

# Maritime

## Anthropology: Achievements and Agendas

### Introduction

Since its rise in the 1970s, maritime anthropology has become a more or less well-established sub-discipline. This article will review some major themes, theoretical outlooks, and concepts that have been important in maritime anthropology over the last three decades or so, devoting special attention to work done in Europe. As will become apparent, maritime anthropology has moved in focus from more general anthropological issues to a predominantly applied type of anthropology. Early studies dealt extensively with ecology, territoriality, kinship, social organization (co-ops, unions, associations), division of labor, the share system of remuneration, communication strategies, gossip, secrecy, fishing knowledge, worldviews, rituals, taboos, luck, occupational ethos, ethic and identity – to name just a few aspects. Subsequently, attention shifted to policy and management issues, lending the sub-field an applied character. Currently, a particularly well-researched domain is common pool resource use, including various types of management systems and legal pluralism. Increasingly, maritime anthropologists act as policy advisers to combat over-fishing and to arrive at sustainability of marine resources. They also advise on equitable allocation of access and use rights. Maritime anthropology's achievements notwithstanding, I will argue that returning to the concerns in more general anthropological research would be timely. I will also point to some regional, thematic and theoretical lacunae. But first let me start with some history.

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From the very beginning of “modern” – fieldwork-based – anthropology, island societies and fishing communities received considerable attention from its practitioners. For example, Malinowski wrote on Trobriand fishing, Radcliffe-Brown published his ethnographic monograph on the Andaman Islanders and Margaret Mead gave an account of her research in an Admiralty Islands fishing village (Malinowski 1918; Radcliffe-Brown 1922; Mead 1930). Yet, it would be wrong to assume that their “rustling-of-the-wind-in-the-palm-trees” style of ethnography was evidence of a sub-discipline called “maritime anthropology”. Even Firth’s classic *Malay Fishermen* (1946) does not treat fishing and fishers as a “special” subcategory in their own right; he deals with “their peasant economy” as the subtitle of his book indicates. Though subsequently the occasional ethnography on a maritime community was published,<sup>1</sup> it was only in the late 1960s and especially the 1970s that the contours of maritime anthropology as a sub-discipline began to become recognizable and the term “maritime anthropology” gained some currency.<sup>2</sup> “Maritime ethnology”, a designation probably coined in the early 1950s (cf. Nooteboom 1952), was particularly concerned with the material culture and “folk” culture of people making a living from or at sea. When dealing with Europeans, it is usually considered a sub-discipline of *Volkskunde* (folklore studies or, in Europe, [European] ethnology). Most of the work in the rubric “maritime anthropology” deals with the culture of fishers and fishing communities. Other maritime occupations and communities have received scant attention. Some authors therefore prefer the term “anthropology of fishing” or “fisheries anthropology” (cf. Gatewood and McCay 1988: 103-104).<sup>3</sup>

That maritime anthropology made its appearance at that specific time had probably much to do with promises of a Blue Revolution and the subsequent discovery that marine resources did not come in unlimited supply. In addition, anthropology’s “repatriation” or “part-way coming home” implied that western fishermen and fishing communities came into the scope of anthropologists. Many maritime anthropologists did their fieldwork more or less “at home” (especially on both sides of the North Atlantic). I suspect that they were in search of “authentic” cultures at home and therefore chose fishing communities as their fieldwork locations. To some extent, they continued a tradition established by students of folklore, who throughout Europe had been attracted

1. See e.g. Hornell (1950); Davenport (1956); Weibust (1958); Tunstall (1962); Fraser (1960, 1966); Kottak 1966.

2. See e.g. Weibust (1969); Hasslöf *et al.* (1972); Smith (1977c); McCay (1978).

3. In France, too, maritime anthropology and fisheries anthropology would seem to be synonymous (see Geistdoerfer 1984).

4. For example, anthropologist Reginald Byron does not consider his ethnography of the fishers of Burra (Shetland Islands) and example of “maritime anthropology” or “the anthropology of fishing”: “I consider it as a work of social anthropology that just happens to be about fishermen” (Byron 1986: 5).

by the “folk” in fisher folk and romanticized them as embodying the spiritual essence of the nation (van Ginkel 2003). By the time anthropologists discovered them, most fishing communities were experiencing rapid transformation. The introduction of the Law of Sea and exclusive economic zones, the rise of oil and gas exploration and exploitation, the development of coasts and the rise of coastal tourism impacted these communities. So maritime anthropologists could do their bit of “salvage ethnography”.

Since the 1970s, its practitioners meet regularly at specialist conferences or in conference panels, teach courses on maritime anthropology at universities, and publish widely in a range of outlets. The staking out of maritime anthropology as a special sub-field was also hesitatingly taken up. This brought about a response by Bernard, who did research among Greek sponge divers. In his review of Casteel and Quimby’s *Maritime Adaptations of the Pacific* (1975), he wondered whether “there is an anthropology for everyone”, calling into doubt the usefulness of yet another sub-discipline in anthropology that appeared to only have the sea as its linchpin (Bernard 1976). Smith (1977a) forcefully replied with an article pointing to maritime anthropology’s “heuristic utility”, indicating a number of themes and issues that she deemed specific to people earning a living from the sea. And the publication in 1981 of a review article on “Anthropology of Fishing” in *Annual Review of Anthropology* also helped legitimize and consolidate the sub-field’s *raison d’être* (Acheson 1981). Nonetheless, maritime anthropology has few – if any – particular methods, concepts and theories, and “[m]uch of what has come to be called maritime anthropology may be more appropriately associated with economic anthropology, ecological anthropology, development anthropology, and tourism studies, among others” (Johnson 1996: 726-727).

In addition, quite a few anthropologists who did fieldwork among fishermen or in a fishing community have done so during a more or less short period in their career, turning to other subjects in a next stage. Often, they would not call – nor consider – themselves maritime anthropologists.<sup>4</sup> In spite of this weak sub-disciplinary identity, a measure of institutionalization came about. Of particular importance was the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the Memorial University of Newfoundland that turned into a hub of maritime anthropological expertise where resident and visiting

scholars worked on research and publications. Other important loci of social science maritime research developed in Scandinavia (University of Iceland, University of Tromsø), France (Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Maritime, Centre National de Recherche Scientifique, Paris) and Spain (Grup d'Estudis Socials de la Pesca Marítima, University of Girona) (Pálsson 1995) and the Netherlands (Centre for Maritime Research, Amsterdam). In the 1980s, specialist journals such as *Anthropologie maritime* (since 1984 – in French) and *Maritime Anthropological Studies* (MAST, since 1988) were established.<sup>5</sup>

