pluralistic understanding of the environment (2017, pp. 161, 235). This moves away from the top-down approaches to sustainability, to allow for decision making at the local level, where communities can find balance specific to them. Dryzek also argued for renewed democratic politics in decision making, taking advantage of the multiple perspectives available at all levels of governance and society (2017, p. 236). This is similar to the recommendations of Silver et al., who suggest that place-based observations are given greater consideration on resource management (2022, p. 175). In each of these suggestions is the sentiment that conservation and resource management should recenter local specificities, looking to the wealth of knowledge available at the local level, with people who have direct ties to the spaces affected.

For Ireland, while the fisheries industry may need to be shrunk in order to sustain the environment, this does not necessarily need to come in conflict with coastal communities. In *Rewilding* (Woodfall, 2019), Simon Berrow speaks to the need to rewild the Irish coastal waters, and prevent overfishing to allow for the restoration of the marine environment (Woodfall, 2019, p. 373). To Berrow, the survival of the ecosystems comes hand-in-hand with the survival of local coastal communities fishing, which also suffers from the overexploitation of larger industrial fishing fleets (Woodfall, 2019, p. 374). By limiting these large scale fleets but finding space for the locals, we can begin to find a sustainable way forward that protects the Island and the people on it, and moves away from colonial imaginings of space.

Conclusion

In the context of increasing environmental and economic pressures on the Irish coast, the above work has attempted to untangle how space and nature are constructed at the national level, taking into account the different actors involved, as well as the cultural, social, and material specificities of the Irish marine and coastal space. To untangle these dynamics, the central research

question asked how Ireland's coast and its conservation were constructed in legislation and Biodiversity Plans. This was further contextualised by two additional questions, asking how the coast and its conservation are articulated in relation to state, EU, local, and environmental actors, and how these articulations are shaped by postcolonial and colonial history. To answer these questions, a discourse-material analysis was utilised, due to its specific ability to address both material and discursive components which are central to issues of environmental policy as it directly interacts with and is shaped by the material world. The main findings from this research determined that at the national level the legislation and action plans participate in an anthropocentric valuing of space, understanding the natural world through economic and use-value terms. This valuing understands the importance of nature-protection through its relation to humanity, and emphasises the need to protect biodiversity without endangering sustained economic development. Next, in addressing the question regarding the different actors relevant to Irish conservation, this thesis argues that through the action plans, international directives are used to justify national actions, which combines with administrative and scientific rationality to legitimise top-down decisions from state and international actors such as overall quotas and the designation of protected areas. When these decisions are mobilised, it is local communities and businesses who must enact and adhere to the rules set out by the directives. This leads to the third question on how colonial history shapes conservation and coastal spaces, as this top-down management of space, especially pertaining to the coastal environment, recalls colonial-imperial practices from Britain that limited the growth of the Irish fishing industry. However, this top-down approach to conservation may be coming to an end, with the most recent action plan from 2023 providing more concrete avenues for community participation, although this is limited by the directives from national, regional and international actors which set requirements for conservation that must be met.

From these findings, the importance of active community engagement at all levels of implementation and policy decision making for effective and equitable environmental protection was highlighted. This research thus joins others in arguing for the political and historical understanding of conservation and resource management, recontextualizing conservation discourses, and looking for alternative and democratic ways forward which recenter local knowledge and practices. However, in focusing only on the action plans and legislation from national government actors, this research is limited in addressing what these ways forward may look like for specific communities, opening the door for further research which directly engages with local communities and their positions and recommendations for conservation and resource management. To many Irish coastal communities, the marine and coastal spaces are central to culture, history, and livelihood, and the experiences of these people must be acknowledged within conservation policies at the national and international level.

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