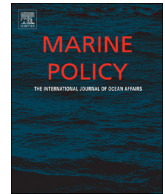




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# Past-present discontinuity in ecological change and marine governance: An integrated narrative approach to artisanal fishing

Carla Mouro\*, Tânia Santos, Paula Castro

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), CIS-IUL, Av. das Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal

## ABSTRACT

Today artisanal fishers working in *Natura 2000* coastal protected sites face two major types of change: in marine resources, and the governance of their professions. Such transformations affect fishers' livelihoods, identities and traditions, yet little is known about how these professionals elaborate on these changes – i.e., as continuities or discontinuities – in the narratives they produce as a group. Interviews and focus-groups with artisanal fishers and shellfish harvesters (n = 36) from the Portuguese Southwest coast were subjected to a two-step analysis. First, a textual analysis with *Iramuteq* helped select the themes directly related to marine resources and governance. Second, three main narratives – on algae, barnacles and fish – were reconstructed. These were then explored regarding: (1) narrative formats (stability, regressive, progressive, mixed); (2) whether/how these formats elaborated changes as continuities or discontinuities; (3) the roles attributed to Self and Others, and whether and how these legitimized the laws, opening avenues for change; and (4) whether narratives were unified or fragmented. This study illustrates how transformations are presented through various combinations of narrative formats, sometimes mobilized to resist and other times to legitimate legal institutional change. It shows how institutional change can be integrated into local narratives as a positive contribution through a process that implies re-constructing the collective identity and local traditions. Through a narrative approach, this paper offers an integrated examination of fishers' concerns towards their professions and the laws regulating them, and provides useful insight into how and when marine governance is more/less likely to be legitimized.

## 1. Introduction

Today artisanal fishers working in coastal protected sites integrated in the European Union (EU) *Natura 2000* network face two types of transformations: in marine resources and in the policies governing their profession. On the one hand, the availability and timings of some marine species are changing, due to various factors, including climate change and over-fishing [1]. On the other hand, in protected *Natura 2000* coastal sites fishing activities are now regulated by various new laws and institutions [2]. The present paper aims to gain insight into how artisanal fishers make sense of these two types of changes, i.e., to what extent the accounts they give suggest these changes are lived as major discontinuities, and indicate acceptance or contestation of laws and institutions. It also seeks to reflect on what this suggests for the formulation of marine conservation policies better adjusted to climate change and the professions affected.

This issue is made even more relevant by the fact that artisanal fishing<sup>1</sup> has been steadily decreasing in EU member-states in recent

decades, for reasons as yet unclear [1]. Some analysts point out how EU marine policies have followed a restrictive, top-down model, prioritizing ecological and biological factors, especially in *Natura 2000* sites, and favouring a uni-directional communication that fails to listen to fishers and include their input [e.g.2–5]. Some of these scholars argue that this may negatively affect the continuity of these communities [5–7], and that the decline of the communities may, in turn, negatively affect the very resources the policies seek to protect – since viable fisheries “need viable fishing communities” [5, pg.53].

Moreover, over the years artisanal fishing communities have consistently contested some aspects of this governance model [5,6], as well as some specific *Natura 2000* coastal and marine regulations [2,3]. It has, thus, become increasingly important to know more about how fishers make sense of *Natura* implementation and regulations. This means knowing more about how they view the state of marine resources and their relationship to them, what rights and duties they claim as institutionally regulated professionals, what accounts they offer about the institutions responsible for their governance, and what

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [carla.mouro@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:carla.mouro@iscte-iul.pt) (C. Mouro), [tania.rita.santos@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:tania.rita.santos@iscte-iul.pt) (T. Santos), [paula.castro@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:paula.castro@iscte-iul.pt) (P. Castro).

<sup>1</sup> ‘Artisanal fishing’ is broadly used in this paper to refer to the professional fishing, shellfish harvesting and harvesting of other traditional marine resources. Distinctions and specific terminology are employed when justified.

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can be learned from these responses.

In this regard, recent reviews of the studies that have analysed the implementation of *Natura 2000* reveal that the social and psycho-social aspects of this process remain under-studied, as most analysis have focused on ecological outcomes only [cf.8]. Furthermore, the few investigations examining social and social-psychological aspects were mostly guided by such concepts as perceptions, attitudes or beliefs [cf.9]. However, studies guided by these concepts usually leave three types of lacunae. First, because these are atomistic or molecular concepts, studies fail to explore how beliefs and attitudes are integrated in meaning systems [10]. Second, the concepts are often used in a way that assumes that sense making is only an individual – not also a joint, social – endeavour, and therefore the collective, shared dimensions of meaning making are left unexplored [11]. Third, they examine sense making in a static fashion, failing to analyse its temporal deployment. Even the few studies that have approached fishers' views by exploring their shared, collective, dimensions [e.g. 4,12,13] have, nevertheless, left the temporal dimension undertheorized or forgotten.

