

INTERACTIVE APPROACHES TO GLOBAL AND LOCAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT: A Challenge for Fisheries Social Scientists

Nathalie A. Steins

Dutch Fish Product Board
nsteins@pvis.nl

A second discussant always has the privilege of responding to two voices. And I must say that I was really pleased to be given the opportunity to respond to an authority in fisheries biology *and* to an authority in fisheries social science. I think both Daniel Pauly and Svein Jentoft raised a number of issues that not only this conference, but everyone involved in fisheries - be they scientists, administrators, managers, the fishing industry, environmentalists, or other stakeholders - should take note of. Adding to Svein's remarks, I would like to reflect on Daniel's observations about the potential role of social science in fisheries.

Although I now work for the fishing industry, I am a fisheries sociologist by background. And like Svein, I was always oriented to fisheries in the North: north-western Europe to be more precise. I worked in small-scale and industrial fisheries (although I am not that happy with this terminology since small-scale can be industrial too). When Svein said that, like small-scale fishers, fisheries social scientists are a marginalised group too, I could not help smiling. This was exactly why I decided to leave academia to start working for the fishing industry where I felt I could make a difference by becoming an active part of the policy process. Do I make this difference? On the huge European fisheries management scale I am not so sure. So I might as well have stayed a working fisheries social scientist. But frankly I do not regret my career change. Only by becoming part of the policy process did I really learn how difficult it is to translate the messages from the natural and social sciences into sound fisheries management and did I understand the kinds of ecological, socio-economic, and cultural complexities that are involved. When I hear Svein responding to Daniel saying that he unfortunately does not see any trace of social scientists' work in the policy documents of various governments, I think I can enlighten you as to why this might be.

Social scientists have an incredibly difficult message to sell. As Daniel rightly argued, most of us tend to focus on the local, on case studies, on socio-cultural diversity, etc. The message of social scientists to policy makers is often: 'generalised and top-down policy does not work, instead we need bottom-up and tailor-made management'. This is a macro message that originates from micro studies and a message that makes sense. But imagine that you are an administrator having to deal with a nation's or even a whole continent's fisheries management system. Then suddenly bottom-up and tailor-made management becomes very difficult indeed. Think of the implications for implementation of a vast number of different regulations and their enforcement, let alone the equity issues involved. So just arguing the case for people-oriented fisheries management -- which is nice to hear from a biologist for a change -- will not bring us that far. And I agree with Svein that simply doing more research will not solve the problems small-scale fisheries, but also industrial fisheries are facing, since most of

them are political in nature. Disclosing how governance systems work, as Svein suggested, should be one of our jobs. But I also believe that what is needed from fisheries social science more than anything -- and this touches upon Svein's remark about our role in empowerment processes -- is a more action-oriented approach towards the development of effective tools for bridging gaps between administrators, fishers, and other stakeholders to jointly work towards problem appreciation and solution. I personally find it very encouraging that at least in north-western Europe, a number of initiatives and governance experiments, which could be classified as interactive fisheries projects, have started from which we could draw really important lessons.

Daniel asks us to generalise the social in fisheries. He proposes that by being willing to develop generalisations, biologists and economists have been able to monopolise the fisheries arena. Administrations prefer generalised policy and regulations, so what could be more successful than a generalised message? And when I hear Daniel speaking, and knowing that right now his name and ideas are buzzing in the corridors of the European fisheries directorate and finding their way into policy discussions, he has proven this point well. But there is also an inherent danger in generalising, a danger which at the same time provides the social sciences with a challenge.

Generalisations may lead to prejudice, and while listening to Daniel, I could not help but notice certain preconceived ideas or perhaps 'stereotyping' towards 'small is beautiful' and 'big is bad'. In his attempts to explain the marginalisation of small-scale fisheries -- a phenomenon that occurs all over the place, and I would argue also in the industrial fisheries in the North -- one of his arguments is that the industrialisation of fisheries accelerated the marginalisation of small-scale fisheries. Daniel has a strong point there. But things are changing, although perhaps not as fast as we all would like. Criticism from people like Daniel and from non-governmental organisations has led, for example, to what you could call breakthroughs in how some industrial fishing companies now deal with their fisheries agreements in the South in order to bring real benefit to local communities instead of merely filling the pockets of often corrupt governments. These positive examples have, at least within the European Union, led to policy changes with respect to third country agreements and have also been picked up by governments in Africa. We can also see co-management systems emerging in the Northern industrial fisheries that were once governed by top-down policy, which despite good intentions was detrimental to fisheries. Equally there are many examples where small-scale fisheries, in spite of their appealing name, have caused severe ecological and social problems, as Daniel showed in his presentation.

Social scientists are often inclined to study the perhaps more romantic local fishing community, but disclosing the processes involved in the operation of industrial fisheries is in my view of even greater importance. After all, industrial fisheries in the South and North provide the bulk of fish. They are here, whether you like it or not. And with an ever-increasing global demand for food, with fish being a relatively cheap but high-protein food source -- but also in view of increasing demands on product quality in the North -- it is unlikely that industrial fisheries will disappear altogether. It is exactly because of the impact industrial fisheries can have on fish stocks, the ecosystem, and on social systems and the economy, that these fisheries need our immediate attention. Only by understanding

how they work, and what drives them, will it be possible to facilitate a transition towards responsible fisheries from an ecological and a social perspective. But if we keep depicting industrial fisheries as the 'capitalist bad guys' and small-scale fisheries as the good guys we should embrace, it is unlikely that we will make this move and more likely that we will instead lose interest as Svein Jentoft confessed. Social scientists should care about profit margins and the introduction of harvesting machines because these are part of a transformation process in fisheries that affects fishers and fisheries communities in the South *and* the North, small-scale *and* industrial, and ultimately our own future. We should also care about the frequent interdependence between these fisheries and between fisheries and their larger social and economic contexts; with the effects of rising fuel prices Daniel mentioned being a good example.

Finally, by generalising, there is a risk that we may overlook the perceptions and discourses that shape fisheries management or worse, that we may impose our own categories or stereotypes thereby failing to explain how fisheries management (or non-management) comes about. After all, fisheries management is socially constructed, not only by fishers and other stakeholders, but also by scientists. So we have to find ways of dealing with this problem.

If we as social scientists want to make a valued contribution towards responsible fisheries management, then we should continue to fight for small-scale fisheries, as Daniel and Svein argue, but we should also have the courage to put preconceptions about capitalist entrepreneurship aside and dive into the world of industrial fisheries. And I regret to say that only a few of us have decided to leave the safe haven of researching small-scale or local fisheries. By shedding light on the processes involved in the governance or non-governance of 'bad' and 'beautiful' fisheries alike -- the interests, images, attitudes, values, discourses, interactions, struggles, and so on -- we can make an invaluable contribution. Not only by increasing public and political awareness of our fisheries resource, but also by providing a basis for the development of tools for administrators, scientists, fishers, and other stakeholders to work towards solutions for truly responsible management.