

## Chapter 10

# **INSHORE FISHERMEN: CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF A MARITIME OCCUPATION**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

European fisher folk often constitute close-knit occupational communities. Fishing is not merely a job, it is also a way of life. Fishers consider themselves to be engaged in the same kind of work which they view positively. On the basis of their 'work worlds', fishers at local level fraternise 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 whereby 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 behaviour; work codes surrounding relatively routine practices; mental maps giving primacy to the occupational group as a reference group; 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 (van Maanen and Barley, 1984; Trice, 1993).

Fishers derive considerable satisfaction from their work and they are extremely proud of their identity as fishers, even when they fish only part time. As Taylor (1977, 1981) shows with respect to an Irish community, fishing can be of modest economic importance yet be the subject of considerable cultural attention, and provide a source of communal and personal identity. 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). Danish west coast fishers

assign a high priority to their occupation as a means of livelihood (Rasmussen, 1974). On the Shetland island of Whalsay, fishing is perceived 'as the very quintessence of local identity' (Cohen, 1987). With respect to Galician fishers, LiPuma (1992: p. 50) remarks that

'being a fisherman is not a job (i.e. labor is not fungible) but an occupation and mode of labor which is inseparably tied to a person's identity. A fisherman's self-image, his presentation of self in the public arena, the resources that he uses to define his place in the community, his kin relations and village friends, and the trajectory of his family are intrinsically bound to fishing. It is this network of relations and meanings, determined by life in the fisheries, which defines the ground in terms of which people construct their subjectivity'.

In strikingly different settings, one may encounter among fishermen remarkably similar ideas concerning work ethos, egalitarian ideology, rhetorics and concepts of independence, self-reliance, freedom and so forth. McGoodwin (1990) perceives these attitudes as psychological coping mechanisms in an occupation where physical danger and economic uncertainty are rife. 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 characteristics in common. Such commonalities are often explained in functionalist or ecological terms.

However, on closer inspection, a good deal of difference exists between fishing systems and the ways in which they are embedded in encompassing socio-economic structures and cultures (Pálsson, 1995). Löfgren (1977: p. 235) deems functionalist or ecological explanations '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'. Thus, fishing may be for subsistence, for the market or a combination; 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 shipowners, or vertically integrated. Different modes of production entail different social relations, rationales and motivations. But even spatially and socio-economically proximate fishing communities can exhibit vast cultural differences (van Ginkel, 1993). Factors like boat size, ownership structure, degree of indebtedness, number of crew members, variation in fish species, species pursued (e.g. migratory or sedentary), technology and gear

used create differences in mental maps, cultural rules, practices, styles, goals and aspirations. Similarly, there is diversity with respect to preferred modes of regulation, institutional arrangements, organisations, management regimes and policing. These differences are closely linked to occupational and fleet structure, technology, division of labour, social practices and cultural backgrounds (E. Vestergaard, 1996).

Though this cultural variety in fishing societies is acknowledged and appreciated, this chapter focuses on a number of family resemblances found in the occupational cultures of European inshore fishers and fishing communities. The data are predominantly gleaned from maritime anthropological literature. Its aim is to point to some common themes and patterns in the current worldviews, lifestyles and concerns of European inshore fisher folk, and the difficulties they face. It deals not with long term developments but focuses on contemporary issues and features.

## 2. BECOMING A FISHER

Each prospective fisher must learn the cultural and behavioural modes of the occupational community of fishers to which one is a newcomer (either as a child or as an adult). Through enculturation or socialisation, an outsider 'learns the ropes' of fishing and becomes an insider. This process is not limited to the mere performing of tasks; it includes internalising 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 legitimise the work world. Compatibility with the crew's ideology is an important factor.

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'. But prior to his initiation as a fisher, he has often already been prepared for the job on land. For example, in Burra (Shetland Islands), '[t]he lore and skills of fishing and seamanship are learnt in play, and the introduction to a boy's first job as apprentice is long and gradual' (Byron, 1978: p. 3). The fisher-to-be has gained a 'reputation' even before joining a crew.

As a rule of thumb, the process of becoming a fisher involves informal and gradual enskilment (sometimes in addition to formal education). Fishers get an 'on the job training', and have to learn as apprentices with the entire crew as a collective tutor. After the initial rites of passage, young crew members are usually quickly accepted and receive a full share. They have to show flexibility, compatibility, a willingness to work hard and absolute loyalty to the boat (Wadel, 1972; Baks and Postel-Coster, 1977; Byron, 1994). In many maritime

communities 'women exert as an important influence on the shaping of a fisherman as their husbands' (Löfgren, 1984: p. 293). Fishermen's wives have an important part in giving their sons (and occasionally daughters) an outlook on life which makes fishing as an occupation attractive to them (Nadel-Klein and Davis, 1988). But, of course, there is much variation across generations and across and within cultures in maritime socialisation. In many communities, fishing has become a less attractive occupation.

