The 'Living Q' – An Interactive Method for Actor Engagement in Transnational Marine Spatial Planning*

'Living Q' session during the SIMCelt closing event in Liverpool 2017 (I. Mayer 2017)

The 'Living Q' is a method that aims to enhance transnational marine spatial planning processes. It allows interactive dialogue among stakeholders in a playful, communicative and living environment. 'Living Q' sessions showed benefits for comparison of MSP approaches and understanding of principles which drive planning in practice.

Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and the connected more effective use of the sea is becoming increasingly important, while the significance of transnational action is rising as well. MSP is considered a rather new governmental approach in Europe and for many other marine regions worldwide [1]. Numerous European directives are stressing the importance of transnational action at sea-basin level [2] but are also lacking specific blue-prints and guidance to planning processes. Transnational cooperation has been identified as one of the main challenges, involving transnational users and usages ranging from shipping, to cables and pipelines, and fisheries across the sea basins. Many MSP initiatives lack the international perspective [3], which highlights the requirement for greater transnational coherence and collaboration.

Collaboration of actors (and stakeholder engagement) has been identified as a key strength [4,5] and is considered to be a significant factor for the successful implementation of MSP by adding and providing mutual understanding about MSP issues, to explore and integrate ideas and generate new options and solutions [6]. According to [7], many actors and groups in society have different perceptions and interests of the same marine area.

We identified a need for personal experience and interactive practices, dialogue and communication, the need to identify mismatches and synergies and the requirement to understand stakeholder perspectives and viewpoints. We therefore developed the 'Living Q' as an addition to the 'Q Methodology' (combination of qualitative and quantitative research characteristics exploring viewpoints of people [8,9,10]), with the aim to support participants in categorizing, discussing and evaluating MSP relevant statements in an interactive (living) environment.
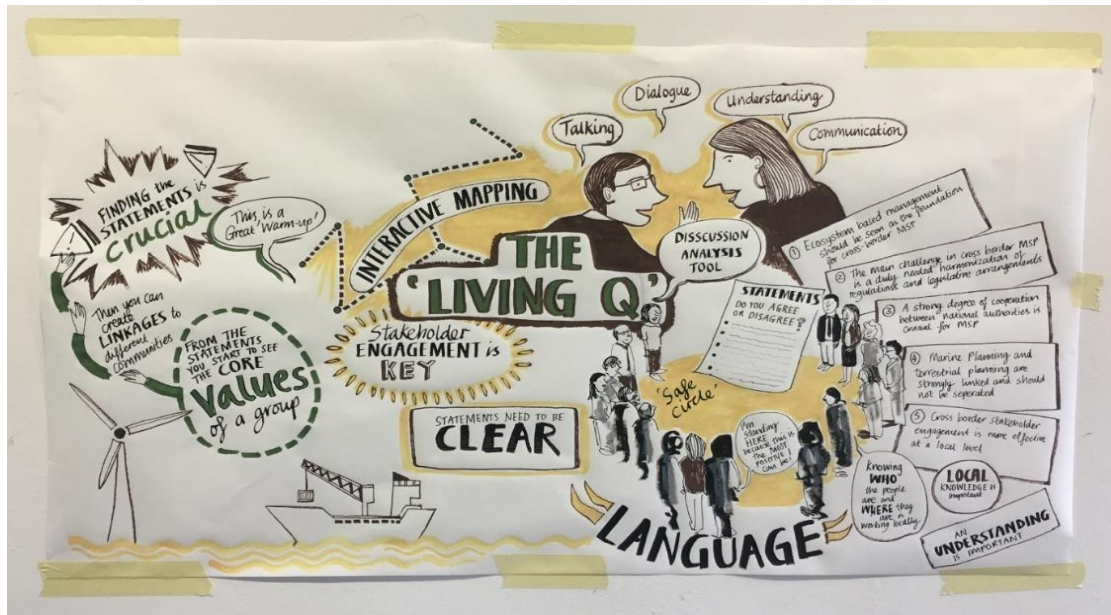
Figure 1 Visual Minutes of the 'Living Q' during the SIMCelt closing event (2017)

In numerous sessions across Europe we demonstrated that the 'Living Q' raises awareness of participants about different existing mind-sets, fosters interactive discussion on transnational MSP and promotes collaboration and participation. The method brings together actors and their worldviews and belief systems, while identifying viewpoints, perspectives and values, aiming at all levels and all actors in MSP processes. The 'Living Q' comprises (1) a preceding 'Q methodology' study (2) identification and tailoring of controversial statements to the group; and (3) an interactive 'Living Q' exercise. The detailed rules of the game are highlighted in table 1.

Results, published in Ripken et al. 2018 show that the 'Living Q' has the potential to improve both discourse and interaction of actors in transnational MSP but also highlights challenges of the method, such as the importance of the quality of statements, the amount of statements that can be discussed in a certain time frame and the importance of the willingness of actors to engage in the discussion. However, the benefits for participating individuals or groups of participants are vast. These range from the identification if mismatches and synergies among participants, the way MSP is perceived and the overall variety of individual opinions. This has implications for the MSP process, as finding a common ground is most important. Overall, participants highly acknowledged the method as a framework that fosters dialogue, communication and a mechanism that leads towards improved understanding.

Geographical thinking and diverse planning systems from regional to international scale are highly relevant when it comes to interaction among actors. The session and reflections on 'comparative analysis of MSP' at the Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference highlighted the importance of engagement tailored to specific groups of society. The need for innovative tools and interaction to also learn from experience has been emphasised. The 'Living Q' has been appreciated as a mechanism that can be of benefit for theory and practice in marine planning.

Table 1 'Living Q' rules of the game [11]

Step	Description
1	Participants are asked to have a look at the pre-selected statements on MSP.
2	Afterward, participants are asked to sort these statements into categories from strongly disagree to strongly agree (including the category neutral) using a sheet of paper, questionnaires or pre-printed cards with the statements. Note: Only one statement per category is possible.
3	The moderator shows each statement at a time.
4	Participants walk around a U-shaped line in the room and position themselves along bases, which indicate the numbers for the ranking.
5	The moderator highlights the distribution of participants and facilitates a discussion and participants explain why they decided to position themselves in this specific category.
6	Participants have the opportunity to re-consider and change their ranking after discussions and position themselves in another category.
7	Repeat from step 3.
8	Moderator asks participants to reflect their decisions and experiences.

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