## Domain I: The Cultural Ecological Paradigm

Owing to the fact that fishers adapt to similar environments and face corresponding problems, fishing communities and fishing cultures the world over would seem to have a number of socio-cultural characteristics in common (cf. e.g. McGoodwin 1990). In strikingly different settings, one may encounter among fishermen remarkably similar ideas concerning work ethos, rhetoric and concepts of independence and freedom and so forth (cf. E. Vestergaard 1996). Independence and self-employment are highly valued, particularly among small-scale inshore fishermen who own their own boats and work alone or with a small crew of kin. Occupational communities of fishers are often characterized by an egalitarian ideology (cf. e.g. Cohen 1987; Peace 1991, 1992). In his anthropological review of the world's fisheries, McGoodwin states:

Nearly all fishers stress independence, self-reliance, freedom from regimentation, and challenge as important aspects of their occupation. (1990: 23)

He perceives these attitudes as psychological coping mechanisms in an occupation where physical danger and economic uncertainty are rife. The exploitation of marine ecosystems seemingly requires specific technological, economic, social, cultural and psychological adaptations. Maritime anthropologists have contributed considerably to knowledge about the adaptive strategies of fishers and the adaptive processes and dynamics in fishing communities. "Adaptation" is one of the key concepts in early maritime anthropological publications, especially those authored by U.S. anthropologists.<sup>6</sup>

5. MAST ceased to be published after volume 6 (1993), but was re-established in 2002 under the same acronym but with the full title *Maritime Studies*. The last issue of *Anthropologie maritime* appeared in 2000 (no. 11).

6. For examples, see Andersen and Wadel (1972); Casteel and Quimby (1975); Andersen (1979); Knipe (1984).

Most of these studies fit well within the cultural ecology tradition in anthropology, including its functionalist, teleological and reifying tenets (McCay 1978; Pálsson 1991: 39). The Swedish ethnologist Löfgren points out that "[t]he same tensions between individual strategies and community solidarity exist in widely different maritime settings. There has been a tendency to explain these cultural patterns in functionalistic or ecological terms" (1977: 235). What early maritime anthropological studies usually showed was that certain social and cultural characteristics proved "ecologically adaptive". In this sense, the marine ecosystem was seen to generate "particular relationships of work that in turn shaped social structure and marked culture" (McCay 2001: 257). In other words, environmental constraints and uncertainties lead to specific organizational coping responses and "social life is mechanistically adapted to the material world" (Pálsson 1991: 39), which is reminiscent of Julian Steward's idea of "cultural core". This may even lead to ecological determinism, as evidenced by Knipe, who studied a Scottish fishing community, and wrote that the main thesis of his book is "that the relationship between technology and environment *determines* social organization" (1984: 115, my italics, RvG). Although ideally, adaptations refer to the modes of adjustment of humans to natural and social milieus, and/or the natural and social milieu to their lives, needs, wants and goals (cf. Bennett 1976: 246), some cultural ecology studies appear to get stuck in a vulgar materialism.

What are the uncertainties and risks fishers have to cope with and how do they attempt to adapt to these collectively and individually? I will lean on Acheson's (1981) review to explain. *Ecologically*, extreme weather conditions, natural fluctuations, the location of fish (which is invisible and straggling), the ecosystem's carrying capacity and overexploitation are factors that are beyond the control of fishermen. In addition to these capricious forces of nature, there are fickle *economic* forces, including uncertainties with regard to access and use, markets and prices, relations with traders and competition with fellow fishermen. *Collectively*, fishers adapt through certain social arrangements, including the share system of remuneration (wherein after subtracting operational costs boat-owner[s] and crewmembers receive specified parts of the proceeds), egalitarian relations, familial recruitment, gendered division of labor, restricted exchange of informa-

tion in code groups or clusters, voluntary associations and informal rules of access and use rights. *Individually*, fishers develop knowledge and skills; they adopt certain technologies; they innovate, specialize, intensify or diversify (pluri-activity); they attempt to monopolize resources and niches through secrecy and observe certain taboos. Now, as said, we see some similar patterns in these "functional" responses. For example, although fishers may compete with each other for the same species or use the same ecosystem, they rarely exploit one single species or one single ecological niche. They usually catch different species with different kinds of gear over the annual cycle, using various ecological niches. Switching behavior is "the most important adaptive strategy used by fishermen" (Acheson 1988: 49). To give yet another example, the share system of remuneration – in which all crew members are co-adventurers and share risks – is common in most fishing communities and is said to (1) increase the commitment and labor motivation of the crew, (2) promote cooperative behavior and (3) foster a spirit of egalitarianism (Acheson 1981: 278-279; McGoodwin 1990: 33).<sup>7</sup>

However, on closer inspection, a good deal of difference exists between fishing systems and the ways in which they are embedded in and relate to encompassing socio-economic structures and cultures (Pálsson 1995). Functionalistic or ecological explanations are "too simplistic":

The dependance upon a marine common property resource no doubt influences the fisherman's belief and behaviour, but how this dependance is structured into cultural forms depends upon the economic and social structure within which the fisherman is operating. (Löfgren 1977: 235)

Thus, fishing may be for subsistence, for the market or a combination; it may be open access, communally managed or privatized; it may be subject to quota regulations, licensing or other measures; it may be small-scale, medium-scale or large-scale; it may be inshore, mid-water or offshore; it may be seasonal or year-round; it may be full-time or part-time; it may be owner-operated, done by crewmen who are hired by land-based ship-owners, or vertically integrated; it may be based on a share system of remuneration, a wage system or a combination. Different modes of production entail different

7. However, Pascual Fernández (1999a) points out that there are also tensions that may surface under particular circumstances.

social relations, rationales and motivations. But even spatially and socio-economically proximate fishing communities can exhibit vast cultural differences. For example, the two Dutch fishing communities where I did intensive fieldwork, while located at a distance of less than 10 km apart, differed considerably in terms of their fishing strategies, investment policies, adoption of innovations, work attitudes, religious background and worldviews (van Ginkel 1993). Factors like boat size, ownership structure, degree of indebtedness, number of crewmembers, variation in fish species, species pursued (e.g. migratory or sedentary), technology and gear used bring along differences in mental maps, cultural rules, practices, styles, goals and aspirations. Similarly, there is diversity with respect to preferred modes of regulation, institutional arrangements, organizations, management regimes and policing. These differences are closely linked to occupational and fleet structure, technology, division of labor, social practices and cultural backgrounds (cf. e.g. E. Vestergaard 1996: 2). As Paul Thompson and his co-authors argue in their comparative study of British fishing and fishing communities:

Fishing as an occupation does not automatically push men towards a single, simple view of life. On the contrary, it pulls in very contradictory directions. (1983: 4)

But they, too, focus on "how fishing communities have had to adapt and fight to survive" (1983: 4). And although "adaptation" as a concept has lost some of its prominence in maritime anthropology, it continues to be important (van Ginkel 1995). If such coping responses are explicitly linked with larger ecological, socio-economic and cultural contexts and the ways in which fishers are embedded within them, we should be able to better understand both similarities and differences in fishing societies.

