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# Identity and life quality: shaping one's place on a small island in a fishing community

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## ABSTRACT

The paper is based on 15 months of anthropological fieldwork on some small islands, fringing the North Atlantic Ocean, in Norland County, Norway. The concepts of identity and life quality are central to this exposition as part of a socio-cultural web including significant elements of history/traditions connected to social and nature environments. In a modern world, life quality is everywhere significantly influenced by political decisions brought out without major impact or guidance from many small scale community members. This is important when assessing perceptions of sustainability, how it is defined and for whom it is considered.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## KEYWORDS


Identity; life quality; fishing community; sustainability; cultural resilience

This paper brings us to a fishing-based small island community with a total population of approximately 100 residents that is situated in Norland County, Norway. A high-speed passenger carrier makes the distance from the mainland to their homes by the Norwegian Ocean in 60 minutes when weather conditions are fair.

The paper is primarily based on anthropological fieldwork, amounting to 15 months (one year from August 2006 into September 2007 and later more shorter periods during intensive fishing activities), in the community, but primarily onboard several of the 26 locally owned fishing vessels during fishing activities. Most vessels were between 11 and 15 meters long, usually operated by a single man, but strengthened with added manpower during the winter cod fisheries. January 2019, I returned for a brief visit and then participated in the winter cod fisheries from Røst during March. Interestingly it was easily observed that the fishermen I knew, their families and the community showed marked signs of resilient adaptation. Three youngsters, schoolchildren in 2008, had entered the local fishing fleet and owned their vessels. The population has grown, children have been born and some few East Europeans have moved in to work at the local small-scale fish plant. Although this description is sketchily, it indicates that the community presents its members with some goods they find cherishing or a worthwhile reason to move into or remain on the islands. In the following, we shall learn more about the nature of this island community and look into questions of sustainability and resilience in the shadows of a national policy of centralization.

## Clarification of central concepts used in the exposition below

Here concepts like fishing community, resilience, identity and life quality are presented. According to Clay and Olson (2007), the seemingly simple question: What is a 'fishing community' raises complicated issues of place, identity and economy. Further, they ask if it is anything that distinguishes

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these communities apart from their common dependence on some type of fishing and or fishing-related enterprises? (2007, 27).

When Nadel-Klein (2003) and Webster (2013) write about Scottish fisher folk they generally localize them in fishing villages. Villages are described as rural and relatively small settlements. Fishing villages are, however, usually placed along coasts and their residents show an attachment to both a particular geographical place on land as well as to the sea. Nadel-Klein (2003: 13–15) places village life in an often imagined context of community, of shared, overlapping ties, obligations and rights. She did, however, find fishing villages that were clearly and sharply divided into social classes. The residents all lived in the same village, but largely inhabited distinct social worlds. Thus, we may find villages divided into more communities, where one could be defined for instance by self-definition as a fishing community, a fishing village may even form an overarching community. On the other hand, some fishery-based households in a town or city are not enough to define it as a fishing town or community. In a Norwegian context and in particular the focused location of research presented here, fishing villages are not a suitable label. The houses occupied by the fisherfolk of this study spread out on several tiny islands, the feeling of community is however marked by words and deeds. To describe the meaning of this I largely follow the suggestion of Clay and Olson (2007). They list a set of criteria that characterize what can be described as a fishing community. (1) A visible connection to fishing-related businesses such as fish processing firms, fishing equipment managing, fishing vessels. This is coupled with strong local attitudes stressing the importance of fishing to the community's sustainability, resilience, even continued existence into the future. (2) Connections between at sea and on land networks. (3) Kinship and friendship tend to be important for job recruitment to the fishing fleet as well as much land-based work. (4) Although formal education has become a prerequisite in professional fisher education, important experiences and skills are still earned during young ages from peers and relatives in the local community. (5) Gender tends to be attached to tasks both on land and at sea, there are women and men's spheres to a somewhat larger degree in fishing communities than elsewhere.

