

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.