### 3. EGALITARIANISM AND LEADERSHIP

Occupational communities of fishers are often characterised by an egalitarian ideology (Cohen, 1987). As Peace (1991: p. 5) remarks concerning an Irish inshore fishing community: 'The idea that every man is as good as his neighbour is a consistent thread informing most important codes of interpersonal conduct'. Egalitarianism is a moral principle. This does not mean that actual social relations are necessarily egalitarian. Nonetheless, a good deal of camaraderie is reported concerning life aboard fishing vessels. The ethic of cooperation emphasises equivalence and plays down status differences between crew members (Byron, 1978, 1986). Usually, the skipper is a *primus inter pares* (Löfgren, 1972). The share system of remuneration - in which all crew members are co-adventurers and share risks - increases the commitment and labour motivation of the crew, promotes cooperative behaviour and fosters a spirit of egalitarianism (Acheson, 1981; McGoodwin, 1990). The fact that crew membership and kinship, friendship and community ties are often intertwined also helps to mitigate status differences and maintain an egalitarian ethos. Such multiple ties contribute to cohesive relationships marked by unity, solidarity and mutual regard (LiPuma, 1992). Moreover, the seniority of a father or elder brother makes for a 'natural' hierarchy that facilitates playing down lines of command.

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). They have formal power but rely on informal authority based on personal relationships and legitimated by their reputation for skill and success (Byron, 1980). Skippers rarely give direct orders or shout. A nod, a cue or a hint often suffices, especially in experienced crews. Instead of a command structure, there is an 'ideology of wordless cooperation' (Byron, 1986: p. 98).

But impression management or ideology is not practice. Even if intracrew relationships would appear to be egalitarian, there are status and prestige differences. 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 crew members (Prattis, 1973; Knipe, 1984). A skipper or a skipper-owner has certain privileges and he may receive a higher share than 'ordinary' crew members. He does not have to participate in the most disagreeable tasks. In inshore fishing, however, and especially aboard small vessels with a small crew, the degree of specialisation is low, the division of labour simple, tasks are shared or exchanged through rotation or alternation and an egalitarian ideology is more strongly adhered to than aboard larger boats.

#### 4. COOPERATING INDIVIDUALISTS

In many fishing communities, an ethos, rhetoric and idiom of freedom and independence prevails (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. 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: p. 234). Despite the individualism ascribed to them, there is overriding evidence that fishers do cooperate. In many cases fishers are 'cooperating competitors' (van Ginkel, 1996). As Hanna and Jentoft (1996: pp. 47-48) explain, 'When resource users compete, their interaction is contained within rules of the larger society. 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'. At local level, face-to-face relationships sometimes make for a 'moral economy' in which transactions between fishers and merchants or processors are to a certain degree mitigated by shared community norms and values.

The interplay of competition and cooperation also holds true in access to and use of resources. Fishers have in many cases been cooperative where it concerns 'community-based, spontaneously developed and informally organized' regulatory measures to restrict fishing (Jentoft and Kristoffersen, 1989: p. 355). This capacity of self-regulation should be acknowledged and used in fisheries management. It would avoid contestation and evasion of rules and enhance legitimacy of and compliance to regulations. Social control also plays a role in observing rules and regulations (Frangoudes, 1996). However, it would be wrong to assume that all fishers are 'noble commoners' and that their

prime motivation is conservation of marine resources. But it is equally wrong to view their behaviour as innately selfish and rapacious.

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. Scottish fishers had a reputation of being fiercely independent, but Knipe (1984: p. 98), notices 'a growing spirit of collectivism'. Indeed, Scottish, English, Dutch, French and Spanish inshore fishers have staged several protests, boycotts and blockades in recent times (LiPuma, 1992; Delbos and Prémel, 1996). However, though fishers can be cooperative, formalising cooperation into voluntary associations and other organisations is not always successful. This is often due to the fact that locally, regionally or nationally, fishers are a heterogeneous group expressive of contrasting and often conflicting ideologies and behaviours (Jentoft and Davis, 1993; van Ginkel, 1996). They also have little withholding power and a weak bargaining position *vis-à-vis* traders and politicians. On the other hand, time-honoured institutions like the *cofradías* in Spain (Alegret, 1996) and the *prud'homies* in the French Mediterranean (see Chapter 8) have played an important role in regulating fisheries and resolving conflicts for many years. Meltzoff and LiPuma (1986: p. 695) argue that Spanish littoral fishers, following adverse consequences of the Law of the Sea, have begun to establish or join associations 'that integrate familism with an international outlook. The associations have two tiers: one that preserves and encourages individual ownership and another that defends the interests of fishermen in national and international forums'.