When a future is assessed for current fishing communities it is difficult to separate political rhetoric from social and biological insight and questions of scale. It makes a difference whether the economic and ecological situation in the European Union, Norway or a small fishing community is considered. A problem with some predictions based on resilience theory relates to notions of optimal development. One may wonder for whom optimal development or living conditions are designed, anticipated or evaluated (Folke 2006; Broch 2013b). In the present context, the future possibilities as seen from a local community perspective are in focus. To explain this bluntly it makes a difference if one works for the survival of a fishing community, local resilience, biological diversity and sustainability or purely economic gain for investors and their likes, rational harvesting in terms of large trawlers and multinational resource ownership. Thus, the future of fishing communities is as dependent on political ideologies as of fish stocks and other marine resources. Sustainable resource use has become a problematic buzzword when discussed by many politicians. That is also because they view it in terms of maximizing economic profit and what is regarded as economic sustainability. Resilience, or rather cultural resilience, should be a useful concept if one hopes to understand what it takes to secure the survival of coastal communities and perhaps fishing communities in particular. Resilience is a vague concept often left undefined (Olwig 2009) and appears in a variety of disciplines (Sherrieb and Norris 2009). Significant components of the concept are various forms of sustainability, flexibility, a strong potential to handle both unforeseen natural and social changes. Whether adjustments to novel conditions and circumstances take place within the family, local community arrangements or commercial fishing – resilience achieved through needed creativity (Broch 2013b) is ultimately 'an aspect of agency – and thoroughly social' (Hastrup 2009, 28). Cultural resilience is a key to the analysis. Resilience as applied below should lead the attention toward complex processes pointing toward a future where economic gain cannot overrule biological sustainability. Resilient adaptation should prevent species and resource depletion, support energy-saving strategies and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Cultural resilience is about what it takes to survive in, and secure sustained healthy environments in the broadest sense.

When the members of the fishing community share positions of agency this power potential are related to identity. There is a collective identity component, they are all fishing community folk. Equally important all residents have a personal identity and potential agency to contribute substantially to community and family survival and development. Unfortunately, there are sectors of socio-cultural life where and times when both young and older community members share feelings of lacking agency, lacking political power to secure their fishing adaptation. This is linked to identity as I use the term. Based on the thinking of Erikson (1978, 1982) and Goffman (1959), identity is a composite idea made up of social, cultural and psychological elements. A person's identity is powered by conscious and unconscious energies. Some notions are self-ascribed, others are ascriptions such as social reputation. All have ideas that may be wrong or correct, about the qualities or lack of basic skills others attribute oneself and others. Most importantly, people present themselves in ways they find suitable and adjusted to the setting and context. Most people wish to present themselves as morally competent and likeable individuals. Even when some identity markers such as gender, age or profession may have imperative impacts on role play some individual creativity of self-presentation is always present. That roleplay does not need to mirror a person's inner understanding of self. This understanding of identity creates some methodological complications for social science fieldwork that are best solved by means of slow-moving investigations or extended time in the field. Likewise, participant observation or participation may untangle the dialectics between theory and praxis, or what people say and what they do.

Life quality can be linked to what is said and done, to the agency as it is experienced, and ideas about what once was, the here and now, and hopes for the future (Broch 2013). Life quality is a highly individual assessment and the outcome of the experience. It is difficult to measure because the concept incorporates inner feelings, to what extent subjects feel well and think positively about their lived lives. Perhaps it is an encroachment to question the felt life quality of fellow women and men. Who are to decide that the life quality of some people is less worth than that of others? When we are concerned about the future of fishing communities the experienced life quality of residents is certainly important. We may postulate that if not a significant number of community members are satisfied with their life quality and have faith in its development into the near future, they would seek to move away, look for better living conditions elsewhere. Above I implicitly rejected the idea that the local community as a concept has outplayed its utility to describe some Norwegian and other small-scale societies. The death of local communities apparently happened because we all now live in the Anthropocene. In this historical epoch, all communities are in touch with and influenced by global structures and impacts. This supposedly leads to a situation where there are no non-global locations as well as no places that are not local. That is, any place, any community may in some contexts appear as local and yet be affected by hidden or exposed foreign or global elements. We may speculate whether such claims give any meaning or are void. From many local societies, including the fishing community in focus here, some residents pendulum from the islands to the mainland to work, and others to attend high school five days every week. Fish is exported directly to buyers in Spain and other distant European markets. Further, television, internet and the social media bring ideas, impulses and new values home from near and far. A methodological way out of these troubled waters is, however, the belief in experience near descriptions and analysis of thick enough ethnography achieved through extensive community and fishing participation. In the present context, this implies a bottom-up lens on the community and the world we share.

