



# CO-MANAGEMENT



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A work coordinated by **Michèle Mesmain**  
with the **Slow Fish network** in 2016

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## CONTEXT

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In a context in which a lot of pressure has been built around the degradation and management of ocean resources, combined with an increasing complexity of competing industries and markets, **Co-management** - alongside similar notions of Ecosystem Based Management and Community Based Management - has sparked huge interest amongst a wide range of stakeholders, and is now ubiquitous in the fisheries conversation.

Other contextual elements important to note are **the larger economic crisis** - with the loss of jobs and states' resources that it entails - and a crisis of **the political legitimacy** of our governing institutions. We could more generally speak of a context of debilitation of the Nation State social contract.

More specific to fisheries, the sector is plagued not only by the diminishing of resources, but also **the generalized unfair competition** (between sectors and industries), social conflicts, as well as total lack of trust towards both scientific and governmental institutions, which are a major handicap to achieve ecological, and socio-economic results that both EU and national policies want to achieve.

Finally, the current **"blue growth"** emphasis, which focuses on the oceans and their resources as providing the engine to power the next great economic leap forward (energy generation, transport, mineral extraction, bio-resource development/ extraction for the health industry) could very easily overwhelm fisheries, both small and large scale, pushing them out of the seas.

## WHAT IS CO-MANAGEMENT?

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The concept conveyed by the term co-management is not always clear and often means different things for different players. There are a range of situations that can be viewed as co-management to lesser or greater degrees and are referred to as such depending on the viewer.

**Slow Food understands co-management to be an institution of collective action, geared towards the management and strengthening of a common resource, centred on local ecological knowledge, which becomes the backbone of the relationship** between the different parties involved (typically the State and/or regional authorities, fishing communities, the scientific community and the civil society), and where both the fishing community and the State **have a voice and a vote**.



## ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES

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Co-management is the heart of a **collaborative model**, which uses and recognizes normative rules where they exist, or fosters new ones, within a robust and agreed upon legal framework. This framework allows the development of an ad hoc institution, which generates the conditions for the collaboration to thrive. There cannot be a sustainable long lasting co- management effort if it is not centred on **fairness**, including a subsidiarity principle to avoid further marginalisation of the most vulnerable actors, co-responsibility, which implies the need for emotional and ideological change to bring about a paradigm shift within private entities, as well as a strongly shared notion that individual development depends on strengthening **the common resource**.

## NECESSARY CONDITIONS

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Co-management thrives where there is a strong political will, as well as a constant effort to guarantee **legitimacy, participation, and democratic representation, which very often lack in all matters referring to fisheries**.

**Co-management institutions must be focused on designing flexible and adaptive governance based on local ecological knowledge, through forms of accountable delegation of power to manage common resources, and must be granted legal powers as well as financial resources to do so.**

The complexity of the issues at stake requires the involvement of the local scientific community in designing or verifying management plans, and the involvement of local and/or national authorities to recognise, formalize and legalize the necessary managing prerogatives of the co-management institution, and to verify it's good functioning and commitment to sustainability, and support it over time.

Creating co-management institutions requires the capacity building of fishing community members and their representatives to engage, as well as provide frequent verifications that democratic mechanisms of representation are working.

It also requires generating creative and specific indicators for each situation. These criteria, to measure progress towards collectively defined goals and priorities, must cover the full dimensions of sustainability: institutional, ecological, economic, and social. They must allow monitoring of a wide range of issues such as working conditions, equity of access, gender issues, occurrences of social conflicts, diminishing dependency of subsidies, incentives for selective fisheries, etc., which are not always taken into account.

**This is very difficult to obtain without financial, legal and political support for establishing and running co-management bodies/institutions, as well as statutory capacity to solve conflicts and to sanction violations.**



## CO-MANAGEMENT LEGAL FORMS

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There are ancient and new forms of co-management, and some have existed for more than ten centuries (inscribed in the national legislation, such as the Prud'homies of the Mediterranean in France) while others have come to exist only within the past 10 years. There is currently a legal void concerning such initiatives, both in national and EU legislations. Specific types of MPAs, such as Protected Areas for Fishing, can be used to create a legal frame, but they are expedients.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND POSITIVE OUTCOMES

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On the mid to long-term, co-management processes are a tremendous opportunity to simplify public policies and reduce conflicts over resource management and access, at a lesser cost than current top down policy processes: critics are quick to point to examples where it has failed, but just as co-management does not always work, there are also plenty of cases where it has worked and have proven better than centralized management.

Also, co-management bodies create a collaborative dynamic which can reach beyond managing the resource, to managing the landing and marketing of fish, managing the up-keep of the harbour area, managing artificial reefs, etc.

Co-management is good at increasing the feedback loop between marine resource users and managers and policymakers. Having a feedback loop in place is really important in managing complex adaptive systems like our oceans that are constantly changing.

Slow Food believes co-management has a crucial role to play to help strengthen and legitimize the State's role, its trust mandate and sovereignty over public resources, especially at a time when it is accused of privatizing, or facilitating consolidation of these resources.

## CHALLENGES

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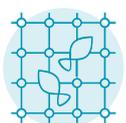
There are numerous challenges to making co-management a success for all parties, which is why a strong political will is indispensable. Here are a few:



**Commodification** of fish within the global trade, and the resulting price volatility and unfair competition.



**Market concentration** - both in terms of operators and in terms of consumption, with the value and desirability concentrating on fewer species.



**Industrialization**, and the resulting logic of high volume production, low margin rationale vs small scale rationale of low volume, high quality, value added, as well as the loss of the subsidiarity principle which keeps fleets diversified.





**Privatization**, which precludes alternative policies and constitutes a de facto resignation of national sovereignty over a common resource.



The **lack of an ecocentric conservation vision**, which includes people in conservation, as opposed to fortress conservation, which isolates humans from nature.



**Lack of existing legislation** to build co-management processes and institutions.



**Climate change** and its impact on accessible resources and living conditions in coastal communities.

## WHAT IS NOT CO-MANAGEMENT

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Marine Protected Areas defined with limited and superficial input by fishing communities and other stakeholders, with no room for flexible rules changing, cannot be considered examples of co-management. Neither are locally managed fishing grounds, however successful they are, which are not recognised and supported by the State, because this lack of recognition will eventually undermine the success over time of the local institution.

There cannot be co-management in the full sense of the concept as Slow Food understands it where the State has abdicated its responsibility and sovereignty, which is very different from delegating management powers while remaining engaged and involved.

Also, co-management necessarily follows a Human Rights approach, which also guide the only existing international document that attempts guide governments, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Small-Scale Fisheries, approved by the Committee of Fisheries (COFI) of FAO in June 2014.

## TWO EXAMPLES

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**The Os Miñarzos Protected Area for Fishing**, is a good example of modern co-management, which started with a small pilot reserve of 4000 hectares and is growing to involve more than 1600 fishermen, local Universities and NGO's, local and national authorities, to manage an area as big as 100.000 hectares.

**The French Mediterranean Prud'homie Institution**, inspired by medieval guilds, constitute a partial example of co-management. The fishing communities' prerogatives to manage specific areas are recognized by the French legislation, but the State does not participate in designing evolving managing rules, hence it is not in a position to verify its efficiency or to support it, eroding it instead by establishing parallel administrations, and superimposing rules without understanding the impact they might have on the current system, thus undermining it. The Prud'homie of Sanary-sur-Mer and the Prud'homie of La Seyne-sur-Mer are a Slow Food Presidium.





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