## 5. COMPETITION AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Being competitors, fishers have adopted specific information and communication management stratagems. They often attempt to monopolise 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: pp. 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' (Löfgren, 1972; Jorion, 1978; Moustgaard, 1984; Byron, 1986; Cole, 1991; Pålsson, 1991; Peace, 1996; Mondardini Morelli, 1998). With respect to a Portuguese fishing village, Johnson (1979: p. 246) 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'. In the course of his career a skipper accumulates a wealth of

knowledge concerning specific fishing areas. In a process of trial and error, he develops a cognitive map of good fishing locations, wrecks, reefs, currents, depths, breeding habits and migration patterns of fish, the behaviour of other fishers and so on. This kind of knowledge is highly valued, as is evident in the way fishers treasure their mental maps and private log books. A skipper will most likely not share (all of) this information with others but will pass on this cognitive capital to his successor(s) (Jorion, 1978; Acheson, 1981; Peace, 1991; Dufour, 1996; Alegret, 1998).

However, McGoodwin (1990: p. 17) points out that there is a 'skipper's paradox': skippers must maximise their gains of valuable information and minimise their loss of it. At the same time, they must be 'socially participant cooperators and competitors'. 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. Thus, there are important moral restrictions to 'fisherman lies' (Andersen, 1973: p. 159). As Pálsson (1994: p. 914) maintains, 'One way to solve the tricky problem of cooperating 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'. In this respect, Barth (1966) refers to 'clusters' or reference groups in which 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. Cross-cutting social ties at community level also mitigate inter-crew rivalry (Byron, 1986).

Nonetheless, fishers thoroughly enjoy the competitive game of being top skippers and top crews. They keep a watchful eye over who lands the most fish. For instance, in Öckerö there is rivalry and competition between crews and a careful keeping of accounts of 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). In view of the competition between boats working out of the same port in Galicia, LiPuma (1992: p. 58) contends that 'the 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'. 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; Byron, 1980). With the introduction of quota regimes, part of this penchant for competition has disappeared. As Pálsson (1991) reports with respect to Iceland, there is less secrecy concerning fishing spots and 'quota kings' have replaced 'catch kings'. However, if economic problems are severe, fishermen's solidarity may also be affected. As Vestergaard (1990: p. 29) 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'.

## 6. SUCCESS, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL

Some authors explain differential success by pointing to a combination of engine power, equipment and skipper performance (van der Vlist, 1970), others to skipper-crew interactions (Barth, 1966; Baks and Postel-Coster, 1977), while yet others attribute success to the leadership role and personal skills of skippers (e.g., Byron, 1980; Thorlindsson, 1988). Pálsson and Durrenberger (1990) argue that in Iceland the so-called 'skipper effect' is a folk myth which serves social functions. In their view, success mainly depends on fishing effort, i.e. boat size and number of trips. Though such factors are important so too is the social nature of production. Fishing is very much team work and its outcome depends heavily on the experience, skills, cooperation and coordination of the entire crew. In this respect, one could attribute success partly to a 'crew effect'. As Pálsson (1995) later argued, 'the practical skills of fishing skippers are the result of mutual enskilment, the collective property of a community of practice'. A skipper's prestige is negotiated and maintained at three levels: between skipper and crew; within the local fleet; and among the general public (Pálsson, 1991). In Scotland and Ireland, too, the skipper's performance is the topic of continual public scrutiny (Baks and Postel-Coster, 1977; Peace, 1991). It is not necessarily catching the most fish which earns a skipper his reputation of being a good fisherman. For example, on the Breton island of Houat, being a good fisher is related not only to knowledge ('avoir le pif' - 'to have the nose'), but also to 'patience' (the capacity to wait), 'luck' (having good luck, bad luck or no luck) and 'courage' (being 'hardy' or 'rugged'). Strikingly, the women play an important role in deciding who is a good fisher and who is not (Jorion, 1976; 1983). Elsewhere, it may be predominantly retired fishers who keep track of prestige scores. Of course, such evaluations of prestige only have meaning in a local - usually subcultural - context.

Fishers often have a specialised and intimate knowledge of the marine ecosystems they exploit though many are at a disadvantage where it concerns formal education (McGoodwin, 1990; Vestergaard, 1990). With the exploring of new technologies and new markets fishing involves a process of continual learning. While according to some observers and fishers electronic gadgets have led to a degree of deskilling, the traditional method of 'reading' and understanding 'natural signs' continues to be of great importance (Pálsson, 1995; Dufour, 1996). This cultural competence is earned only through experience at sea (Meltzoff and LiPuma, 1986).