### The ethnographic field site by the Norwegian Sea

Now to the ethnographic field site, some rocky small islands fringing the Norwegian Sea. After my arrival, it did not take long before I was told by women and men, young and elder the probably most

shared opinion encountered in this fishing community. The residents regarded their homeland as a definable locality, a place geographically and culturally separated from the neighboring communities. In other words a proper place-based local community. ‘We have our own rules and regulations out here by the ocean, there are traditions we adhere to. If the commercial fishery and the fishermen disappear, this community, the permanent settlement shall soon vanish’. Thus the islanders express belonging to a conjoint community, let us look into some of the implications or reasons for their stated feeling.

In a community of approximately one hundred souls, everybody knows or at least knows about all the others. Living on adjoined islands all do not meet every day. There are however social institutions that bring them together at various times and places. Meeting places are the church, the shop, summer café, lotto evenings with cakes, coffee, juice, small prices and singing in unison. The celebration of May 17, the national day of independence, is an event when all may meet, where gender or age do not matter much. However, those who do not attend are noticed, and most seem to know why the absentees did not find the time. Various private parties where family and or friends are celebrated are also arranged, who are invited is a wide-open expression of social networks and friendships. The elementary school also plays a key role in the community. All the children attend the same school, and the islanders soon learn about the progress of the students and know their teachers well. During classes, the children are taught how wisdom sits in places (Basso 1996). They learn about particular locations in the neighborhood and the attached stories. Who lived where and what happened when. One narrative is about the family who lived by the last lighthouse in the archipelago that was closed in 1959. This all adds to current local social memory (Connerton 2012), about living by the ocean, about what parents and grandparents remember because it happened during their lifetime – intergenerational relations at play. This included historical reconstructions based on formal or academic constructions of the past, for instance by established scholars (Gudbrandson 1978), form part of dynamic community identity. The children may ask any adult islander about these narratives, most know the community history. When walking between the houses, along the shorelines or sailing through the narrows between the islets – the land so to say, speaks. The sharing of the stories unites the knowers.

Comprehensive interviewing of young and old members of small rural agricultural communities in Iowa, USA was conducted in the 1980s. One of the findings was that communities characterized by intergenerational closure are better able to safeguard their children from social risks. This is, it is argued, because all or most adults in the community and not only the parents take on responsibility for the youngsters’ moral education and wellbeing (Elder and Conger 2014, 107–108). Obviously, scale matters, the social situation seems similar in a Norwegian fishing community 40 years later.

Four men drink coffee at the summer café and are commenting on a newspaper article about ‘black work’ (not registered work).

This is just ridiculous; it is part of our tradition to help each other. Living here is dependent on cooperation, most houses for instance, are built with assistance from relatives and friends. To request payment for such favors would be socially ruining, we pay in kind. Happily, we have different skills. One day I get help to repair a broken jigging machine the next day I compensate assisting during net fishing. There are also some here who barter fish for potatoes, have established exchange network with a small-scale farmer on the mainland,

so goes the conversation. ‘You see’ one of the men addresses me ‘we live by our own rules here’. It is not regarded as morally suspicious to apply common sense even when that implies to break a few laws or regulations set by the national authorities. This does not imply that this community without a police officer is uncontrolled. The islanders indeed live in a moral community. Like Canadian and Norwegian west coast fishermen studied by Gezelius (2004) they present themselves as morally engaged persons. Greed is frowned upon, and hard work is morally praiseworthy. This goes for all, youth and adults, women and men (Broch 2012). There is a cultural ethos based on close social

networks here, much like described for Bremnes on the Norwegian west coast long ago, by Barnes in 1953 (Barnes 1954).

