



Are fisheries-dependent communities in Scotland really maritime-dependent communities?



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ABSTRACT

It is often said that fishing is not a job, but a way of life. The traditions, culture and structure of fishing in coastal communities have been built over the centuries, supporting their development and sustaining their existence (OECD, 2007). Scotland has one of Europe's largest fishing fleets with 2,046 working vessels; around 4,800 fishers; 132 active fishing ports; and landings which totalled £466 million in 2012. However, during the last ten years, the number of vessels, people employed and active ports have all decreased and are now at the lowest levels ever recorded (though the value of landings in 2011 was at its highest since 2000 (£501 million) (Marine Scotland, 2012)). This contraction (or 'consolidation') of fishing activity has been driven by fleet efficiency and policies targeting stock recovery – targets which are now showing some success, though, arguably this has been at the expense of some 'fisheries dependent communities' (FDC). This paper looks at community well-being and the links with changes in fishing activity to ask the questions: has a decrease in fishing opportunity had a negative effect on community well-being in Scottish coastal communities?; and if so, has that effect been greater or less in rural compared to urban areas? Community well-being has been measured using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to compare fishing communities' well-being in relation to other Scottish towns. Our main conclusions are that the decrease in fishing activity has had relatively little effect on so-called FDCs, especially those in rural areas, and that we should expand the concept of fisheries-dependent communities into the concept of marine-dependent communities (MDCs) to encapsulate the impacts the range of marine industries have on coastal communities.

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1. Introduction

It is often said that fishing is not a job, but a way of life that is reflected in the traditions, culture and social structures found in fishing communities which have evolved over the centuries to support their development and sustain their existence (OECD,

2007). Scotland is one of Europe's largest fishing nations (Marine Scotland, 2013) but as with most other European nations it has seen a decline in the fishing industry over the last three decades, first and foremost due to severe over-fishing (Froese, 2011) and further by intervening policy initiatives such as decommissioning, resulting in fleet consolidation, and regulations, which have limited fishing opportunities e.g. through quotas and days at sea (The Scottish Government, 2010). The severity of the decline has been clearly mapped from the mid-1980s until the early 2000s (Fig. 1 left), when landings saw a notable recovery but then declined again from 2006. Although this latest decline was offset by price rises which have resulted in the value of landings (real value) recovering to levels observed in the early 90s (Fig. 1 left), the price rises have not been reflected in jobs, and employment has been declining steadily since the early 1990s along with vessel numbers which have been in continual decline for large vessels, and also for

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The Scottish Government, 2010: 5.

“The fishing industry provides important social goods in many remote and deprived areas”

Cabinet Office, 2004 in Urquhart et al., 2011: 241.

However, what is the evidence that the recent decline in Scottish fisheries has resulted in a reduction in the wellbeing of Scottish coastal communities? And what is the evidence for the equally common assertion that rural communities are more sensitive to this decline in fisheries than are urban communities?

In this paper we attempt to quantify the links between economic dependency and fishing in FDCs in Scotland. To conduct this study we used the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (a policy tool employed to target resources to areas suffering from deprivation), to test whether there is a relationship between a change in fisheries employment and volume and value of fisheries landings, and a change in deprivation. We quantify the economic elements of well-being, drawing on findings from key informant interviews to contextualise this data, and then discuss the implications of our findings for the concept of FDC.

2. Key concepts

Although social wellbeing has been described as a fuzzy concept that means different things to different people (White, 2008; Coulthard et al., 2011), some common ground is emerging. Wellbeing is a positive, inclusive concept that is as relevant for the wealthy as for the poor, but its flipside is traditionally linked to negative development concepts such as poverty and social exclusion (White, 2008). Wellbeing affects us all;

“Wellbeing is a state of being with others, which arises where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one’s goals, and where one can enjoy a satisfactory quality of life”

McGregor, 2008, p. 1.

When exploring what makes up wellbeing, two dimensions are prominent;

“At a simple level, this can be seen in terms of a contrast between the familiar ‘objective’ indicators on income, nutrition, life expectancy etc with the ‘subjective’ dimensions of how individuals feel about their health and economic status”

.White, 2008: 3.