But ecological knowledge is no longer sufficient to successfully run a fishing enterprise. In addition, fishers increasingly need to acquire knowledge concerning markets, exchange rates, bureaucracies, political negotiations and so on. Delbos and Prémel (1996: p. 137) argue that 'such skills of anticipation are precisely the modes of operation of the large processing firms and distribution groups which by these means are able to build up their dominant positions and dispossess the producers of their status as social actors'. Small scale, inshore fishers would seem to bear the brunt of this development. They are increasingly marginalised or even ousted from the fishing industry. Capitalisation often results in a shift away from small scale fishermen's control of the means of production. For instance, in the Galician fishing industry, a mode of production based on kinship and community is gradually and partially replaced by capitalist relations of production (LiPuma and Meltzoff, 1989; LiPuma, 1992).

## 7. THE IDIOM AND IDEOLOGY OF LUCK

Differential success is sometimes explained in terms of such elusive factors like 'luck'. Even when modern technology is used, ideas about luck are often used to explain variations in catches. Clark (1978) maintains that in the English maritime community of Staithes there is a widespread belief in luck, fate, coincidence, and so forth. In Sweden, 'fishing luck' is regarded as an individual resource that can be manipulated by others, for example by 'stealing' luck (Löfgren, 1989). In the Portuguese maritime community of Nazaré 'the importance of knowledge and experience is clearly recognized, but in many ways they fail as explanations. In these cases supernatural explanations are invoked' (Brøgger, 1989). For example, 'bad luck' is sometimes 'explained' by transgression of certain taboos (van Ginkel, 1987). There is indeed a large element of unpredictability and uncertainty in fishing and often bumper catches are explained by reference to luck. But even when production is to some extent controlled, as in shellfish farming, shellfish planters may refer to luck rather than expertise, skill and effort to account for their relative success (van Ginkel, 1994). It is striking that in many places, the concept of luck constitutes the core of the *Weltanschauung* of fishermen: it is 'an important, deeply symbolic, and ubiquitous concept in the consciousness of fishers, used to explain in-group differences in catches' (McGoodwin, 1990: p. 138).

Chance remains an important factor in the spotting and catching of fish. However, some fishers are consistent winners while others are consistently less successful. The notion of 'luck' can function to 'explain' the leadership of successful skippers while playing down differences between crews, avoiding a loss of reputation for less successful skippers and maintaining an egalitarian

ideology (Knipe, 1984; Byron, 1986, 1988; Brøgger, 1989; van Ginkel, 1994). By stressing, or even reifying, such elusive factors like luck, potential inter-crew conflicts over catches and income can be avoided and status distinctions mitigated. The ascription of success to chance implies that one does not need to emphasise one's own capabilities if one is successful, and gives those who are unsuccessful an opportunity to attribute this to a lack of fortune rather than personal failure or incompetence. However, reference to 'luck' as an explanation of differential success should not only be understood in functionalist terms, or as key to fishermen's impression management; chance is indeed embedded in the real experiences of fishers and is part and parcel of their day-to-day existence.

## 8. CONSERVATISM AND ENTREPRENEURIALISM

Given the daily variation in catches and rewards, most fishers have short term time horizons and prefer short term planning (Johnson, 1979). Many have a disinclination for deferred gratification such as savings and investments. It is sometimes reported that fishers are conservative when it comes to values (Cohen, 1987) and innovations (Acheson, 1981). Andersen (1979: p. 21) contends that 'fishermen are ill-positioned to be innovative and progressive, to influence the direction of their fisheries, because they are not in optimal control of their labor, capital, products, and profits'. However, there are marked differences in this respect. On the Dutch island of Texel, fishers from one community were reluctant to adopt new technologies, while fishers from a neighbouring community were among the most innovative in the country. With respect to Shetland fishermen, Byron (1980: p. 231) states: 'Far from being rigid traditionalists, commercial fishermen are realistic businessmen making calculated choices'. If they want to remain in business, presently fishers have to behave as 'modern entrepreneurs'.

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: p. 87). Underlying fishers' scepticism 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: p. 5). In other words, the images of nature held by fishers on the 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, too, 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 competitors and external authorities.