### The Christmas banquet

Perhaps the most popular or rather conversed party is the Christmas banquet. It is presented here to illuminate the above-mentioned ethos, highlighting the social equality and moral concerns of participants. I heard about this party during the goose hunt in September when one hunter confirmed that there would be goose meat at the communal Christmas dinner. Soon thereafter, Saturday, December 9, was decided for the occasion. It turned out to be a suitable day for a party. Right from the morning, the sky was gray with drizzling rain +5°C. Towards the evening the wind grew into a strong gale. Figuring out when the feast would start was not that easy, even for the arranging committee members: 'Half-past eight, some have to tend to their sheep before they are free'. 'Well, others may think we start at 9 o'clock because that was when we started last year'. Several task groups had prepared the arrangement during the day. The hall was cleaned, and the tables were decorated. Dishes with roasted geese, smoked and cured salmon, and mutton were in place on the buffet. Potato and other salads were prepared from store goods, wine and spirits bought in the city on the mainland.

The all-male group I am with consists of four adult persons responsible for the welcome drinks 'gløgg' a mix of red wine and 60% proof alcohol. We are also responsible for brewing coffee, decorating the prepared geese with prunes, layout the buffet and collecting Nok 250 from each participant. All the group members (except the anthropologist) brought a small bottle with either aquavit or cognac in the pocket or a small bag. Our job starts with a few shots. All being experienced fishers they are familiar with kitchen work. The dress jackets are hung over the back of some chairs. The work runs smooth, no one bosses the others, here is no leader, many smiles, all apparently content.

At five past nine, all the anticipated twenty-five persons have arrived. No children are allowed, it is a 20-year-old age restriction for participation. All receive the welcome drink, but four of the younger women prefer water. One person claimed he had no money and was granted delayed payment. Most of the attendants are married women and men. Few are past 60 years; the oldest community members are not here. Some of them are babysitting for younger relatives. One young fisher couple has installed an electronic nanny at home and brought a screen in order to check that their baby is all well. Three women in their mid-thirties are the major organizers and host the event. One of them welcomes all when seated. She thanks everyone who has participated to make the banquet possible. Then she reveals the program. In a while, we shall sing some songs, the texts are placed by your plates, more entertainment is planned and there will be dance. She then begs for attention.

The evening's menu is as follows: the starter is deep-fried frog legs directly from the pond at the South Island, and then we will be served rock gunnels (*tangsprell Pholis gunnellus*) in a homemade sea urchin souse followed by tasty, steamed cormorants with a cod parasite (*kveis*) dressing and even more goodies.

The menu was applauded with roaring laughter. 'Oh well they are short of food this year' one man at the table giggled. It did not look like the exotic dishes reduced anyone's appetite. Most went for two or three servings. Red Wine and beer accompany the foods by choice. One young man asked why only inexpensive brands of pilsner were served tonight 'It should be the better brand of Christmas beer on an occasion like this'. He has answered right away: 'That brew is too expensive, it is part of the purpose to keep the costs as low as possible, we wish that all who would like to attend can afford it'. A woman nods:

That is right, this is cheap. I overheard Jonas in the shop yesterday tell Sarah that he would not come tonight because he did not have the money. That is quite OK, but everybody knows that he did not tell his major reason for not coming. He and all his close kin stay home because they do not like partying, never did.

More nodding, ‘yes, yes, that is how it is’. Olav frowns a little when he tells us placed close to him at the table, that two women in their mid-twenties proposed they deserved a small compensation in cash for their effort with this December Party. ‘Now’ he said,

I have participated at the five last banquet arrangements, contributed a fair share of work and donated salmon and gees. It never struck my mind that I should be paid for that. This is what we all do for each other.

The spirits are high. Some wives pour water into their husbands’ empty wine glasses. Nothing said, no comments, but some more wine tolerated after the water is drunk. Lots of small talks, laughter, songs are sung, no psalms this night, it is all fun. One man in his forties is tipsy, annoying because his talk is quite loud. When he wishes to be the lead-singer one of the women from the arrangement committee tells him calmly: ‘Now – That is enough’. Obedient like a lamb he immediately stops.

After the meal, the dishwashing group places all dirty cutlery and plates into the dishwashing machine. The ‘gløgg’ – group members clean off the buffet table and bring in cakes and coffee. Taped music is playing, but not louder than allowing conversations at the regrouped tables. The middle of the floor is readymade for those who would like to dance. Coffee is drunk from cups and cognac from water glasses. Almost every man has brought a bottle in a plastic bag, placed on the floor, by the chair. Some have a pocket bottle that strangely never gets empty and one or three leave their brandy on top of the table.