## Domain II: The Culture and Politics of Fishing

The cultural ecology paradigm has been dominant in maritime anthropology for some time (say, from the late 1960s to 1980), and it has continued to be of some importance until today. Of course, this does not mean that there were no other

paradigms or theoretical frameworks that impacted anthropological work on fishing and fishing communities. What we can observe from the 1980s, however, is that a plethora of paradigms – if they can still be termed “paradigms” – have entered the scene. There are clear examples of Geertzian interpretative anthropology (Zulaika 1981), social constructivism (Clark 1982), symbolic constructivism (Cohen 1987; Peace 1991), neo-marxist or mode of production approaches (Jorion 1983), discourse analysis and practice theory (Pálsson 1991), to name just a few. And there is ethnographic work with a less clear-cut theoretical framework but fitting nicely within, for instance, the tradition of British social anthropology (Byron 1986, 1994b) and feminist anthropology (Cole 1991). Thus, it is impossible to point to any theory or theme that took center stage. So let us explore the field and see what kind of issues were dealt with in the literature on fishing and fishing communities.<sup>8</sup>

### Fishers' Occupational Cultures and Identities

Fishers in Europe (and elsewhere) often constitute close-knit occupational communities. Fishing is not merely a job or income-generating activity. There is overriding ethnographic evidence that fishing is a way of life as much as a way of making a living. Fishers consider themselves to be engaged in the same kind of work that they view positively. On the basis of their “work worlds”, fishers at local level fraternize and identify with one another. The cultural forces that facilitate such group identity include: esoteric knowledge, skills and expertise; extreme or unusual work demands; consciousness of kind; pervasiveness (social relationships meld the realms of work and leisure); ideologies or norms, values and perspectives that apply to, but extend beyond, work routines and that bestow positive self-images and social value on the tasks; standards for proper and improper behavior; work codes surrounding relatively routine practices; mental maps giving primacy to the occupational group as a reference group; and consistent cultural forms – including a special language or argot, shared rituals and taboos, occupationally unique symbols, myths, stories and jokes; and compelling accounts attesting to the logic and value of these cultural forms (cf. van Maanen and Barley 1984; Trice 1993: 26ff.).

Fishing receives a good deal of cultural attention and in many instances marks local identity. Fishers derive consider-

8. There are quite a few interesting themes and discussions that I cannot deal with here, for example, territoriality and tenure, skipper prestige and the skipper effect, differential success and the concept of luck, ritual practices and observances, while I will only very briefly deal with the gendered division of labor and the important role of women in economic production and socio-cultural reproduction. See van Ginkel (2001) for a more comprehensive overview.

9. See Taylor (1977: 172ff., 1981) with respect to a community in county Donegal (Ireland), Macleod (2002: 64) as regards La Gomera, Canary Islands and Lipuma (1992: 50) concerning Galician fishers.

able satisfaction from their work and they are extremely proud of their identity as fishers, even when they fish only part-time. They are highly devoted to fishing as a way of life (McGoodwin 2001: 7). Fishing can be of modest economic importance yet be the subject of considerable cultural attention, and provide a source of communal and personal identity.<sup>9</sup> In the Swedish fishing village of Öckerö there is a common awareness of sharing an unusual way of life, a strong sense of community, intense loyalties to boats with accompanying status rivalries (Byron 1993: 65). Danish West Coast fishers assign a high priority to their occupation as a means of livelihood (Rasmussen 1974: 131). On the Shetland island of Whalsay, fishing is perceived “as the very quintessence of local identity” (Cohen 1987: 151).

Fishing permeates nonworking life in maritime communities. The communication and reinforcement of norms and values connected with the fishermen's occupation partly occurs in nonworking situations. The reputation and ranking of skippers and crews is often evaluated on shore. On the Dutch island of Texel, colleagues often attend birthday parties of fishers and conversations usually focus on the fishing. Here, news is exchanged about the behavior of other fishers, good fishing locations, new electronic gadgets, and so on. It is therefore important to join social occasions in order to keep up to date and gather information. The same goes for attending weddings and funerals, meetings and quayside gatherings. Eating and drinking together ashore is also important to reinforce social relationships, relieve tensions, to resolve conflicts and exchange news and information (cf. Peace 1991 on Ireland; Johnson 1979 on Portugal). Rituals are further important for maintaining and reinforcing the social fabric of fishing communities (Macleod 2002).

The distinctive identity related to fishing as an occupation often sets maritime communities apart from other social formations, for example farming communities (Cole 1991; Macleod 2002). In a wider context, the status and prestige ascribed to the occupation of fisherman differs from place to place (cf. e.g. Moustgaard 1984: 353) and from period to period. For example, fishing in East Coast Scotland and in Portugal has long been regarded as an undesirable and low-prestige occupation (Nadel-Klein 1988: 193; Cole 1991: 43), whereas in the Netherlands, fishers used to be considered hardworking, deeply religious “noble commoners” (an image which has faded

rapidly over the past few decades) (van Ginkel 2003). More generally, however, fishers tend to be "a denigrated if not despised segment" of the societies in which they live (Smith 1977b: 8), and in Europe, they have long been viewed as belonging to the lowest social classes and stigmatized accordingly (Coull 1972: 60). Inter-marriage between landowners and fishers was usually rare, and many fishing villages were characterized by endogamous marriage patterns (cf. e.g. Cole 1991: 46ff.; LiPuma 1992: 58; van Ginkel 1993). In view of the "breakdown" of Danish fishermen's social identity, Torben Vestergaard even contends that they "have come to feel like a dying species" (1990: 29).

But fishers themselves may use social stigma to express, articulate and cherish their identity as a fishing community. For instance, Sally Cole reports that the *pescadores* of Vila Chã, a Portuguese fishing village "have chosen to value as the foundation of a cherished group identity the very areas upon which their social stigmatization is based – the organization of maritime production, the gendered division of labor within the household, and the construction of social images of maritime women, for example" (1991: 46). The villagers express their pride of being (descendants of) *pescadores*, even those who are currently no longer engaged in fishing. Likewise, Jane Nadel states that in Ferryden, a Scottish "maritime" community few of whose inhabitants have spent any time fishing, "fisherfolk identity has become a cherished possession, highly romanticized and mythologized" (1984: 113). The Ferrydeners cling to their image of themselves as "fishers". In both Ferryden and Vila Chã, there is symbolic boundary marking and maintenance by means of which fishers or descendants of fishers distinguish themselves from the social world of "landlubbers" around them and to award themselves special status. What facilitates doing so is the fact that fishing communities are often based to a considerable extent on extended family networks.