From the fishers' point of view, they usually have good reasons to behave like this. New management regimes often impede time-honoured fishing strategies, adaptive performance, flexibility and switching behaviour. 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 Moustgaard (1996: p. 15) writes 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'. Devolved management systems, in which fishers are involved in decision making processes concerning the management of marine resources, are an important step in the direction of achieving legitimacy. At the same time, in European fishing communities there is still a strong tendency to accuse 'others' of overfishing and to not accept responsibility for declining fish stocks. Local fishers point an accusing finger in the direction of their compatriots in neighbouring communities; fishers from one nation do likewise with respect to fishers from another nation.

## 9. COMMUNITY LIFE, IMAGE AND IDENTITY

Fishing permeates non-working life in maritime communities. It receives a good deal of cultural attention and in many instances marks local identity. The communication and reinforcement of norms and values connected with the fishermen's occupation partly occurs in non-working situations. The reputation and ranking of skippers and crews is often evaluated on shore. On the Dutch island of Texel, birthday parties of fishers are often attended by other fisher families and conversations usually focus on fishing. Here, news may be exchanged about the behaviour 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 scanty 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, resolve conflicts and exchange news and information (Peace,

1991; Johnson, 1979). Likewise, participation in rituals such as the Blessing of the Fleet in Roman Catholic countries, and fisheries related prayer and thanksgiving days in Protestant communities in the Netherlands may serve similar purposes. They are further important for maintaining and reinforcing the social fabric of fishing communities.

The distinctive identity related to fishing as an occupation often sets maritime communities apart from other social formations, for example farming communities. In a wider context, the status and prestige ascribed to the occupation of fisherman differs from place to place (Moustgaard, 1984) and from period to period. For example, fishing in eastern Scotland and in Portugal has long been regarded as an undesirable and low prestige occupation (Nadel-Klein, 1988; Cole, 1991), 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). More generally, however, fishers tend to be 'a denigrated if not despised segment' of the societies in which they live (Smith, 1977: p. 8), and in Europe, they have long been viewed as belonging to the lowest social classes and stigmatised accordingly (Coull, 1972). Inter-marriage between landowners and fishers was usually rare, and many fishing villages were characterised by endogamous marriage patterns (Cole, 1991; LiPuma, 1992; van Ginkel, 1993).

But fishers may use social stigma to express, articulate and cherish their identity as a fishing community. For instance, Cole (1991: p. 46) 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'. The villagers express their pride in being (descendants of) *pescadores*, even those who are currently no longer engaged in fishing. Likewise, Nadel (1984: p. 113) 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'. 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. In Vila Chã, such boundary maintaining mechanisms 'include the operation of an informal network for the distribution of fresh fish; a profession of knowledge and interest in things maritime, like the weather, the boats, and tales of former fishing days that express their attachment to the sea; the attribution of special virtues, such as hospitality, to the *pescadores* ...; and the use of personal nicknames that have meaning only for insiders, only for members of the group' (Cole, 1991: p. 46).

## 10. CONCLUSION

This brief description of cultural aspects of fishing and fishing communities cannot do justice to the many intricacies of 'real life' in Europe's economically, socially and culturally widely diverse fishing settings. Nonetheless, it covers some themes that seem to be common in many such social formations. In addition, fishing communities throughout Europe have faced similar economic and socio-cultural consequences of modernisation and national and supranational interventions in fisheries management. These include: increasing antagonism and conflicts among fishers and between fishers and state representatives; growing inequality and social divisions; a consolidation of vested interests; the blocking of social mobility; division and opposition between boat owners and crewmen; heavy indebtedness and bankruptcies; a decline in the status of fishers; a loss of certain fishing skills; destruction of communal identity as a fishing culture; changes in community values and association; and a loss of autonomy. In many European coastal communities, fishing no longer dominates 'local culture' but has turned into an occupational subculture (Löfgren, 1984).

Inshore fishers seem to be pessimistic about the future, and for good reason; the number of inshore fishers has been on the decline continually for several decades in most of Europe's fishing communities. In many places, young people are increasingly reluctant to follow in their father's footsteps. In view of the 'breakdown' of Danish fishermen's social identity, Vestergaard (1990: p. 29) even contends that they 'have come to feel like a dying species'. What is particularly worrying is that, given the fact that many communities depend on fishing and that entire local families are involved in the fishing industry in one way or another, a crisis in the fisheries potentially undermines the entire economic basis and social fabric of such social formations.

But given the feelings of pride and satisfaction they derive from their occupation, many fishers tenaciously adhere to it even when facing declining stocks and catches, and substandard incomes. 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. 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. Therefore, 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. Nonetheless, communities dependent on inshore fishing and consisting of simple commodity producers attempt to 'muddle through' in adverse times. They have proven to be extremely resilient and

adaptive in the past, but today they must cope with forces that are beyond their understanding and control.

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