Outside the weather is unpleasant. The rain is hammering against everything and everyone who braved the conditions of the snarling gale. Here they are, gathered, the habitual and the party smokers, cigarettes and a few cigars are enjoyed, outdoors but carefully sheltered from wind and rain.

Inside the atmosphere is genial, no shouting, but inspired conversations. Even this night’s topics are primarily centered on the weather, fishing and food. Well after midnight, the first couple enters the floor to dance. At the most, there are four pairs swinging accompanied by pop music from 1980 and 1990s.

Unexpected, one fisher in his late forties who I know well, wish to tell me something:

I feel it is something very wrong when some people cannot accept that others enjoy a drink or two. Well, it used to be frowned upon because it was regarded as sinful and immoral behavior. It is not that long ago some people here tried to hinder physical education from our school because they felt it looked too much like dance.

A woman at the table agrees and adds: ‘The Mission is still strong and animated for some here by the ocean edge, but now they are almost all old people’.

At three o’clock, I leave the feast together with a couple, we are heading home in the same direction. Most people remain, only very few left before us.

### *Solidarity across differences*

In the present context, this Christmas banquet is important because the islanders regard it as a cherished cultural tradition. Here they honor local foods, community and cooperation are demonstrated, individual and family identities are played out or rather confirmed. When the weather and fishing are overwhelming dominant themes around the tables this also signals the importance of those issues. Everyone enters whichever conversation or communication situation as total persons in this *gemeinschaft* society (Toennies 1957) type of social interaction. They all share and verbally express an attachment to the location, the islands and the surrounding sea. This community is directly dependent on a small scale, commercial, coastal fishing. There are, however, more threats to their adaptation and resilience of future dwelling at this particular location. Should the shop, post-service and most importantly, the school close down, that would also mark the end of the settlement. These are, however, no themes of conversation when gathered to share fun and enjoy a pleasant night.

The party also illustrates that moral values also are unevenly distributed among the islanders. One man 26 years old who did not participate had told his father that he wished to go to the party. His father replied that if that were his wish, he should go but added that he wished the son would remain at home. 'Of course, I did not go' the obedient son told me.

When we meet again a few days later he asks about the party, was it lots of fun? Many people drank and did they dance a lot? I tell him that the food was very good. Actually, he was well informed and knew what was placed on the buffet.

I remember years back now, how much I really wanted to go to the parties where most all of my age mates went. In my family, we never drank alcohol at home or anyplace. I remember it made me sad when I was younger that I was never invited to any parties, never told where my comrades all went having fun. A few times a bunch of them, girls and boys, came to see me when their party was over. Then we all had a good time during the rest of the night, no one brought booze to the house. My mother and father did not mingle, left to ourselves we were drinking coffee until morning came.

We do things differently here, families have distinctive values but we all respect each other and cooperate on land as well as on the sea. This is a good place to live, I think we are tolerant and are tied together.

Like 'Mr. Basso wrote that places became morally powerful for the Apache because they were ways that people remembered their past' (Luhmann 2015, 3) I argue that the same holds true in this Norwegian fishing community.

It is dark, stormy weather and around zero degrees Celsius. Suddenly it is discovered from behind a window that Peter's tiny 7 meters wood hull vessel has broken its mooring and gone. Three fishermen run out to look for the boat, if it has drifted onto some rocks it is surely just a pile of wood by now. When it is discovered that Alf takes off with his twelve meters vessel in the search one bystander on the shore smiles: 'Usually Alf neither goes out when the weather is rough nor if it is not pertinent, it must be the hope of a significant reward'. The comment is met with laughter. A while later I am drinking coffee with an elder man by the wharf. We talk about the just mentioned episode. 'It is not too many here who dare to make a joke about Alf. This I tell you', says the elder, 'If you wish to make a pun about someone, do it when they are not present! No one was ever hurt by what they did not get to know or did not hear'. It is my understanding that his statement underlines the importance to avoid conflicts and confrontations. That is one way to 'demonstrate' tolerance and community solidarity.

