Social resilience in Cornish Fishing Communities

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Abstract

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE SESSION - CONVENORS: ROSS AND BERKES
Cornish fishing communities express, and have historically expressed, varying degrees of ability to develop and retain resilience capacity, or the ability to withstand ‘shock’ over both ‘fast’ and ‘slow’ onset events. Endogenous and exogenous influences include aspects of social, economic and environmental change that may result in the loss or depletion of community and livelihoods as well as fishery resources. It is hypothesised that social resilience, or community operationalization of durable coping strategies to disturbance, is largely influenced by the unique balance of social, economic and environmental factors of relevance to that community. The relationship between the balance of these capitals and social resilience attributes changes and transitions over time; important resilience attributes to be considered are those of social memory and identity in community and individual terms. This research frames community resilience within a multi-level resilience framework on local, national and EC scales. The fishing communities of Cornwall have historically been influenced in regard to fishing activity in productiveness terms through local livelihood prospects as well as EC governance under the Common Fisheries Policy which is undergoing reform under an unclear and contested ecological basis as well as other localised impacts in regard to the three capitals. The research fieldwork observes social resilience primarily through an anthropological lens within fishing communities across a spectrum from resource dependency and vulnerability on commercial fishing activity, to reliance on fishing as heritage, or the ‘virtual’ fishing community. This perspective aims to highlight trust, efficacy and kinship as potentially important characteristics of social resilience trajectories within fishing communities influenced by both internal and external drivers. An objective of the research is that of building social resilience typologies and coupled approaches to coping strategies that may have value both across the studied Cornish communities and into a wider community usage.

Keywords: Adaptability, Common pool resources, Disturbance, Path dependency, Power, Resilience, Self organisation, Shared learning, Social capital, Social network, Stability, Sense of place, Trajectories, Transformation

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