

Roots and Wings

The need for community in the age of globalization becomes apparent when we employ the double vision of interdisciplinarity to the governance of fisheries

This summer one of our national TV channels put cameras on board a coastal steamer—the *Hurtigruten*—and followed it on its week-long voyage from Bergen to Kirkenes. The voyage was filmed non-stop, with hardly any narration added, and it broke the Guinness Record for the longest TV programme ever. You would think it would have been boring. Yet, no other TV programme in Norway has received such wide viewership.

The programme was an eyeopener for a lot of Norwegians, both in a literal and a figurative sense. An 85-year-old man who was interviewed said that it was the most wonderful TV programme he had ever seen and that he hadn't slept for the whole week after it was telecast. Not only did the programme provide the viewers with a constant flow of images of wonderful natural landscapes in real time as the ship was passing by, but it also allowed them to observe vibrant communities, wherever the boat stopped and uploaded and unloaded passengers and cargo, alongside local people who showed up on the wharf with their music and art performances.

For a few weeks this summer, the TV show was what we talked about. The programme filled us with such a good mood—until the hideous shootout incident on the island of Utøya, for which we are struggling to find a proper word, and which shattered everything. All of a sudden, within a few hours, the image we had of ourselves as a country and a nation changed brutally, most probably forever.

This article is about our images of the coast, the fishing industry and the fishing community, and what they do

to us and what we become because of them. A few words to begin with about what I mean by images:

Images are what we read into what we see. They allow us to recognize what we observe. They turn an observable object or event into something that we have an idea of already. Images have consequences for what we do in the real world. When sociologists argue this point, they often refer to the so-called Thomas theorem, which states: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” It is for

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these reasons that images often turn into self-fulfilling prophecies—as the sociologist Robert Merton said.

Therefore, governance theorists—and I consider myself as one of them—argue that our images should be made explicit. They should not be taken for granted as true representations of the world. They are our own mental constructs, and it is always possible to look at things in different ways. For instance, my colleague Bonnie McCay has argued that we should not necessarily look at the resource commons as something that would inevitably turn into a “tragedy of the commons”, as Garrett Hardin phrased it.

Commons comedy

What if we looked at the commons as a comedy—to use another ancient

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theatrical plot as a metaphor? The implication for how we think about overfishing and how we deal with it would be very different if we shift the image from tragedy to comedy.

I shall run through a number of similar images about the coast and the community, and the argument is the same: It matters how we look at them—for how we think about the coast and the community and what policy implications we draw.

In 1966, Ottar Brox, a now grand old man in Norwegian social science, published a book titled *What Happens in North Norway?* That book came to change the way we view the fishing industry, and indeed our perspective on this region as a whole. At that time, North Norway was more rural than it is today. People typically made a living from combining small-scale fishing with small-scale farming in a household subsistence-oriented economy. The government, however, had their eye on the gross domestic product (GDP). They were concerned about the relative contribution of North Norway to the overall national economy. When compared to other regions, North Norway did not produce as much as its population

the government should look at the region as an aggregate of local communities. Instead of moving people out, it should assist people in creating their own employment. The government should concentrate on improving the conditions on which people made their own choice regarding where to live and what to do. The government should support the industry via their communities rather than the industry directly.

Brox has been, for many decades now, a prominent figure in public debate in Norway. His story is a good illustration of the case I am trying to make here about images: If you side with the community perspective, Brox is a hero—and he has numerous followers in coastal Norway as well as in the academic community. He is indeed also my hero. But if you look at him from the sector perspective, which leaders in the fishing industry and in government tend to do, he appears like a hopeless romantic.

In thinking about the fishing community, I have borrowed the distinction between what the French sociologist Raymond Boudon calls an interdependent versus a “functional” system. The interdependent system is characterized by competition. Here, people are basically in each others’ way. Their relationships do not go very deep. Think of a bus queue, for instance, where a bunch of strangers show up, hoping to get in first to find the best seat. But if everyone tries to be first, chaos and conflict are inevitable. The kind of social system that Garrett Hardin had in mind is obviously such a system. The “tragedy of the commons” is bound to occur in an interdependent system.

Then consider the functional system. An example would be a business enterprise, a family household or a soccer team. These are social systems characterized by organization and division of labour where people are members with roles and responsibilities. Here people need to co-operate to realize their goals. The better they know and trust each other, the easier it is for them to do so.

The government should concentrate on improving the conditions on which people made their own choice regarding where to live and what to do.

size would suggest. For the government, the answer was industrialization of the fishery, as well as urbanization. The government believed that it would do people and the region a favour by helping them to move out of the scattered fishing communities and into better-paid jobs in the cities.

