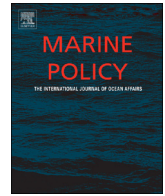




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How much in the clan are you? The community as an explanatory factor of the acceptance of poaching in small-scale fisheries

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ABSTRACT

This work is an in-depth look at the acceptance of poaching in Galicia, exploring the role of the community in tolerating acts of non-compliance with shellfishing regulations in Noia, (Galicia, Northwest of Spain). Tolerated non-compliance attitudes were identified and as a result it was possible to define the motivations behind poaching and which individuals are potentially acceptable in the target community. It was concluded that formal access and withdrawal property rights to shellfishing resources are only granted by the formal users of the resources under certain circumstances, but, fundamentally, only to individuals who are recognised as belonging to the community. To this regard, the concept of community is what sustains the possibilities of co-managing the resources and the acceptance of certain shellfish poaching acts within the community in question. Once the possibility of acceptance was established, the perceptions of the shellfish harvesters were used to measure tolerance towards poaching by asking the following question: Up to what point can poaching be tolerable? The information used in this work was collected in 95 surveys carried out between February and April 2017.

1. Introduction

Shellfish poaching in Galicia is considered to be the most important problem in the shellfishing sector due to the fact that it is an endemic, widespread phenomenon and deeply rooted in coastal communities [1–6]. Attitudes of non-compliance with Galician shellfishing law are founded on a series of incentives promoting illegal shellfish gathering, which are structural in nature: it is, in practice, impossible to carry out a thorough surveillance of the coast, it is difficult to identify and effectively punish poachers, the existence of a well-established black market which demands large quantities of shellfish, and the social acceptance of illegal practices, among others [2].

Recent studies into the management of fisheries highlight the need to study non-compliance attitudes among marine resources users, using methods adapted to the specific nature of each small-scale fishery [7], and forgoing the classic binary approach. The latter only makes a distinction between those who comply and those who do not, the former makes it possible to evaluate the problem by acknowledging the existence of diverse attitudes of acceptance and engagement with fishery regulations [8,9]. Using this approach, some studies have been carried out into the acceptance of non-compliance attitudes in small scale fishing and shellfish harvesting communities, these works mention that tolerance towards illegal shellfish gathering may be based on the

perception that these acts, besides benefitting specific individuals, may be favourable for the wellbeing of the fishing community as a whole by establishing compensation frameworks to promote social justice [3,4,10–12].

The analyses carried out in the aforementioned works are based on two characteristics. The first one is that the shellfish gathering takes place in fishing communities where maritime activities not only support the socioeconomic existence of the same, but also define them culturally and determine the interpersonal relationships of their members [11,13–16]. To this regard, communities depending on natural resources have been described as social constructs defined by the perception, self-association and by the feeling of belonging of their members, in institutional contexts governed by common rules [11,15,17–22]. Nevertheless, these fishing communities are so complex, that it is not possible to accept that they are defined by homogeneous characteristics, uniform beliefs and traits of identity, or by stable and well-defined relationships [19]. Keeping this complexity in mind in this research it was agreed to accept the definition of community given by Agrawal and Gibson [18] based on three core factors: i) the community arises from a local economic homogeneous activity, which is dependent on natural resources, ii) the limits of the community are clearly defined, and iii) its members share common rules and values.

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The second characteristic is that the allotment and organisation of the resources are accomplished by means of a co-management regime, in which informal institutional management can favour a more efficient organisation of resources [20,21,23–34].

In Galicia, shellfishing activities fulfil both premises. On the one hand, shellfish harvesting is carried out under a co-management regime [35], in which the participation of formal shellfish harvesters has been fundamental to establish the institutional architecture of the activity [36–40]. At present, Galician shellfish harvesters hold clear and well-defined formal property rights which stipulate their rights and obligations with regard to shellfishing activities.¹ Furthermore, as they are members of Fishermen's Associations, they benefit from certain self-management capabilities, which imply internal organisational competences, resource management and the organisation of harvesting activities, moreover, they have the capacity to establish internal mechanisms to manage participation, sanctions and representation [41–43]. These characteristics make it possible to bring about informal institutional arrangements regarding the management of shellfish beds, such as, for example, the acceptance of some non-compliance attitudes [3].

