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PhD project: Design, governance and management performance of Marine Protected Areas in the North-East Atlantic Ocean

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Summary:

By early 2013, 550 inshore and offshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) had been established in the North-East Atlantic Ocean (England, France, Portugal and Spain) to accomplish a wide diversity of objectives. Only 244 of these MPAs had a management plan (MgP), and only 151 were actually managed by 66 MgPs. To achieve their goals, three processes (MgP design and implementation, governance and performance) must work jointly and efficiently in an MPA. In this thesis, an empirical analysis of the three processes and their relationships was performed, based on the expert knowledge of MPA managers about MgP and MPA performance. The results showed that effective governance, rather than design and implementation, is critical for the performance of Atlantic Arc MPAs. These results contradict previous studies showing that objective design, MgP design, and participation of stakeholders in these processes are key factors for MPA performance. The most critical improvements needed in governance are: routine MPA monitoring and assessment, increased community engagement in MPA management, stable funding, established enforcement system and routine dissemination of results. Good design and adequate MgP implementation have a limited value for MPA performance.