However, because the ‘subjective’ elements of wellbeing are impossible to measure in this case study of Scottish FDCs through lack of relevant data, we focus only on the ‘objective’ elements – in particular on income and employment criteria. The key concept in this paper is ‘deprivation’, which, like the terms poverty and social exclusion, has negative connotations, by contrast to the positive connotations of wellbeing. Like wellbeing, however, deprivation is a multifaceted concept, and this paper focuses on two of the seven dimensions of material deprivation in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (see below) termed as ‘objective’ in the social wellbeing literature; access to material goods and social opportunities. Because it includes social opportunities, deprivation is a broader concept than poverty. Like wellbeing, deprivation is a relative concept that is defined by the societal norms and expectations from the societal group being measured.

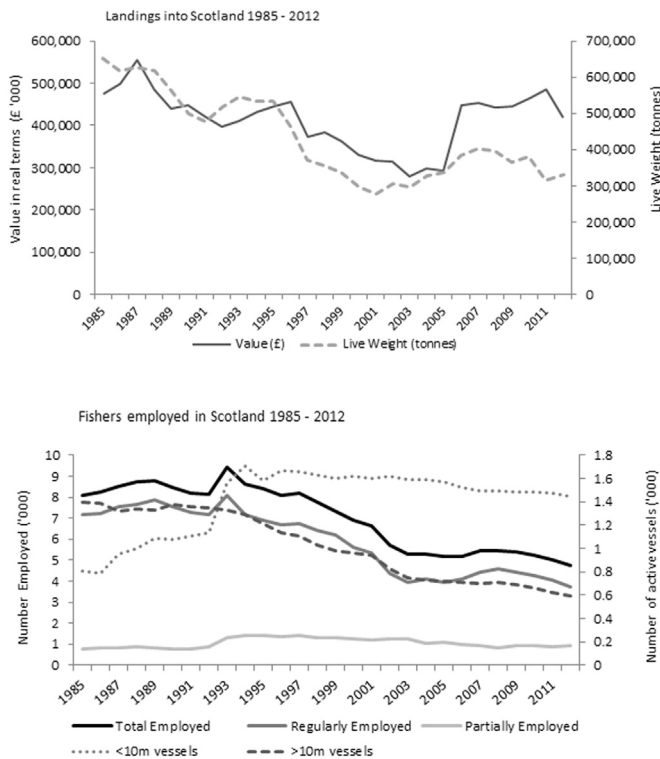


Fig. 1. Volume and value of landings into Scotland from 1985–2012 (left) and number of people employed as fishers, and number of active vessels in Scotland from 1986–2012 (right). All monetary values are to 2012 prices.

small vessels, though at a much lesser rate from 1996 onwards (Fig 1 right).⁴

The impact of this decline is well documented in the literature, often discussed in terms of the negative effects on ‘Fisheries Dependent Communities’ (FDC) (Jamieson et al., 2009; Brookfield et al., 2005; Ross, 2013). The generic term, FDC, has strong social and cultural dimensions (Ross, 2013; Reed et al., 2013) often linked to the historical importance of the industry, but the focus in the policy arena is on the economic dimension (Jamieson et al., 2009) particularly referenced to income and employment.

As many of Scotland’s coastal towns have been built on the back of fishing, the country is often said to have a high number of FDC (Agnew et al., 2010), and the observed decline has been a major concern for policy-makers and academics. This decline has been a result of a number of factors, including overfishing, technological developments, drive for efficiency and profits, and policy interventions (The Scottish Government, 2010). The technological developments have been particularly noticeable, resulting in the majority of the industry which was once low technology, with high local employment on local vessels, evolving into sophisticated businesses, with diverse crews and often serving distant markets. The rhetoric surrounding FDC has, however, remained the same, in that fisheries are still regarded as vital for social wellbeing in otherwise resource poor areas;

“In many small and medium sized settlements, especially on the islands and the remoter parts of the mainland coast, fishing is often the major contributor to the productive economy ... fishing in many cases is vital to their survival”

⁴ The recorded increase in the late 1980s in small vessels is accredited to incorrect data collection methods, rather than a true rise in the number of small vessels (per comm. Marine Scotland, 2013).

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