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Considering communities in fisheries management

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ABSTRACT

Fisheries management in the United States, the European Union, and other parts of the globe, increasingly reflects a burgeoning realization that fisheries management policies affect not only fishermen, but also the broader communities in which fishermen work and reside. Understanding fishing communities, however, is not a straightforward task. Researchers draw upon many methodologies across diverse disciplines in the attempt to better understand the needs of fishing communities and the ways in which fisheries management programs affect these communities. This special issue draws together international research on fishing communities, highlighting the diverse relationships between people, places and their fish and fisheries. Rather than attempting to consolidate these complex, multifarious relationships into simple metrics, the papers presented in this issue illuminate community needs and wants from a variety of frameworks highlighting the importance of meaningfully understanding local contexts. These papers represent novel frameworks and case studies, adding depth of scholarly knowledge to a relatively understudied segment of fisheries management. Specifically, the goal of this issue is to advance the inclusion of community considerations in fisheries management processes. While approaching the topic of fishing communities from diverse perspectives, the papers in this special issue work together to provide a broad view of the concerns and conflicts existent in these communities. They highlight the need for management endeavors to be flexible, broad, and inclusive, providing potential tools and frameworks to aid in management projects.

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1. Introduction

Fisheries management as a discipline has broadened in the past few decades to include concerns such as ecosystems, livelihoods, community sustainability, and well-being. Despite this, day-to-day management efforts remain primarily focused on stock assessments and fish ecology. While efforts have been made to incorporate broader ecological concerns and economic considerations, the non-economic social sciences have remained particularly marginalized, despite legislation in many countries around the globe, mandating the inclusion of various human dimensions in the fisheries management process (e.g., US [1], EU [2], Canada [3], FAO [4]).

Many scholars have proposed reasons for the continued marginalization of non-economic social sciences and these reasons range from the preferences for quantitative data typically used in management [5,6] to the epistemological, that is, the destabilizing force non-economic social science represents to current dynamics of power and control within the fisheries management community [7]. While there are a host of barriers to inclusion, the social sciences have much to contribute to the fisheries management process—from increasing trust between fishermen and managers [8], to ground-truthing quantitative models [9], to determining areas of conflict and misunderstanding between stakeholders [10], to development of social indicators for community vulnerability and resilience [11], and to reconsideration of Optimal Yield (OY) in relation to seafood availability and management [12–14]. This special issue, therefore, discusses recent anthropological research on fishing communities in an effort to highlight the utility of these approaches to the management process, as well as, to discuss ways in which these concepts might be better integrated into fisheries management efforts.

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In the US, the push to include social science in fisheries management dates back to the mid-1990s [15,16]. A new standard (National Standard 8) was implemented, requiring that managers “take into account the importance of fishery resources to fishing communities in order to: (1) provide for the sustained participation of such communities, and (2) to the extent practicable, minimize adverse economic impacts on such communities.” This opened the door, at least legislatively, for increased social science research, in particular anthropological research, in order to account for the importance of fishing communities and their cultural and economic sustainability. These amendments situated fishing communities within the management framework, though the extent of their integration into practical management efforts remains limited. In their landmark publication, Abbott-Jamieson and Clay [17] document the emergence of fisheries anthropology, and especially its inclusion in NOAA and Council committees.

The work of anthropologists within NOAA Fisheries has helped to focus attention on issues of socioeconomic well-being. There has even been some limited success in making contributions to policy, as in the case of the social indicators discussed below. In reality, however, despite their continued efforts, social scientists have had only marginal success in influencing and impacting fisheries management. The vast majority of personnel and resources in the federal-level fisheries management apparatus are devoted exclusively to natural science. Virtually all directorship positions at all levels in NOAA Fisheries are occupied by fish biologists, fish ecologists, and stock status specialists. Each Council is supported by a Regional Fishery Science Center, where personnel collect, manage, and analyze multiple streams of data, collected on periodic bases. Data collection and analysis efforts are increasingly complex. The stock assessment model used in the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico (Stock Synthesis 3.4), for example, is a statistical catch-at-age model that will accommodate more than 1100 parameters (groups of related measurable variables), but none of them are specifically social or economic. The six regional science centers all have the responsibility for stock status data, but they differ in terms of their inclusion of any “human dimensions” in their focus and research. The Northwest Regional Fishery Science Center in Seattle, for example, includes “human caused stress/risks” as one of their five primary areas of interest, and the Northeast Regional Fishery Science Center includes statements on the NOAA webpage on science center [18] that the Center includes “social and economic research in support of the fishery management process.”