### Familial Recruitment and the Family Firm

In the relatively small crews in inshore fishing, crewmembers are usually recruited in a local network of kin, neighbors, friends or community members. The process of recruitment is informal and may be initiated by the skipper or by the person who aspires to become a crewmember of a specific vessel. Through enculturation or socialization, an outsider

"learns the ropes" of fishing and becomes an insider. This process is not limited to the mere performing of tasks; it includes internalizing the norms, values, attitudes, interests, knowledge and skills necessary to become an accepted member of the occupational group, to do the job properly, and to legitimize the work world. Compatibility with the crew's ideology is an important factor.

In many fishing communities, occupational inheritance is common; a fisherman's son also takes up the occupation of fisher. This applies in particular to the offspring of owners or part owners. Sometimes, girls too would begin fishing as a crewmember for a father or brother (cf. Cole 1991: 68). Continuity in family firms is highly valued. When an adolescent fisherman's son shows an interest in becoming a fisher, he will occasionally join his father on a trip to sea, simply being aboard and lending a hand if and when possible. This way, the father gets to see whether his son has "the hang of it". Many fishers prefer to work with agnatic kinsmen, especially so in the inshore sector.<sup>10</sup> There are social, economic and psychological reasons for this preference.

*Firstly*, patterns of inheritance are important. It is often necessary to pool resources to stay in business (Löfgren 1972; Norr and Norr 1978). However, inheritance has both centrifugal and centripetal forces; tensions and conflicts are rife when brothers are forced to cooperate and these may easily lead to fission in family firms (Faris 1973: 93). Moreover, the preference is insufficiently explained by rules of inheritance, usually patrimony:

Among kinsmen, membership of the crew is a complex relationship of interwoven strands of economic interest and social obligation within and across the generations. (Byron 1994a: 287)

*Secondly*, crews composed of agnatic kin further enable keeping income within the (core) family. They create a common fund of financial resources, enabling the accumulation of capital that is reinvested in the family firm. Thus, family firms pool social, economic, cultural and cognitive capital. The family firm is a stable system of self-motivated labor and a form of self-exploitation (Thompson et al. 1983: 156; Jorion 1983: 10). The family firm has considerable "shock absorbing capacity" (Löfgren 1972: 103) and it is a relatively fluid and

### 10.

The involvement of kinsfolk in fishing crews should not be regarded a survival of some ancient institution or mode of production. As Byron (1986: 4, 88ff., 129ff.) shows, family crews in Burra (Shetland Islands) came about as a post-World War II coping response to rising capital costs. See also Löfgren (1972) for similar arguments concerning the Swedish fishing community of Bua.

flexible unit, which is highly adaptive under uncertain circumstances (Durrenberger and Pálsson 1985: 114ff.). Work permeates the entire existence of fishing households. Seeking a profit is not the only motivation of fishers working in family firms. In adverse times, fishers (like other petty commodity producers) often work longer hours, bring in family labor, cut on their remuneration, adjust household budgets, postpone investments and eat into their capital. They can do so because the family firm is at the same time a unit of (re)production, consumption and (re)distribution: "Family involvement gives small capital a flexibility that ... alters basic assumptions about rationality in economic behaviour" (Apostle et al. 1992: 321; cf. also Pálsson 1991: 107). In European fishing communities, the logic of capitalist production would seem to differ from that of the encompassing society and not be solely determined by the market.

*Thirdly*, family members know and trust each other, and in an accident-prone occupation this is deemed an important asset (Barth 1966; Wadel 1972; Byron 1975). Working with kinsfolk is supposed to promote cooperation and harmony (Byron 1975: 147). However, due to the dangers inherent in fishing, some communities avoid having close kin as crewmembers aboard a single vessel. And kin crews are not necessarily stable, but may be composed of changing coalitions (Beukenhorst 1988), while in some cases, affinal relatives seem to be preferred as crewmembers (Jorion 1982). This apparently has to do with the developmental cycle of the family and the fact that all-brother crews are the least profitable of all crews because of their high consumer-to-worker ratio.<sup>11</sup>

The family firm often rests on close conjugal cooperation. The fisher wife's organizational, economic and emotional contribution to the fishing household can be crucial for its flexibility, versatility and resilience. In many fishing communities, there is a relatively sharp division of labor along gender lines. In exceptional cases women are involved in work at sea, but men mostly do the fishing while women – the "shore crew" – perform land-based tasks such as the sorting, processing and marketing of the catch, baiting lines and traps, repairing nets, cleaning boats and fishing clothes, keeping subsistence gardens, running the household and rearing children. Underlying this gendered division of labor are cultural and symbolic constructions and constrictions. This does not mean that women's work is less important than men's

11. Unfortunately, Jorion's statement has not stimulated much discussion.

work: "not infrequently it is their economic contribution that underwrites or provides the risk fund necessary to sustain fishing activities" (Davis and Nadel-Klein 1988: 19). Nor do men always refrain from performing domestic tasks, while women often take an active role in the fishing business and do the accounting, keep record of catches, pay bills, bargain with fish traders, and order parts and gear while their husbands are at sea. In addition, fisher women may have control over family income, while they can also be (part) owners of boats and fishing tackle.<sup>12</sup>

## Competition and Cooperation

There would seem to be a paradox in many descriptions of maritime communities:

On the one hand the fisherman is portrayed as a secretive individualist and gambler, on the other hand the social ethos of the fishing community is characterized as egalitarian and cooperative. (Löfgren 1977: 234; see also Pollnac 1991: 265)

Indeed, there is ample evidence that competition among fishers is rife. Being one another's competitors, fishers have adopted specific information and communication management stratagems. Fishers often attempt to monopolize a particularly good fishing spot through tactics of secrecy and deception: "Such claims, which fishermen are continually trying to make, are defined by relations of competition: the establishment, maintenance and adequacy of exploitative strategies in the hope of establishing economic advantages over rival crews" (Byron 1975: 152-153). They exchange this information with kin, close friends and possibly fellow villagers only, while being reticent or even deceptive vis-à-vis "outsiders".<sup>13</sup> With respect to a Portuguese fishing village, Twig Johnson explains:

Given the intensive competition between boats and the efforts to guard one's own information while discovering the information of others, a social climate rife with secretiveness, lying, avoidance, and general suspicion is generated. (1979: 246)

### 12.

On these gender issues, see Acheson (1981); Thompson (1985); Nadel-Klein and Davis (1988); Cole (1991); Hoefnagel (1991); Thiessen et al. (1992); Jentoft (1993): 72ff.; Meltzoff (1995); Munk-Madsen (2000); Hoefnagel and Smits (1999).