There are, however, social-psychological approaches that developed a theorization of how meaning-making is jointly elaborated and transformed through integrated meaning-systems, and of the temporal dimension this entails. One example is the narrative approach [14], which assumes that narratives bring meaning and order to individual and collective experiences and events [10,15,16] by selecting and placing them in certain – culturally learned – typified sequences over time [17], and by ascribing also typified roles and responsibilities to Self and Others [18,19]. The narrative approach has thus the potential to offer a richer understanding of the relations between people, their environments [9] and their governing institutions [20], by namely helping explore how local narratives make sense of new fishing policies [e.g.21]. Therefore, this paper adopts an integrated narrative approach for exploring fishers' accounts of marine resources and their governing institutions.

To this end, the transcriptions of narrative interviews and focus groups conducted with artisanal fishers and harvesters living in the Portuguese *Natura 2000 Southwest Coast* site were analysed. This is a coastal site where small-scale, artisanal fishing and the harvesting of sea-food (e.g., barnacles) are important activities, and were the object of a series of specific legislations in recent decades [cf.1,22], some of them actively contested by the local fishers [3]. The next section offers more details on *Natura 2000* and the context of the study; then the theoretical tenets of a narrative approach are substantiated. After detailing the methodological and analytic procedures employed, the main narratives that emerged are presented. Lastly, the contributions of this study are discussed.

## 2. *Natura 2000* and artisanal fishing – the context of the study

The *Natura 2000* network – the largest network of protected sites in the world – is the cornerstone of EU biodiversity conservation policy [9]. Covering around 18% of the EU land area and almost 6% of its marine territory, the network resulted from the transposition to member-states of two EU Directives<sup>2</sup> seeking to protect endangered habitats and species [23]. This was followed in most countries by the issuing of specific national legislation applying to the protected sites, which brought additional restrictions to local activities [2,3]. For instance, in the *Southwest Coast* area where the present study took place, the harvesting of barnacles is a traditional activity and a relevant source of economic income. This activity is now regulated by specific rules, which include a limited number of harvesting licenses, the implementation of a closed season and a maximum daily catch per harvester [cf.22]. Similar rules were imposed for fishing, later altered to less stringent ones following public opposition [cf.3]. The

implementation of the protected sites has been also criticized by fishers for relying almost exclusively on biological and ecological expertise, neglecting local knowledge, actors and concerns [2,3]. The criticism is corroborated by a recent review showing how EU fisheries management often follows a top-down model with goals defined by governmental institutions, and collaborative governance is rare [24].

In sum, these changes in marine resources and in the governance of their profession affect fishers' livelihoods, identities and traditions [13]. It is therefore relevant to know more about the narratives these professionals produce as a group about these changes: to what extent they are presented as discontinuities or accommodated as continuities, how they are contested or accepted, how they depict Self-Other relations over time. The next section presents the literature that will help explore fishers' narratives.

## 3. Narratives of change: the elaboration of continuity and discontinuity

Narratives are cultural tools used for sense making [14,19]. They constitute forms of telling and remembering the past that carry and integrate values, beliefs, attitudes, norms and knowledge, and are key for defining identities and for legitimizing past, present and future actions and roles of Self and Others [10,15,16]. In the telling of personal or group stories, some authors consider that a sense of continuity is essential for sustaining a positive identity [25]. In the narrative literature, continuity is usually illustrated by one of the three prototypical narrative formats [17], the *stability* format. This format narrates events as persistent or continuous over time. Changes that may challenge continuity – like a change of residence – can present identity threats that need to be dealt with [e.g.15]. In our case, the new marine policies impose changes that can be seen as devaluing local traditions and may, thus, be elaborated and narrated by fishers as threatening discontinuities. Such negative discontinuities are often contested and resisted through nostalgic narratives, where a *regressive* format [17] elaborates change as a negative discontinuity that de-legitimizes the present situation, and favours a return to the “good old days”.

However, changes and transformations can likewise be recounted in a way that is useful for a positive re-construction of collective identities [26], e.g., by defending a desired change for the group [27]. This may imply the recognition that some past actions of the Self had negative consequences (e.g., local fishing contributed to the scarcity of some species), and the integration of these actions into identity re-construction in such a way that the continuity of the group is defended [26] (e.g., fishers actively demanding limits to some activities, to avoid depletion). Such integration of changes in narratives, elaborating them as oriented to a future continuity, can be achieved through either a prototypical *progressive* format or a combination of two formats – the *regressive* and the *progressive* ones –, organizing a *mixed* downwards-upwards plot [17].

In short, when the group's story is told, transformations can be presented as either continuities or discontinuities, and these, depending on the roles attributed to Self and Others [28], can be mobilized for either presenting change as positive or negative, legitimizing or delegitimizing it [26] and allowing or refusing convergence between local aspirations and legal impositions [3]. This intricate dynamic between continuity and discontinuity in narrative construction may help understand why local responses to conservation policies are often complex, combining both resistance to and integration of new meanings and arguments into the local narratives [28–30]. This paper will thus examine how the narrative formats and contents used by fishers elaborate changes as continuity or discontinuity.

Finally, it is important to note that the stories told by individuals through these cultural and shared formats – *regressive*, *progressive*, *stable*, or *mixed* [17] – are both personal and collective. They are personal narratives that help people maintain a sense of identity over time [18, pg.339,15]. Nevertheless, they are also learned stories that are told and

<sup>2</sup> The Birds [79/409/EEC, 91/244/EEC] and Habitats [92/43/EEC] Directives.

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