

A Richness of Exchanges

At the celebration of World Fisheries' Day on 28 November, in Lorient, France, fishermen and students got together to recognize the wealth of fishers' knowledge and experience

For the 21st year running, the Collectif Pêche & Développement celebrated World Fisheries Day (November 21, 1997) at a symposium organized with UBS university and student participants on the theme 'Recognizing fishers' knowledge'. There is a trend towards the marginalization of fishermen, as highlighted in a statement to the European Commissioner for the Oceans: "Fisheries...is absent from the European Commission's strategy to ensure the growth of the blue economy"... and "sustainable fisheries and fishing communities are likely to be the losers." A student from Djibouti named Djoumah Ali observed: "It is not a question of denouncing all the measures or activities related to the blue economy but of taking into account the fishermen's opinions. This is not really the case today at the international level in the debates on the future of the oceans."

Training and experience

The symposium allowed the development of a rich and sometimes lively exchange between fishermen and students, with questions on the knowledge and practices of two retired fishermen. The fishermen displayed the richness of their knowledge and experience as they reflected on their own drifts in a framework without regulation until the 1980s. They insisted on the importance of getting the opportunity of learning with "tutors" who inspired them; it is on this basis that we can motivate young people to become fishermen today, they said. There was also a lively debate on the role of schools.

The fishermen who spoke said that experience is the only way to become a fisherman and that school education represented only 10 per cent of their

knowledge. Becoming a fisherman's boss is not something that is given to all those with diplomas either—one must develop a permanent capacity to adapt in a constantly changing marine world. The teachers present acknowledged the lack of experience at sea amongst maritime high school students; they would like fishermen to invest more in the piloting of training centres.

Others, including a fisherman's wife, recalled that today a fisherman must master such knowledge as languages, law, ecology and safety drills. Finally, a fisherman must know how to manage human relations in order to maintain an efficient and stable crew. Another fisherman's wife reminded the audience that to be efficient, a fisherman must go to sea without being disturbed by personal and family worries.

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Pierre Vuarin from the UITC (International University of Citizen's Earth) concluded by stressing the importance of the common construction of knowledge in a process of permanent interpersonal exchanges between fishermen, scientists and society.

Scientists and fishermen: an indispensable relationship of trust

The afternoon was devoted to films including *Océans 2* by Mathilde Jounot, showing the ability of today's fishermen to innovate to protect biodiversity and manage and restore

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stocks such as lobster or scallops by creating, if necessary, reserves under their control. Finally, a roundtable, led by René-Pierre Chever brought together scientists and fishworkers' representatives, emphasising the richness of the exchanges between fishermen and scientists to improve practices and better manage resources. The scientists recognized the need to rely on the knowledge of fishermen to manage the fishery.


Points of view may differ, but there is no calling into question the relationship of trust. Marie Savina-Rolland from the French National Institute of Ocean Science (IFREMER), showed the complexity of stock assessment based on her experience with sole in the Eastern Channel. Curiously, scientists are now judging the stock to be recovering; they are proposing to increase the quota when fishermen, for their part, see a stock in serious decline, which makes them unable to catch the allocated quota. The fishermen present called for an increased presence of researchers on their vessels, which is impossible for the researchers due to the limitations on available human resources. We can, therefore, see that the problems are no longer so much between the fishermen and the scientists with whom they work, but rather with other researchers focused on the biological approach to the oceans, disconnected from the links with the fishermen.

Knowledge and power

It is these biologists who now make the law in major international conferences and in UN bodies, with the exception of the FAO. A young Irish researcher called Edward J. Hind had devoted his thesis to the relationship between fishermen's knowledge and fisheries management. He said: "With the rise of neopositivism, the democratic ideal began to disappear. In the environmental field, in particular, technocratic experts have become de facto advisers to Western governments on issues of public interest." These communities of experts constitute knowledge elites who play a political role.

Today, the debate is less about the state of stocks than about the state of biodiversity. Fishermen are among the

main culprits in the face of threats to biodiversity. Yet fishermen have an interest in maintaining biodiversity and if they are able to take it into account, a fundamentalist vision of the defence of this biodiversity cannot satisfy them. Fishermen are now confronted with more porpoises and dolphins, probably because of the greater food resources in the open sea, and they are trying to find ways to avoid them. But it is not easy. The difficulties associated with the proliferation of seals in certain areas are also known. Finally, scallop fishermen have to get rid of starfish, not to mention the fact that their dredges change the seabed, which is a scandal for many biologists.

The fishermen also see the catastrophic effects of pollution and are the first to denounce it. Ali Djoumah, the student, put the problem in its proper perspective in her presentation: "For fishermen, respecting their rights and recognizing their world also means answering society's questions about protecting the oceans and taking marine biodiversity into account. It is, therefore, up to everyone to be open to debate and question, and thus to be a stakeholder in the preparation of the future of the oceans." 

For more

<https://peche-dev.org/spip.php?article276>

Call to the European Commission: An inclusive oceans strategy is needed to ensure sustainable fishing communities

<http://hdl.handle.net/10379/3022>

Edward Jeremy HIND. Last of the hunters or the next scientists? Arguments for and against the inclusion of fishers and their knowledge in mainstream fisheries management. NUI Galway, 2012, 347 p