### 13.

See e.g. Löfgren (1972: 87ff.); Jorion (1978); Moustgaard (1984: 345-347); Byron (1986: 101ff.); Cole (1991: 54); Pálsson (1991: 122ff.); Peace (1996: 88); Mondardini Morelli (1998).

Fishers thoroughly enjoy the competitive game of being or becoming top skippers and top crews. They keep a watchful eye over who lands the most fish. There is rivalry and competition between crews and a careful keeping-of-accounts in relative success, prestige and rank. Fishers pay close attention to the latest innovations in boats and gear that will give them an edge over their rivals (Byron 1993: 67). In view of the competition between boats working out of the same port in Galicia, LiPuma contends that "[t]he social result is a game of recognition and status whose yardstick is the quantity, quality, and species of fish brought to dock. Fishermen are thus partly defined by this sense of mutual and measurable competition" (1992: 58). In many fishing communities, there are "leaders" and "followers". The former are reputed for their fishing skills and enjoy a high prestige. A skipper's incentive is prestige based on "conspicuous productivity" (Wadel 1972: 111; Byron 1980: 228).

However, there is a "skipper's paradox": skippers must maximize their gains of valuable information and minimize their loss of it. At the same time, they must be "socially participatory cooperators and competitors" (McGoodwin 1990: 137). In other words, they have to balance the dilemma of being competitive and secretive on the one hand, and being (or seeming) helpful to peers on the other hand. There is a measure of reciprocity and not exchanging information may mean social ostracism in the occupational community of fishermen:

To guard a secret is to withdraw from social exchange. The guardian of secrets and treasures becomes asocial [...] Long-term secrecy is neither socially or economically advantageous [and] the unwillingness to exchange information results in loss of social esteem which has also economic consequences. (T. Vestergaard 1992: 172, on Danish fishers)

Hence, there are important moral restrictions to secrecy.

Users are guided by the ethical principles, social duties, and responsibilities that prevail within the community or ethnic group to which they belong. Thus, competition may evolve without causing social disruption and disorder. In fact, competition and cooperation

should not be regarded as mutually exclusive activities, because competition cannot take place without cooperation. (Hanna and Jentoft 1996: 47-48)

A possible solution to the problem of cooperation under conditions of competition is "to participate in an informal club of skippers, a network with relatively stable membership, thereby exchanging information on a regular and reciprocal basis" (Pálsson 1994: 914). Such "clusters" or reference groups can exchange information regarding the proper ways to fish, the location of species and markets, technological and economic innovations is exchanged in the hope that there will be reciprocation in the future (cf. Barth 1966; Acheson 1981). Crosscutting social ties at community level also mitigate inter-crew rivalry (Byron 1986: 102). However, if economic problems are severe, fishermen's solidarity may also be affected. As Torben Vestergaard remarks in regard of fishing in Denmark:

Knowledge of fishing opportunities becomes so economically valuable that it is tempting to increase secrecy and reserve knowledge for one's own purposes or keep it within narrower circles protected by the increasing use of radio scramblers. (1990: 29)

But with the introduction of quota regimes, part of the penchant for competition has disappeared. In Iceland and the Netherlands, for instance, there is less secrecy concerning fishing spots and "quota kings" have replaced "catch kings" (Pálsson 1991: 139-142; van Ginkel 1999).

### Collective Action Dilemmas

Though there are many examples of informal cooperation among fishermen, it would seem to be much harder to arrive at sustained collective action. In many parts of the world various types of fishermen's organizations are confronted with major difficulties and even breakdowns. The prolonged and institutionalized cooperation of fishermen is often fraught with problems and dilemmas. Anthropologists point to a number of factors that can explain the phenomenon of failed or under-organization. (1) Some argue that there are practical hindrances: It is partly because of their frequent absence from



shore that fishermen have difficulties organizing. For example, Smith (1977a: 5) states that for this reason fishermen are unable to promote their interest and hardly ever participate in decision-making within their communities. (2) Other scholars maintain – in an economic reductionist fashion – that uncooperative behavior is generally inherent in the (petty) capitalist mode of production. Competition is a key element in this pattern of production, impeding cooperation (Scotte 1981). (3) Related to this argument is the viewpoint that problems of cooperation are connected with the common property nature of marine fisheries. Fishermen are often perceived as competitors for open access resources, pitted against one another in a zero-sum game in which one fisherman's or crew's success is achieved at the expense of all others. Under common property conditions they can neither own fish nor fishing locations. As a consequence, fishermen are in constant competition. Individual fishermen or crews direct their own economic interests. The differences between them and their independence make concerted actions unlikely, even when it is in the best interest of fishermen to act as a group (Jentoft 1986: 199). (4) This independent economic behavior of working alone or in crews and making individual decisions where and when to fish is sometimes backed by cultural models of fishermen who share and value the belief that they are independent or autonomous persons. (5) Competition and economic and socio-cultural autonomy lead to the psychological character trait of a "need for independence". This independence in their behavior and thinking, which is supposed to help marine fishermen adapt to their occupation, turns them into prototypical individualists. For example, McGoodwin (1990: 127) summarizes the view of many scholars when he writes that "because of their rugged individualism, small-scale fishers are not particularly inclined toward cooperative action". Smith also contends that the nature of the fishing industry "creates individualized, competitive structural factors which inhibit the creation of associations and cooperatives" (1977a: 5). But this psychological reductionist reasoning is circular. (6) What impedes formalizing cooperation into voluntary associations and other organizations is often related to the fact that locally, regionally or nationally, petty fishers are a heterogeneous group expressive of contrasting and often conflicting ideologies and behaviors (cf. Jentoft and Davis 1993; van Ginkel 1996).

But external pressures occasionally bring fishermen together in organizations. For example, they have little withholding power and a weak bargaining position vis-à-vis traders and politicians. Fishermen have been – and often still are – dominated and sometimes exploited by fish merchants and processors (Smith 1977a: 4; Andersen 1979: 21; Acheson 1981: 282). The former depend on the latter for the marketing of their catch and their relationships are usually asymmetrical. Given the rapid deterioration of fish and shellfish, fishermen have little "withholding power" (Löfgren 1977: 228). This implies that they cannot control prices: they are price-takers, and not price-makers. Thus, not only do they face sharply fluctuating catches, they also have to cope with fluctuating prices. Fishermen have often responded by establishing cooperatives to further their position in trade networks, gain leverage vis-à-vis fish merchants and processors, and to circumvent as many middlemen as possible (Jentoft 1986: 199-200; Prattis 1987). Deas views cooperatives as "an attempt by the owner fishers to remain independent of ties with large scale capital" (1981: 69). Better returns, lower costs and improved marketing are the most important goals. However, the fact that local-level relationships usually are face-to-face sometimes helps mitigate power differences between fishers and merchants and processors; they are part of a "moral economy" in which transactions are to a certain degree guided by norms, values and mores (van Ginkel 1996). Factors that facilitate successful cooperation are occupational homogeneity; strong leadership; quick results (collective benefits); external pressures; supportive state agencies.