### *And into the future?*

The islanders' mixed adaptation based on domestic fishing, supported by a few cows, some sheep, hens and perhaps a pig ended in the 1970s. Today there are a few so-called wild or Viking-sheep grazing on the succulent, green, island grass. Sheep are, however, not regarded as an important economic asset. I have argued elsewhere that fishing always was and still is the fundament in the islanders' livelihood. Further that the ecological niche they occupy has not narrowed, which is fortunate in terms of the future sustainability of the community and the basic natural resource use (Broch 2012, 2013b). Resilience theory parallels what ecologists claimed a long time ago and still do; generalized niches have a more robust or better survival potential than specialized niches (for instance Hardesty 1977). A community solely dependent on a single species like farmed salmon or other such specialized niche is vulnerable and not resilient. If the farmed salmon caught a hitherto unknown disease or the chemicals used to clean the fish from lice turned out to be devastating for surrounding marine life, the community would have to undergo complete readjustment, or it would face disintegration. Remember resilience is about a future further ahead than next year.

Communities based on generalized niches are better able to adjust to ecological changes, be it climate change, pollution or international conflicts. Further Berkes, Colding and Folke argue that many efforts to control nature by reducing resource variation in an effort to make an ecosystem more productive, predictable, economically sufficient and controllable may actually lead to a loss of



resilience (2003, 8). So how is it possible to argue that resilience was not reduced or that the niche (resources utilized) did not become significantly specialized when the islanders slaughtered their domestic animals? The argument connects to their utilization of marine resources. Traditionally they fished species such as cod, herring, saithe/coalfish, haddock, ling and halibut. Much of the fishing except the herring fisheries and the winter fisheries for cod, was for local and domestic consumption. Husbandry, with the exception of haymaking, was to some large extent women's work. When small-scale farming ended, neither men nor women claim they miss it. They got spare time to do other things. The men could for instance spend more time at sea and that involved more money-generating activities. One consequence was that their fishing became an all-year enterprise and more commercialized than before. This could indeed be regarded as narrowing the ecological niche through specialization, a strategy that would make the islanders more vulnerable to social and climatic changes. However, when we scrutinize the modernization of their fishing strategies we find that the fishermen gradually fished systematically for more diverse species than before, in other words widened the marine resource variation they harvested for a living. Several factors caused this development. A growing demand for fish they used to see as unfit for human consumption, such as monkfish made it an attractive well-paid target. Veia has demonstrated significant, interesting cultural-historical continuities and differences related to fishing along the Norwegian coastline. It is an example remarkable how well west coast fishers have succeeded with pelagic industrial fishing. On the other hand, North Norwegian fishers have been ridiculed as buried in stale traditions, a *laissez-faire* mentality lacking in economic drive and creativity (Veia 2009). Empirical findings do not confirm such stereotypes. For instance, when one of the younger fishers in the community in focus discovered a few Norwegian lobsters among tusk in a colleague's catch he ordered a bunch of rightly designed pots. He just wanted to experiment, find out if it would be worth the effort to buy more pots. Another fisher in his late forties is the only one who went for lumpfish. In the current climate change situation, we learn about the warming of the North Atlantic. It is interesting to watch how marine animal species that have moved north have been enthusiastically utilized by different fishermen in the community. When they target different secondary resources in addition to the cod and saithe all fish for, this is surely strategic sustainability from a local community perspective. The variation of fishing techniques and targets give the community more opportunities to lean onto in times of both predicted and unpredicted changes. The first marine newcomer of economic significance in the area was the Cancer pagurus crab, one fisher from the community who started to fish for it in 2006. Recently the mackerel has become an established member of the marine ecosystem of the area. This species is now fished commercially here and further north, even around Spitsbergen. Fishermen live in and base their livelihood on a world of flux and some uncertainty. The survival of the fishery and community viability has always been and still remain, a consequence of an adequate level of flexibility.

