



# The role of fishing material culture in communities' sense of place as an added-value in management of coastal areas



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**Abstract** Fishing communities in many places around the world are facing significant challenges due to new policies and environmental developments. While it is imperative to ensure sustainability of natural resources, many policies may overlook the contribution of fisheries to the sociocultural well-being of coastal communities. Authors address the problem of valuing the sociocultural benefits of fishing by exploring the role of fishing landscapes and traditional working waterfronts in maintaining sense of place in fishing communities. The paper explores how sense of place contributes to understanding the relationship between fishing and cultural-ecosystem services, drawing on case studies from four U.S. fishing communities in Brunswick County, North Carolina. Through semi-structured and in-depth interviews with fishing communities members, resident photography and sites visits, this paper outlines how fishing contributes to sense of place in terms of place-attachment and cultural-social memory. By understanding the relationship between fishers' sense of place, and the physical environment in fishing communities in Brunswick County, the authors identify the complexity and interrelated elements that shape the relationship between fishermen and their cultural landscape. The paper suggests that realizing the value of fishing cultural landscape can encourage policies that promote preservation of fishing cultural heritage for the sociocultural benefit of communities.

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## Introduction

With boats, fish houses, ship yards, crafts, traditions and other elements related to fishing (Barrett, 1992), commercial fishermen have not only intervened in the natural environment over centuries in the coastal areas, but also have established identity

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and place attachment. Place attachments are connections to certain physical and social settings that provide different types of social and psychological benefits (Brown et al., 2003). Places are characterized by the physical setting, as well as the range of human activities and social processes that are carried out there (Stedman, 2003).

Fishermen and their material culture are a part of a maritime cultural landscape and traditional working waterfront (Davise, 2001; Inscoc, 2006). These places assist in understanding the culture of fishermen and the meaning of this heritage in fishermen's everyday life (Ford, 2011; Ransley, 2011). However, due to the changes in the use of resources and land/sea-use regulations and policies (Hoyle et al., 1988), along with development and climate change, fishing towns are in decline; in many places development has taken over and gentrification has occurred (Jepson et al., 2005; Coperthwaite, 2006). The result has been the loss of maritime cultural heritage such as fishing material culture, traditional waterfronts, and maritime cultural landscape. Based on my research, I suggest that maritime cultural heritage is a public good that, if conserved, can slow or prevent the loss of social value and well-being associated with commercial fishing (Duran et al., 2015; Brown, 2004). Wellbeing has several dimensions and attributes such as job stability and satisfaction, identity, sustainability and attachment to place (Altman, 1993; (Hausmann et al., 2015; García-Quijano, et al., 2015).

Some studies argue that fisheries policy does not adequately consider social dimensions of fishing communities (Symes and Phillipson, 2009; Steelman and Wallace, 2001; Symes, 2005; Bradshaw et al., 2001; Pollnac et al., 2006; Worm et al., 2009). Others have highlighted the importance of social and cultural contexts of fishing (Griffith, 1999; Urquhart et al., 2014), suggesting that fishing is not just an occupation (Brookfield et al., 2005; Jacob et al., 2005; Nuttall, 2000; García-Quijano, et al., 2015), but also a highly satisfying way of life that which defines fishers' identity. Fishing communities can be the site for the creation of deep-rooted place attachments, adding social value to the economic value of fishing (Jentoft, 2000; Marsden and Hines, 2008).

It has been noted that to sustain fishing communities new perspectives and methods are needed that highlight the wide range of cultural and social values that are generated by marine fishing activities (FAO, 2016; Chapin et al., 2012; Colburn and Jepson, 2012; Kofinas and Chapin, 2009; Johnson et al., 2014). This study investigates how place attachment is strongly linked to material cultural and the cultural landscape. There are three major components of place: the physical form, activity, and meaning. Place is a space imbued with meanings (Relph, 1976). This paper reports on the significance of traditional fishing working waterfronts and their material culture for the fishermen in preserving sense of community and place attachment as attribute of social wellbeing in fishing communities for their sustainability. *"Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects. Places may have a range of values for different individuals or groups."* (Australia ICOMOS, 2000, Article 1.2; ICOMOS – ISCEAH – ICOMOS Ethical Statement", 2016).

Considering that heritage is "that part of the past which we select in the present for contemporary purposes, be they eco-

nomie, cultural, political, or social" (Graham, 2002: 17), this research provides an inventory of valuable commercial fishing cultural heritage in the targeted communities, and investigates and explores the value and role of this heritage in the fishing communities place attachment. This Research explores the proposition that fishermen's sense of place and attachment to their community is influenced by the amount and quality of fishing material culture and built heritage. This study explores the proposition that there is direct correlation between community sense of place and their amount and quality of heritage and traditional working waterfronts preservation.

The justifications for this research are: (1) although it has been acknowledged that achieving sustainable fisheries is feasible through integrating management and policies across biological, social and economic dimensions (FCR, 2000; Forst, 2009), sociocultural values of commercial fishing have mainly been underappreciated in coastal management (Urquhart et al., 2014); (2) several fishing communities are in decline or in danger of becoming extinct due to several natural and anthropogenic causes, which will result in loss of part of the living history and authentic heritage; and (3) by extinction of fishing communities, many related cultural heritage will be abolished and replaced with new urban development, which results in loss of part of human cultural heritage (Jacob and Witman, 2006). Highlighting the values of fishing cultural heritage helps to promote policies to ensure the continued existence of this tradition as well its associated cultural heritage (Act of 2005; Act of 2009).

To preserve the long legacy of commercial fishing and seafood businesses, several studies regarding tangible and intangible fishing heritage have been conducted in the US, along the coast and also in North Carolina (NC Sea Grant, 2007; <http://www.wateraccessus.com/cslist.cfm>; Griffith and Mirabilio, 2012). However, no formal studies have previously been conducted to assess the sociocultural role of fishing heritage in fishing communities in southeastern North Carolina. Therefore, in recognition of the dramatic collapse of fish and commercial fishing in this area, this paper studies the role of communities' cultural heritage in place attachment of four existing and active fishing communities in Brunswick County. The communities of Southport, Varnamtown, Holden Beach and Shallotte have been observed and compared with each other in order to evaluate their quantity and quality of fishing cultural heritage, and the role of heritage in preserving sense of place attachment in the members of these fishing communities. Better understanding of fishing cultural heritage in southeastern NC will help demonstrate how the use-values as well as non-use-values of cultural heritage can benefit people and incorporate in communities' sense of place as an attribute of wellbeing (Potschin and Haines-Young, 2012; Milcu et al., 2013). This study will shed light on cultural heritage as non-market goods (MEA, 2005) and their significant role in people's life.

The following section reviews the literature on sense of place and explores its contribution to understanding fishing communities.

## Background

### *Fishing heritage and the traditional waterfront*

Fishing involves certain human adaptations and behaviors, which necessitates the development of certain cultural charac-

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