### Egalitarian Ideologies

As I have already pointed out, egalitarianism seems to be important in many fishing communities. A good deal of camaraderie is reported concerning life aboard fishing vessels. The ethic of cooperation emphasizes equivalence and plays down status differences between crewmembers (Byron 1978: 7, 1986: 94). Usually, the skipper is a *primus inter pares* (Löfgren 1972: 99). The fact that crew membership and kinship, friendship and community ties are often intertwined also helps mitigate status differences and maintain an egalitarian ethos. Such multiple ties contribute to cohesive relationships marked by unity, solidarity and mutual regard (cf.

e.g. LiPuma 1992: 57). Moreover, the seniority of a father or elder brother ideal-typically makes for a "natural" hierarchy that facilitates playing down lines of command. Adrian Peace remarks concerning an Irish inshore fishing community:

By virtue of being self-employed men in possession of their own productive resources, an ethos of egalitarianism is inescapable. The idea that every man is as good as his neighbour is a consistent thread informing most important codes of interpersonal conduct. (1991: 5)

With egalitarianism being the norm, skippers have to solve the dilemma of direction and leadership versus teamwork and voluntary cooperation, especially so since leadership is often met with suspicion (Byron 1975, 1986: 49ff.). They have formal power but rely on informal authority based on personal relationships and legitimated by their reputation for skill and success (Byron 1980: 228-229). Fredrik Barth's (1966) paper on Norwegian herring fishermen – containing the core of his transactionalist perspective – states that herring skippers downplay their authority towards ordinary crewmembers in exchange for their commitment and loyalty. Indeed, many anthropologists conducting research aboard fishing vessels report skippers do not give direct orders or shout. A nod, a cue or a hint often suffices, especially in experienced crews. Lourido's remark that a Galician skipper was "the absolute master of the boat and often a real tyrant" (1984: 270) seems to be an exception confirming the rule. Instead of a command structure, aboard small-scale fishing vessels there usually exists an "ideology of wordless cooperation" (Byron 1986: 98).

But impression management or ideology is not necessarily practice. Egalitarianism is a moral principle. As Anthony Cohen rightly observes, we must distinguish between "equality as an ideology ('We should all be equal here'), as a rhetoric ('We are all equal here'), and as pragmatism ('We behave *as if* we are all equal here')" (1985: 33). These three versions of egalitarianism are not mutually exclusive and should not be confused with a description of real social relationships. Even when intra-crew relationships are apparently egalitarian, there are status and prestige differences (van Ginkel 1999). For example, a cook usually enjoys lower prestige than a skipper. This is often related to age differences; as a rule of thumb, cooks are the youngest crewmembers (e.g. Prattis 1973; Knipe

1984: 82ff). A skipper or a skipper-owner has certain privileges and he may receive a higher share than "ordinary" crewmembers. He does not have to participate in the most disagreeable tasks. In the Icelandic fisheries described by Pálsson (1994), the relations between skipper and crew are "authoritarian and rigid", but ashore socializing strengthens the social bond and enhances crew solidarity. In inshore fishing, however, and especially aboard small vessels with a small crew, the degree of specialization is low, the division of labor simple, tasks are shared or exchanged through rotation or alternation and an egalitarian ideology is stronger adhered to than aboard larger boats. In addition, until recently crewmembers could aspire to become part owners themselves (Norr and Norr 1978). Given the current capital requirements of not only a boat and gear but also a license and in many cases quotas, it has become increasingly difficult to fulfill this aspiration.

### Muddling Through

Many maritime communities depend largely on fishing and entire local families are involved in the fishing industry in one way or another. A crisis in the fisheries therefore potentially undermines the entire economic basis and social fabric of such social formations. But many fishers tenaciously adhere to it even when facing declining stocks and catches, and substandard incomes. As said, their relation to fishing is expressive and existential: to them, fishing is a lifestyle and they greatly value the idea of "autonomy" and the corresponding identity as "independent individualists". Therefore, losing their jobs as fishers would mean much more than losing their livelihood alone. Fishing permeates their entire personas and their image of themselves. For many, giving up as a fisher would mean giving up their dignity and pride. Consequently, fishers often persist in working in a failed fishery. Moreover, they are ill prepared for land-based jobs. Their formal education is often poor and the knowledge and skills learned in fishing are of little or no use on shore. As a corollary, communities dependent on inshore fishing and consisting of simple commodity producers attempt to "muddle through" in adverse times.

In itself, this is nothing new. European fishermen – and inshore fishermen especially – have quite a tradition of trimming their sails to the wind. Their survival strategies include

diversification (pluri-activity; combining occupations, seasonal wage employment outside fishing; fishing various species over the annual round), intensification (or expansion; investing in boat and gear; employing family-members) and specialization (specialize on one fishing technique or target species) (van Ginkel 1995; Symes and Frangoudes 1991: 171-172). But such strategies do no longer suffice to successfully run a fishing enterprise. In addition, fishers increasingly need to acquire knowledge concerning markets, exchange rates, bureaucracies, political negotiations and so on. But inshore fishers are ill equipped to do so and would seem to bear the brunt of this development (Delbos and Prémel 1996: 137). They are increasingly marginalized or even ousted from the fishing industry. Capitalization often results in a shift away from small-scale fishermen control of the means of production (Norr and Norr 1978: 168). For instance, with the increasing capitalization in the Galician (Spain) fishing industry, "kin, community, patronage-based patterns of wages, work habits, recruitment, and mutual rights and responsibilities are giving way to an understanding that labor should be treated as a desocialized commodity" (LiPuma and Meltzoff 1989: 324). Capitalist relations of production gradually and partially replace a mode of production based on kinship and community (LiPuma 1992: 67).

In addition, fisheries crises are nowadays often compounded by the consequences of new management regimes and the way fishers perceive these. Due to the cultural emphasis on independence and individualism, fishers are often suspicious of and resent interference from fisheries policy makers and managers, especially so if measures are believed to be flawed or unjust:

The motivations of actors in the fisheries and the moral legitimacy of management measures are closely linked with meaning and values. (T. Vestergaard 1996: 87)

Underlying fishers' skepticism and distrust vis-à-vis the state, civil servants and biologists and the managerial rationalism they embody is a basic clash of "scientific" and "folk" models concerning, among other things, fish stock fluctuations. Fishers see natural processes as dynamic, unpredictable, complicated, disordered, chaotic. In their linear view,

scientists (and those who heed their advice) usually depart from the assumption that without human intervention fish stocks are "ordered, balanced and in dynamic equilibrium" (Smith 1990: 5). In other words, the images of nature held by fishers on one hand and fisheries scientists, managers and policy makers on the other, and the perceptions and beliefs linked with them, are often at loggerheads. In this respect, fishers would seem to be conservative; they often stubbornly resist change in resource management regimes and they have occasionally given vent to their discontent through protests, blockades, non-compliance and confrontations with (foreign) competitors and external authorities. When facing problems in the exploitation of marine resources or when denied access to them, fishers often resort to collective action to counter the situation. Indeed, Scottish, English, Dutch, French and Spanish inshore fishers have staged several protests, boycotts and blockades in recent times.