On the other hand, in Galicia, there are numerous coastal communities in which their members live, socialize and share identity characteristics and cultural attributes and in which they pass down institutionalized knowledge about fishing and about the exploited ecosystems [44]. In fact, Freire and García-Allut [45] identified over 80 centres of population with some kind of connection to fishing, varying in size, from towns to villages or hamlets, along the Galician coastline. In the majority of cases they depend on fishing for their livelihood, the sector being one of strategic importance for Galicia in that it drives local economies and sustains whole communities. In this scenario, some research revealed that tolerance towards specific acts of non-compliance between peers within the fishing communities depended on the fishermen's moral interpretation of these activities [3,10–12,46–48]. In these cases, the fishing community is presented as an institutional construct in which tolerance towards illegal activities could come about if the collective morality is not violated, for example, approving small illegal operations which guaranteed subsistence incomes for the fishermen. On the other hand, activities which implied any excess, predatory behaviour or involved financial exchanges with outsiders were openly rejected [3,11,12]. This type of relationship between permissiveness subject to motivation and membership to the community is what justifies the study of poaching in a co-management context. In this regard, although several studies into non-compliance highlighted that poaching acceptance is possible in communities that are dependent on natural resources, no one has measured the degree of tolerance of these non-compliance activities. For this reason, in this paper, the limits of poaching tolerance will be explored answering the question: Up to what point can poaching be tolerable?

For the set out above, this paper aims to delve into the acceptance of shellfish poaching in the Galician institutional context on the assumption that an explanatory variable determining the tolerance of certain non-compliance attitudes is the fact that poachers belong to the shellfish harvesting communities. This premise would imply the need to explore the existence of a common idea of community among the formal users of Galician shellfishing resources.

A case study was carried out in the shellfish harvesting community of Noia (A Coruña, North West Spain) to check the initial hypothesis. To address the discussion proposed, several preliminary research questions were answered. First of all, it was ascertained whether or not the

licensed harvesters would tolerate shellfish poaching in certain cases in Noia, if so, under what circumstances. With this in mind, the following questions were asked: Which poaching activities are tolerable in Noia? Moreover, who can undertake such poaching activities? Secondly, an analysis was carried out into the relationship between shellfish harvesting community membership and tolerance towards poaching, drawing on the understanding of the concept of community-based on the perception of the users. Finally, a rank of poachers in terms of the degree of tolerance was generated, indicating which individuals are tolerable, under which circumstances and to what degree.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. In the next section, some contextual notes about the target community and the Galician shellfish sector will be presented. The survey and the description of the data analysis are contained in Section 2 as well. Section 3 presents the results of the case of study developed in this research, while the paper concludes with a discussion and some concluding remarks in Sections 4 and 5.

2. Methods

2.1. The community of study

In the community of Noia (Galicia, Northwest of Spain, Fig. 1), shellfish harvesting is a fundamental activity, the importance of which can be illustrated by means of economic indicators. For example, in terms of employment, 466 shellfish harvesters were granted shellfish exploitation permits to work on the town's beaches in 2017, additionally, during the same period, 526 traditional fishing boats were authorised to withdraw shellfish in the same area, employing 1076 crew members [42,43,49].

With regard to production, more than 2545 t of the principal species of bivalves, sold in the local fish market, were withdrawn in 2017 (essentially, cockles and 3 varieties of clams), with an initial sale value of more than 16.1 million Euros. The importance of the community of Noia as a shellfish production centre is made evident if these figures are taken into account in absolute terms. To this regard, the fish market in Noia concentrated 34.41% of the total volume of cockle and clam production sold in Galicia, which amounts to a quarter of the 65.22 million Euros of the initial sale value in 2017 of the aforementioned species [42].

The data set forth regarding employment and production bear witness to the direct impact of local shellfish harvesting. Nevertheless, the economic importance of shellfish harvesting transcends the local sphere and spreads throughout the Galician economy, be it by way of indirect impacts, those corresponding to production or employment generated in sectors supplying shellfish harvesting goods and services, or induced impacts such as those related to the purchasing power of the employees in the sector. Specifically, García-Negro et al. (2016) observed to this respect, that each Euro generated by the production of shellfish harvesting in Galicia on land and at sea requires an input of 0.35 Euros from 41 different branches of the economy. Furthermore, the shellfish industry is a key supplier to other fishing industries, such as canning, as well as to sectors such as bars, restaurants, caterers and, of course, households. It has thus been argued that the Galician shellfish industry is much more than a mere harvesting activity and has consolidated itself as a complex one, with carry-over effects on other sectors of the Galician economy. Fig. 2 presents a historical series of the production values of the main species exploited over the last 10 years, and therefore makes it possible to illustrate the relevance of shellfish harvesting activities in the area of Noia.

Considering the above, the importance of Noia as the main shellfish harvesting centre in Galicia justifies its selection not only in terms of representing Galician shellfish harvesting communities, but also as the study site for this investigation.

¹ An individual license call PERMEX defines the property rights held by the Galician shellfish harvesters. This license specifies the shellfish harvester's quota which is individual, non-transferable and is assessed based on a biological Total Allowable Catch. The local Galician government also rules the gathering processes imposing conditions such as where, when and how the PERMEX's formal holders can access and exploit the resources [42].

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