The seven papers in this special issue were presented in earlier forms at the 75th Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology in Pittsburgh, PA on March 25, 2015. Lyons and Carothers organized three sessions at those meetings around the theme of Community Considerations in Fishery Systems. These papers primarily utilized anthropological theories and methods to understand fishing communities, and were primarily based on research conducted in the U. S. While not all aspects or types of fisheries anthropological research are represented, the papers presented in this special issue individually and collectively give an overview of the issues and concerns that characterize recent research in the field. The individual papers fall under two broad categories: (1) those concerned with increasing our understandings of fishing communities and (2) those concerned with developing assessments of these communities for integration into the management process.

2. Understanding fishing communities

Fishing communities do not exist in isolation, nor do they consist of a homogeneous and undifferentiated set of residents.

Rather, fishing communities are highly varied, encompassing individuals with direct and indirect connections to fishing. It is, therefore, useful to take a broad, multifaceted approach to the idea of community, when considering the community-level implications of fishery policies. With that goal in mind, the four papers in the first section discuss disparate aspects of community, focusing on how relationships with fish resources vary among communities, and identifying potential threats to these relationships. In particular, these papers focus on the community formed by fishermen's wives (Calhoun et al.), geographical communities in Alaska (Donkersloot) and Russia (Nakhshina) and interactions between the community of fisheries enforcers and fishermen (Moon and Conway).

In their paper, Sarah Calhoun, Flaxen Conway, and Suzanne Russell seek to incorporate gender analysis into the understanding of fishing communities. Their article documents women's contributions to Oregon fisheries, which have been vital to community resilience, adaptation, and well-being. Their paper discusses the development of an oral history project, “Voices From the West Coast.” The project creates an oral history fishery database for the states of Washington, Oregon, and California in collaboration with the NOAA Northwest Fishery Science Center, Oregon State University, and Newport Fishermen's Wives. The major part of their paper reports on the research methods and on the thematic components that emerge from the analyses. The themes include “taking care of the family and maritime household,” “increases in roles in fisheries management, policy, and decision-making,” and “work within the processing sector,” among others. The activities of these women were seen as strengthening resilience by being adaptive and contributing to local knowledge. The authors conclude by pointing out that the research shows that management and policy-making would profit from greater attention to and inclusion of the manifold ways in which women contribute to stability and thus resilience.

Rachel Donkersloot draws upon an ethnographic examination of North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) efforts to develop a new catch-share program. The paper draws upon a political ecology framework (briefly, ecological information and processes channeled through political considerations and outcomes) to analyze ethnographic data collected from publicly available documents and attendance at public meetings. These methods allowed Donkersloot to contextualize the discussion within the political spaces and perspectives that inform decisions. In effect she has produced a meta-document tracing the central elements of the debate and making available a “road-map through time of the unfolding of points, positions, arguments, and debates that eventually led to the development of the GOA (Gulf of Alaska) Trawl Bycatch Management Program”. She notes that the exercise of power by those engaged in the discussions did not include fishermen who would be the most negatively affected by the move to individual transferrable quotas in the new system. The research is an excellent example of how an ethnographic approach can produce detailed and historically rich accounts and derive conclusions that would not otherwise be visible.

Maria Nakhshina, examines social issues in Russian fisheries, which closely parallel those in US communities. Nakhshina's work draws upon a richly detailed ethnography of communities on the coast of the White Sea, in particular the salmon fisheries in the Arkhangelsk oblast. A major concern of participants in the salmon fisheries is to sustain access to fishing within communities that have had historical rights to the fish. Recent developments have essentially nullified legal rights to that access. Local Arkhangelsk fishermen and activists argue for access on the bases of cultural identity, indigeneity, and traditions of the Pomor people in the region. The paper reports on a series of activities by fisheries management officials and organizations to increase and stabilize

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