

Steering through political struggles: bowhead whaling and policy networks in Alaska

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Panel: Characteristics of social networks as indicators of resilience in social-ecological systems

Policy network analyses typically explore how networks limit participation, set policy agendas, and shape the behavior of actors in relationship to public policy goals. In these respects, networks trace the institutions, or structural aspects of relationships as the focus of analysis. Decentered theory, in contrast, examines emergent network patterns as the products of diverse actions and political struggles by agents within the network. In this study, we argue that policy network patterns of subsistence whaling captains in Alaska are shaped by the political framings of key agents. We use ethnographic data from interview participants within the subsistence whaling policy network to explore how political action and struggle shape the participation of agents. First, the success of self-organization is a manifestation of self-determination. Second, the maintenance of networks is aided by the threat of external agents, such as the anti-whaling majority at the International Whaling Commission. Both framings have important ramifications for resilience-based management.