From the fishers' point of view, they usually have good reasons to behave like this. New management regimes often impede time-hailed fishing strategies, adaptive performance, flexibility and switching behavior. For example, individual quota regimes can lead to rigidity in that they create incentives to only seek species one is entitled to catch. To achieve compliance with rules and regulations, these have to be perceived as legitimate and just. What is said about fishers from the Danish island of Bornholm is equally valid in many other cases:

Like other marginalised groups, the fishermen have gradually developed a set of attitudes constituting the moral basis for breaking the rules, which are perceived as discriminating, unjust, and made up by outsiders. (Moustgaard 1996: 15)

Devolved management systems, in which fishers are involved in decision-making processes concerning the management of marine resources, are an important step in this direction. At the same time, in European fishing communities there is still a strong tendency to accuse "others" of overfishing and to not accept co-responsibility for declining fish stocks. Local fishers point an accusing finger in the direction of their compatriots in neighboring communities; fishers from one nation do likewise with respect to fishers from

another nation. At the supra-local and supranational levels, it is undoubtedly much harder to bring about mutual trust.

Inshore fishers seem to be pessimistic about the future; the number of inshore fishers has been on the decline continually for several decades in most of Europe's fishing communities. Out-migration is a problem faced by numerous, especially remote, fishing villages in Europe. In many places, young people are increasingly reluctant to follow in their father's footsteps. Ever so many fishermen's sons have given up "muddling through". This has led to problems of recruitment of crew in France's Mediterranean inshore fisheries (Symes and Frangoudes 2001: 171). In Northern Norway, many fishermen and their wives do not presently want their children to become fishers (Jentoft 1993: 91), and the same applies with regard to the situation in the Netherlands (van Ginkel 1999). Switching occupations is also indicative of the reluctance to continue fishing. Tourism offers one escape route, either by offering tourists opportunities to share in an "authentic" fishing trip (Rogelja 2002), or by taking up land-based jobs (cf. e.g. Macleod 1999: 449-450). Thus, tourism creates alternative employment opportunities for fishers. For instance in Northern Norway a large number of fishermen's families are involved in the tourist industry (Sandberg 1996: 13). In respect of Scottish fishers, Nadel-Klein even states that "their salvation may well lie in transforming themselves into cultural showcases or icons of one particular variety of Scottish 'heritage', where aspects of the fishery are displayed and performed, yet where fish are no longer locally caught and sold" (2003: 8).

### Domain III:

### The Common Property Theory

My brief excursion into the perceptions of and attitudes towards state representatives and management regimes has brought me to topics that would presently seem to dominate maritime anthropology's research agenda. Maritime anthropologists have increasingly focused on all sorts of aspects having to do with the exploitation of marine living resources and how it was and should be managed as well as the impact of policy measures. From the mid-1980s onwards, attention shifted to such themes as common property (or common pool) resource management, common property theory, chaos

#### 14.

For a small sample of critical views, see McCay and Acheson (1987); Acheson (1989); Pinkerton (1989); van Ginkel (1989); McGoodwin (1990); Pålsson (1991): 15ff. Among those who find Hardin's proposition analytically useful are Prattis (1987) and Brox (1990). The discussions on common property resources attracted attention from a variety of disciplines and eventually led to the establishment of the International Association for the Study of Common Property Resources (IASCP) that held its first conference in 1987.

#### 15.

For instance, see Dyer and McGoodwin (1994); Neis and Felt (2000); Holm (2003); Jentoft and Kristoffersen (1989); Alegret (1998, 1999); Kooiman et al. (1999).

#### 16.

See e.g. Pålsson (1993); T. Vestergaard (1993); Nuttall and Burnett (1998); Munk-Madsen (1998, 2000); Gerrard and Balsvik (1999); Davis and Gerrard (2000).

theory, usufruct and sea tenure systems, folk and co-management, traditional or fisheries ecological knowledge, multiple-use conflicts, and so on.

Initially, anthropologists debated the merits and demerits of Garrett Hardin's proposition of the "tragedy of the commons" (Hardin 1968). It states that resources held in common freely are inevitably prone to overexploitation because each individual is pursuing his best short-term interest, unless external agencies take coercive measures or the resources are privatized in one way or another. Anthropologists have criticized the tragedy of the commons theory on the basis of detailed case studies showing that socio-cultural institutions and arrangements exist that enable the sustainable use and governance of fish and fishing grounds. Among many other things, their critique concerns the fact that Hardin and his adherents equate common property resources and open access; suppose that individual persons behave as autonomous beings, are selfish and act as if free of social norms and values; stress individualism and competitiveness above community spirit and co-operation; neglect institutional contexts; use *a priori* reasoning without empirical substantiation; and are ethnocentric because they view state intervention or privatization as the only solutions to the problem of overexploitation of natural resources. There is overriding empirical evidence that users of marine resources held as common – or rather: communal – property in many cases have developed rules and rights potentially leading to sustainable use. Access to common pool resources is rarely free to all; many authors discern a variety of rights regimes, whether *de jure* or *de facto*. A clear minority of anthropologists were less critical and emphasized the heuristic and analytical utility of CPT.<sup>14</sup> The debate is still ongoing, but in recent years what has been added to the discussions is the value of fishermen's indigenous (or traditional) ecological knowledge for fisheries management, the successes and failures of local or regional (co-)management systems and other forms of creative governance.<sup>15</sup>

What most studies dealing with top-down management regimes show is that they are often seriously flawed, and fail to take into account the complexities and dynamics of fisheries. In addition, they often deal with the consequences of specific management regimes and how fishermen and their wives come to terms with them and try to cope with resource crises.<sup>16</sup> Much of this work has an applied edge in that it is

concerned with the social impact of change, whether state-induced or not. As could be expected, much anthropological work focuses on the local or regional level, but there are also examples that deal with the national and supranational levels (see e.g. Collet 1998; Smith 2000; Symes and Phillipson 2001).