The fishermen, their sons and many women in the community trusted the future of the coastal fishery at the time of my fieldwork. They still did at the revisit in 2019 and tell me that there will always be fish in the sea. If one species disappears, the other will fill their place. It has always been like that. There were years when the sea around our islands was boiling with herring, not now. Now the mackerel is here. When we were young, we had never seen it, only pictures of mackerel in books. Our work is not bullshit work, people need food and we harvest marine resources quite lenient, they claim. 'There will always be a demand for uncontaminated food'.

So, what do they worry about then and now? see as threats to their community by the ocean? Overfishing is one threat, not their own activities, but that of huge trawlers, Danish seiners and large purse seiners. According to the fishers these vessels catch vast amounts of young, small fish, fish fry, they ruin the bottom and the fish they scoop up to cost more per kilogram than the fish caught by small vessels. According to [www.birdwatch.no](http://www.birdwatch.no) and Brox (2016), large ocean-going trawlers spend approximately 500 liters of diesel fuel for one metric ton of cod. Coastal vessels, 10–15 meters long, need approximately 118 liters fuel per metric ton of cod.

The coastal fishermen seem to agree with Brox (2016) and more social scientists that the new regime of selling and buying of fish quotas represents a threat for the recruitment of young fishermen to establish themselves in fishing communities (see also Chambers, Helgadóttir, and Carothers 2017; Rogan 2020). The quota system represents a privatization of former commons and the Norwegian authorities have shown next to no interest in the viability of the few remaining fishing communities along the coast. This view is supported by Jentoft when he argues that fishery politics should pay more attention to the interests and viability of local fishing communities. They represent a positive factor in fishery management as well as providing appreciated life quality for many people residing along the coast (Jentoft 2003). Further, he asserts that the introduction of the saleable vessel quota system has driven up the entrance costs for newcomers dramatically. Young men and women (Nordvåg 2018) who hope to operate their own vessels do not have the means to compete with company skip owners and other maritime entrepreneurs. Local recruitment has therefore halted, especially in the North (Jentoft 2011). Actually, Jentoft is here lending words to the fishermen and more people I got to know in the community of investigation. There they recognized that the economic situation improved for those few who got quotas at the introduction of the cod quota system. There was, however, a consensus among the residents, a worry on behalf of the boys and young men about the poor possibilities for newcomers to enter the fisheries because of the costs of quotas necessary to fish enough to make the enterprise economically sustainable. That the situation has not improved recently is confirmed by Røed (2020, 163) and Rogan (2020).

This situation is not restricted to North Norwegian fishing and countryside politics. Similar quota systems are introduced for instance on the Ferry Islands, Iceland and the US. In Iceland, the effect seems to be exactly what coastal fishermen in Norway fear shall happen (Chambers, Helgadóttir, and Carothers 2017). From Alaska it is reported both from active fishermen, spokespersons for Alaska Coastal Communities (Christiansen and Vick 2007), the executive director of Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association (Behnken 2007) and more (Erikson 2007) that the saleable fish quotas are ruining the local fishing communities in the area now and into the future. The best, and the only solution they see is that the fishing communities should own enough fish quotas to secure their own viability. It is so much available information on the effects of saleable quotas that we must assume that Norwegian authorities have little sympathy for small scale coastal fishing and local fishing communities. Even sustainable harvest, marine biodiversity and community resilience seem to be sold out for relatively short-term profits by fishery investors. Governmental support of coastal wild-fish based communities appears as pure rhetoric.

The coastal fishermen themselves feel their interests are ignored when it comes to fronted politicians' public strategies to promote marine oil exploration, even in the Lofoten area. Some also feel frustrated when tourism, tourist fishing activities and accommodation, perhaps whale watching as well, are suggested as a better economic alternative than their own coastal fishing in the future. Regulations of the fisheries have many intended and perhaps some unintended consequences. Regulations are about more than economic and ecological set goals. They have social effects that soon challenge central community values involving equality, fair and just distribution of goods (Jentoft 2003).

However: 'As long as there are fish in the sea, we shall survive here, in this community. The work we do and the food we send to the markets are too important to be stopped', a young fisher told me gravely in 2010.

## Towards a conclusion

Cultural resilience, community viability and sustainability are also about life quality.