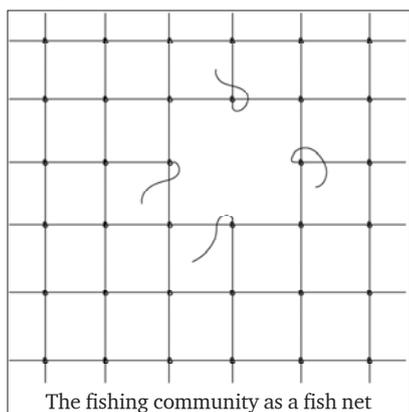
Troubled by this policy and what it did to his home fishing community, Brox argued that the government needed a new paradigm. He said that rather than thinking of North-Norway as made up of industries and sectors,

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Now, how about a fishing community? What kind of system is it? Is it like a bus queue or a soccer team? In reality, it is, of course, a little bit of both. But let us again, for the sake of argument about images, assume that they are either/or, and then think about the policy implications.

If the fishing community is like a bus queue, people are just in each others' way. They do not need each other. The fewer they are, the better, as there would be fewer people to share the same space and the same resources. Reducing the number of people employed in the fishery can then only be good. For those who remain, the money they bring home will go up. One would expect that the community will become increasingly secure, and a consolidation process will occur until it has reached equilibrium.

Now think of the fishing community as a functional system or as a soccer team: Here people rely on each other and, therefore, have to work together. A loss of members would, therefore, be a problem, as when one player of a soccer team is expelled and the remaining players must carry his task. In the community, a reduction of people will break up social relationships, the social fabric of the community will start to evaporate, and a domino effect may cause the community to collapse. Imagine, for instance, the community as a fish net, where the knots are people and the threads are social relationships. Remove one knot, and it leaves a much bigger hole than just the size of the knot. The policy implications of considering the community as one or the other system should come out pretty clear.



Fisher Ansgar Hansen preparing his catch at the local receiving station in Manndalen in the Lyngen fjord, northern Norway

My next concern is the relationship between sustainable fisheries and sustainable communities—coastal culture as implication or premise. What comes first? What is cause and what is outcome? Does the arrow go from a healthy resource to healthy communities, or does it go in the other way? Again, the policy implications of assuming one or the other are profound. This is why:

If we believe that everything must start with the ecosystem, we would tend to think that as long as we sustain the resource, everything will be fine. Therefore, we would only need to focus on the first variable in this causal chain, and the others would follow suit. We do not need to care about fishing communities, as they will take care of themselves, provided that there is enough fish. Fisheries governance can then be reduced to fisheries resource management and we can forget about the rest.

Coastal culture

Not so if the mechanism works the other way; if the premises are community and culture, and not the outcome. Then we would need to target the community, and nurture coastal culture directly, before we can expect to achieve a healthy marine ecosystem. In fact, securing the community will be a necessary condition for securing the ecosystem. How could that be?

In early September 2011, I attended a meeting of fishers in Cape Town, South Africa. During the debate, a fisher leader stated: “We have two big problems in our fishery: poaching and dysfunctional communities.” He offered many personal observations to explain how the two are related.

Ironically, fishers who spoke up at the meeting attributed the erosion of community and the extensive poaching that was going on to the way fisheries management works in South Africa, especially how rights have been allocated through the institution of the individual transferable quota (ITQ) system. “We are no longer the brothers and sisters we used to be. Now we are happy to get rid of one another.” I have often heard similar sentiments expressed also by Norwegian fishers about our quota system. The management system, apparently, has, therefore, transformed the community from a functional to an interdependent system, from a soccer team into a bus queue.

I once gave a talk in the Faroe Islands about these things. There they have a tradition that when people gather on festive occasions, they entertain themselves with what they call the “chain dance”. The dance is inclusive, and everyone participates. Holding on to each other as they turn, they

sing ancient, rhythmic chants, handed down through generations. A song may have more than a hundred verses, typically of a moral content. The lead singer is characteristically called “skipper”. Only the voices and the feet are heard. For participants, the dance is exhilarating and creates a sense of togetherness. As described on a website: “You have to participate, and when it is at its best, the chain melts together and you feel a part of something vast.”

The chain dance is, to me, a beautiful image of a healthy, well-integrated community. What I dared to say in my talk was: “If you want to secure a healthy fishery, you’d better make sure that you keep up the chain dance tradition.” I did not, of course, suggest that there is a direct link here, only that there is an indirect one.

Which also brings me to my final question: Is globalization good or bad for such cultural traditions in local communities? Will it kill the chain dance? Will people start behaving as in a bus queue?