Surely, there have been plausible reasons for this shift towards management and policy. To name just a few: *intrinsically*, many anthropologists are concerned about the declining state of living marine resources and the equitable allocation of access and use rights to marine resources; by extension, some anthropologists are deeply involved in advocacy for impoverished fishing communities. *Extrinsically*, there is the lure of research money for applied studies and the demand of policy institutions for knowledge about fishermen's attitudes, motives and actions, and the viability of fishing communities. Obviously, the more applied and policy oriented work in maritime anthropology is significant and timely. It has yielded important insights into how fishermen and their spouses perceive resource exploitation and its problems; the social effects of regulatory regimes; and what – from a policy point of view – needs to be done to ensure greater legitimacy of and compliance to management measures. Anthropologists have added socio-cultural aspects to the still dominant bio-economic models of fisheries biologists and economists. They have shown that fisheries are economically, socially and culturally complex, diverse and dynamic systems of interactions between humans and the natural environment (cf. Hamilton et al. 1998). Having acknowledged this significant contribution that certainly needs to be continued, it would appear to me that there area some tasks ahead for maritime anthropology in Europe.

## Some Tasks Ahead

*Regionally*, some European areas are well researched, while others have received little or no attention. There is a fairly large English-language maritime anthropological literature on Iceland, Norway, and Scotland, while Sweden, England, Ireland, the Netherlands, France, Portugal, Spain and Italy are also covered to a greater or lesser degree. In addition, there exists quite some literature in native languages. But little maritime anthropological work has been done in Poland, the Baltic States (Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia), Germany, Croatia, Albania and Greece, to name just a few countries. We still stand in

maritime anthropological research and publish mainly in Spanish or Catalan (José Alberto Galván Tudela, Antonio García Allut, Carles Siches i Cuadra). Some – among whom Juan Luis Alegret and José Pascual Fernández – also publish in English. Ethnologist Jóan Pauli Joensen has published widely on Faroese fisher folk in Faroese and Danish.

### 17.

For example, Italian anthropologist Gabriella Mondardini Morelli has published a handful of books on Sardinian fishermen and fishing communities. French anthropologists Alliette Geistdoerfer and Isabelle Leblic co-edited *Anthropologie maritime* and part of their work deals with French fishing communities and there are other French maritime anthropologists who do “anthropology at home” (e.g. Jorion 1983). Several Spanish anthropologists carry out

### 18.

There are only a couple of the kind I have in mind that have been published in English as regards particular maritime communities in Europe. These include Clark (1982) on Staithe (England); Knipe (1984) on Gamrie (Scotland); Byron (1986) on Burra (Shetland); Cohen (1987) on Whalsay (Shetland); Magnússon (1990) on Eyraðakki and Stokkseyri (Iceland); Peace (2001) on “Inveresk” (Ireland); Brøgger (1989) on Nazaré (Portugal); Cole (1991) on Vila Chã (Portugal).

need of solid ethnographies of maritime communities in these countries. Many European maritime anthropologists do fieldwork “at home” and publish (most of) their work in the vernacular.<sup>17</sup> This means that interesting ethnographic material may go unobserved by those who only read academia's *lingua franca*, i.e. English. What is discussed by, for example, French and Spanish maritime anthropologists is not well noticed by those who attend Anglophone conferences and read the “international” (i.e. usually British and North American) anthropology journals.

*Thematically*, maritime anthropologists should aim at getting social structure and culture – anthropology's traditional backbones – more firmly back into the picture. Kinship is at the core of social organization in most fishing communities. Yet, the evidence on forms of social organization and processes of social reproduction in inshore fishing is fragmentary and dates from the 1960s and 1970s, while we know surprisingly little about more recent manifestations (Symes and Frangoudes 2001: 159). It is also unclear whether the preference for a crew composed of kinsmen “arises from obligation, necessity or choice” (Symes and Frangoudes 2001: 163). In addition, there is little evidence pertaining to the issue of whether economic, social or psychological reasons can explain this preference and whether crew composition shows more variation than often reported.

*Methodologically*, we need more ethnographic community studies of fishing societies. With their holistic pretensions coming increasingly under scrutiny and with the concept of community itself being highly contested, many anthropologists have shied away from conducting community studies that deal with the socio-cultural fabric and many intertwined strands of community life. Instead of this “holistic approach”, they opt for more clearly demarcated subtopics or categories. This also goes for maritime anthropologists. But we still need thorough ethnographic community studies with their sense of contextual complexities and dynamics.<sup>18</sup>

*Theoretically*, we should carefully examine how fishermen perceive and relate to their natural and social environments, each other and themselves. Fishing is an “evolving socio-ecological regime”, a historical, economic and political process embedded in historical, social and cultural systems (Durrenberger and Pálsson 1985: 120). Therefore, we should take a diachronic perspective, explicitly devoting attention

to endogenous and exogenous forces impinging on the socio-natural system or subsystem, the unintended and unforeseen consequences of fishermen's behavior and fisheries policy and management, and the feedback dynamics giving rise to new coping responses. Human agency is *in* nature and people and environment are mutually constitutive components of the same world; people confront nature through social interactions and relations and the mental universe produced, reproduced and transformed in these relations (including their images of nature), while nature acts upon them (van Ginkel 1993: 6-7). Like other people, fishers are actors who "enact", "resist" or "negotiate" – and thus "make" – the world they live in, either reproducing or changing it socially and culturally whether intended or unintended (cf. Ortner 1996: 1). Such an approach enables the anthropologist to inventory and analyze the attitudes, actions, expressions and conceptions of fishers in their broader (historical) context.<sup>19</sup>

# 19.

Work in this direction in maritime anthropology is not completely lacking. For example, Pålsson (1991) details an approach that focuses on modes of production and thus reintroduces a "social model" of fishing.

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# *Hunters at Sea:*

## *Fishing Households*

## *and the Problem of the*

## *Commons*

### Introduction

Deep-sea fishing, as a source of livelihood of families and specialised communities, is a form of hunting, rather than husbandry. It relies on wild, undomesticated resources. Unlike farmers, fishers cannot establish proprietorship over the resource upon which their livelihood depends, nor can they bank resources as a hedge against future scarcity. In agrarian societies, the availability of land and the forms of its tenure are the main limiting material conditions for the establishment of new households; in fishing societies, these are relatively minor constraints.

Rather, uncertainty and risk are the greatest problems for fishers and their families. However, a satisfactory "theory of fishing" has so far proved elusive, despite a number of efforts. This lecture focusses on the organisational dynamics of the maritime household, and explores the connections between the Chayanov Principle and the Tragedy of the Commons Thesis, in an attempt to create new understandings of the phenomena in question.

### Fishing as a Source of Livelihood

Fishing covers a great range of possibilities. At one end of the spectrum, fishing may consist of nothing more than the seasonal, opportunistic collection of aquatic resources, which