We should not romanticize everyday life in small local communities. Nowhere consists of everyday life of enduring peace and harmony. On the fishing-based island community we have visited, like elsewhere people disagree in various matters. Some, especially young women and men leave the islands to settle in a different place. After finishing elementary school, all students attend secondary

schools in the nearest city on the mainland. Some continue to stay at home, going to and from by boat every day while others find a place to rent the city. The latter usually return home for weekends and holidays. Thus, all who grow up in the community are well informed about other lifeways than living in a fishing community not only by various media impressions but also by personal experiences. Not surprising then some young women and men move permanently to a city for further education or interesting job alternatives after high school graduation. Fishing is not for everyone. Paradoxically this outmigration serves community viability well. There are neither space enough nor adequate job opportunities available if all born into the community chose to stay.

However, and this is important: Staying is not perceived as an outcome of circumstance or lacking ambitions, but an active choice or preference. Agency! Those who choose to stay are recognized as important carriers of cultural traditions who make continued community life possible. In other words, they provide hope for the future. So, how does this tie to life quality and cultural resilience?

The fishery is primarily regarded as a male enterprise with connotations of bravery, stamina, smartness, seaman skills, even care and consideration. In the community fishermen, young and old are respected for their trade, although all are not equally successful. Being part of a society that positively values ascribed personality components of fishers probably enhance their self-evaluation. The admiration of fishermen and their importance for the community is part of everyday conversation all over the small islands of this fishing community, and also at special events such as the Christmas banquet visited above. The fishermen themselves explain why they sustain the hardship, danger, economic risks, uncertainty and time spent away from home for instance during the winter cod fishery. The most common answer is because of the life quality connected to the profession: thrill and the freedom. Freedom to do what you want and when you want to do it (Broch 2013b, 2014).

When young people choose to spend their future life in the fishing community, it is also important to be attentive to the powerful force of peer influence. As reported from a small fishing community in Alaska these kids are not only classmates and age mates. They are also cousins, siblings and friends who surely influence the aspirations, attitudes, actions and dreams of each other (Donkersloot 2007). We may understand why it could be tempting for boys to achieve for the 'hero' fisherman's occupation and local admiration in the home community. Here are strong domestic role models and people come running to greet, watch and scrutinize the catches when the local vessels come to quay in front of the fish reception. But what about the young women? They too mention life quality when they describe their social adaptation in the community. 'It takes some special qualities to fit in here' a fisherman's wife and mother of three children told me. She emphasized community solidarity and a valuable sisterhood exercising loyal support when needed. At times you worry, maybe afraid when the gale is towering with wet snow and your husband is at sea in his tiny vessel. There are more women around here having that experience, we talk, listen and get help to think about positive issues. She like most other women residing here had spent time out of the community. That she said, made her appreciate the sociocultural environment by the roaming ocean.

In this community, we have some control. This far we have no problems with drug addiction or criminality. You do not have to worry about what children and youth are doing around here, in a short while everybody shall know. This is a good place to rear young children too.

The need for and active demonstration of community cooperation and loyalty are mentioned by most of the island dwellers. We have seen that not all remain through their total lifespan. The majority of those who remain express belonging and say they stay because of experienced high life quality.

Adjusting for a much smaller number of people on the island community than in Bremnes where 4600 people lived when Barnes made his study, there are interesting similarities. Common interest maintenance is paramount in much social interaction. Individual goals must be attained through socially approved processes and deemed morally acceptable by the islanders of both communities.

'... ... and as far as possible the illusion must be maintained that each individual is acting only in the best interest of the community' (Barnes 1954, 50). The 2020s do however pose new questions. We must scrutinize how the North Norwegian islanders we have followed managed to uphold their community where so many others have closed down. Resilience seems to be the cue. The islanders have managed to utilize new marine resources and old ones in environmental (biological and socio-cultural) sustainably rational ways. Flexibility and small-scaled enterprises have against many odds contributed to a remarkably homogeneous island community.

If daring to predict future possibilities for the islanders in focus and similar fishing communities, political ideology and goals for national (not local) development constitute more severe obstacles than the marine resource base and people's willingness to continue and develop a sustainable maritime adaptation. A policy of centralization of people, saleable fishing quotas, schools and commerce to mention just a few will surely lead to the end also of this and similar fringe communities.

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