It would be bad if globalization makes people confused about where they belong and who they are as a community. It cannot be a good thing if industries become less embedded in the local community, if they forget about their social responsibility. Neither can it be healthy if the Internet becomes the only place where our children find their sense of morality. But is everything about globalization necessarily bad? Is globalization a curse or a blessing? Can globalization be the wake-up call that local fishing communities need?

We obviously need the roots that community provides, but we also need the wings that globalization both grants and requires. We need robust communities that install in people a solid identity. We need communities for the permanence and stability they provide. Communities help us stay sane.

But we also need the modernity and freedom that globalization supplies. Globalization brings prosperity, science, new technology and cultural exchange. Globalization has brought us human rights, which is now an

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Fresh cod hung to dry on a drying rack in the Lyngen fjord, northern Norway. People typically made a living from combining small-scale fishing with small-scale farming

issue in the debate on how to secure the lives and livelihoods of small-scale fishing people globally. Globalization also gave us the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Thus, our conclusion should be that we need both community and globalization. One without the other is not a good idea. It is a misconception to assume that there is something inherently backward in local communities and in small-scale fisheries. With globalization, they can be extremely sophisticated in the way they operate, and how they produce, communicate and serve markets.

There is hardly any better expression of globalization than the proliferation of mobile phones in South Africa, I learned that small-scale fishers, who are deprived—in most senses of that word—are using mobile phones to access market information. But I learned that they are also using them to warn each other of imminent fisheries inspections—which is a good illustration of the ambivalence that comes with globalization. It can be good and bad at the same time in a way that challenges our social values.

I suggest that we now make this into a research issue. How can communities become more competent and proactive in the global world without losing their ability to provide their members with a moral footing, and a sense of belonging, of home? How can communities turn the threats of globalization into opportunities?

This article has not been about fisheries communities *per se*, but about how we think about them. Most of all, it has been about how images shape our actions in the policy arena.

I argue that we should not stick to just one image, but that we should be willing to entertain as many images as we can imagine, as alternative images give us more policy options. With globalization, communities need to be imaginative. But switching between images is never easy, as it tends to confuse us. Images are not right or wrong, only more or less useful. The reader may remember the famous ambiguous drawing which, if looked at

one way, would show an old woman, but, if looked at another way, would reveal a young woman. Try then to see the old and the young woman at the same time. It is simply impossible. And no matter how hard you strive, you will not be able to identify a middle-aged woman. You, therefore, have to imagine the young woman and the old woman one at a time.

Do we then have to choose between the contrasting pairs of images of community that I have discussed here? Would it be impossible to see them all at once? Could it be that if we only look hard enough, we would be able to see the community as something we have not seen before?



From an analytical point of view, we may have to look at fisheries communities first in one way, and then in another. It is partly for these reasons that science has been divided into disciplines. When economists look at communities (which they rarely do), they see the bus queue, while sociologists and anthropologists see the chain dance. But disciplinary perspectives are too narrow for the real world. That is also why it can be dangerous to let academics loose in it. They cannot easily make the same argument in the real world as they make in the classroom.

Marine ecosystems

For those challenges that relate to the protection of the environment, the conservation of marine ecosystems,

eradication of poverty, and to the development of local communities, we need more interdisciplinarity. But if we cannot obtain that for the reasons illustrated with the image of the two women, we should at least encourage multidisciplinary, and then try to harmonize policy initiatives.

In any case, we should all strive harder to know each others' images, because it will make us understand where we come from when we argue positions. For that, we must talk across

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disciplinary boundaries more so than we do today. This is not only possible but also worthwhile. Speaking from my own experience, I have not become a biologist from working with biologists, but doing so, I think, has made me a better sociologist. I can only hope that it has worked in the same way for them.

Since we tend to insist on disciplinary boundaries, we do not do communities and policymakers the service they deserve, because they cannot afford to lock themselves into the tunnel visions of disciplines. They have to confront real dilemmas and make hard choices where they cannot be always sure of consequences. They must, as best as they can, strive to find a balance between the policy implications of contradicting perspectives.

This, I hold, is the essence of governance. Governance is the kind of conduct that requires open-mindedness to different perspectives, the willingness to learn from both real-world experience and from analytic thinking. The governance of fisheries needs the alternative images that the disciplines of global academia employ, because they would help them see the choices that they have to make in a sharper light. And that can only be a good thing. 

For more

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottar_Brox

Ottar Brox

www.cess.paris4.sorbonne.fr/dossierhtml/pg-boudon.html

Raymond Boudon

www.faroeislands.com/Default.aspx?pageid=9709

Chain Dance

www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgFaOJJYM0s

Chain Dance Video