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Eating, jigging or watching? Ocean heritage and sustainable development

A.L. Neilson & R. Gabriel & A.M. Arroz, & E. Mendonça
University of the Azores, Portugal.

ABSTRACT: This work emerges from the perspective that research has implications which can serve or hinder environmental and social justice within sustainable development. Who we listen to and how we listen are important to what narratives are highlighted through research. This study involves local residents as well as international tourists and people in the marine tourism industry and marine sciences in the Azores, Portugal in comparison with Newfoundland, Canada. The researchers dance between stepping out of the way in order to make room for voices and perspectives often ignored or silenced in educational and tourism stories of whales and the ocean, and stepping in to help uncover otherwise hidden forces of imperialism, and other oppressions. This study about perceptions of the ocean explores whose expression of heritage provides the driving force for commerce, business, leisure and politics. It also looks at the dynamic nature of heritage as it responds to changes in work, play and politics. Using various interview techniques including photo elicitation and focus groups, we gather rich narratives of visiting, living near and working in the sea. Multiple frames of lived experiences, ethics and politics support the narratives told. Some frames support the perceptions of diverse groups of people, while others privilege the stories of only a few. This study explores local power dynamics and global forces by asking about the ways in which people have learned about the ocean as well as how people decide what is relevant to their learning and what is important to sustain.

1. INTRODUCTION

Jigging - A method of dropping a lure into the water over a fishing site and moving it - "jigging it" - up and down to attract fish or squid. In Newfoundland people jig for cod, a fish commonly preserved in salt and known in Portugal as Bacalhau said to have close to a thousand different ways to be prepared as a stable and important cuisine for special occasions.

The "question, eating, jigging or watching?" makes reference to the often ignored antagonism between various social classes over the concept of sustainability. Linking this highly contested term with the concept of heritage builds an even greater mire of complexity and social tension. Who decides what it is that society is trying to sustain? The tourist who pays 25 Euros for grilled Boca Negro or the fisher who was paid less than 50 cents per kilo for catching that fish? Whose story of the ocean takes priority? The young biologist guide who grew up in the interior of northern Europe who now leads whale watching trips or the former whaler, a son of three generations of fishers and whalers from the islands? This issue of clashes of perspectives is important because there is inequality between the holders of these perspectives based on actual physical experiences (environmental justice) and the power each possesses to construct the official narratives of natural and cultural heritage of the ocean from which we learn during formal (school based) and informal education processes (media, tourism, community).

Environmental justice is related to exploring how some people are disproportionately harmed by environmental hazards while others receive unjust proportions of environmental benefits; these disproportions are based on intersections of race, class, and gender amongst other social constructions (Bullard, 1994; Shiva, 1994). The varying relationships with the environment affect individuals and cultures and hence influence how the environment is perceived by different people. When formal education and informal learning draw only from a limited scope of perspectives, environmental injustice is continued through the silencing of the voices which might otherwise call for an end to the injustices. Environmental justice, perception and education are therefore interrelated.

Perceptions are influenced by gendered, raced and classed stories on what is observed as nature (Baldwin, 2004). In order to disrupt these forces and hear a wider range of perspectives, research needs to focus on multiple ways of communicating (Barrett, 2007); to actively support local knowledges (Cruikshank, 2005); and be self reflective about the assumptions held by the researchers themselves (Neilson, 2008). Deconstruction of knowledge sources and discourses are important for ensuring environmental justice within informal education. Who we listen to and how we listen are important to what narratives inform learning. Indigenous scholars (Battiste, 2005; Smith, 1999) challenge us to acknowledge multiple privileges and to avoid reproducing these through education and research.

Neves-Graça (2002) in her work exploring the transition from whale hunting to whale watching in the Azores, found that the perspectives of former whalers was similar to that of deep ecologists, that whalers had provided much expertise to scientific researchers, but that the expertise of whalers was largely ignored and not considered relevant for tourism, conservation or education.

Rodrigues (2007) found that children from the Azores had complex understandings of the environment, however, the sea and marine life were rarely mentioned in any of the images, stories and discussions with which the children and researcher engaged. Kindergarten teachers of the Azores rarely included local content on their lessons; many of these teachers felt they needed more information concerning the sea (Pacheco, 2008). Howard's (2007) work with children from Newfoundland shone light on the great pain caused by the denial of how deeply immersed they are in the sea and the damage of the collapse of the fisheries ecosystem and economy. These studies suggest that although school children seem to have little knowledge of marine life near their shores, they have complex, sometimes contradictory and often times deliberately hidden understandings of connections with their marine home.

2. RESEARCH FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The researchers dance between stepping out of the way in order to make room for voices and perspectives often ignored or silenced in educational and tourism stories of whales and the ocean, and stepping in to help uncover otherwise hidden forces of imperialism, and other oppressions.

This study explores whose perspectives provide the driving force for environmental education. It seeks to explore and document how Azoreans as well as tourists and people in the marine tourism industry and sciences understand and how they learn about the sea. It seeks to understand the educational aspects of whale watching and other marine tourism on both tourists and Azoreans, and, to compare the perspectives of the sea and tourism held by the people in the Azores, Portugal with the perspectives of people in Newfoundland, Canada. This project takes an ethnographical and cross-cultural approach. The research team includes Portuguese citizens, one Azorean-born and two who have lived and taught in the islands for over 20 years and a Canadian who has lived in the Azores for 2 years. We began by identifying current and past work and pastimes located on or related to the sea. We contacted sailing clubs, whale boat teams, organizations such as the association of wives of fishers and fleet owners, museums and marine tourism operators on multiple islands in order to find key informants as well as gather photo images.

We used photo elicitation and focus groups to overcome potential barriers of language and other social differences between the participants and the researchers (Doyle, 2001). We spoke to groups explaining our interest in their stories and experiences related to the sea. We offered a selection of photos to explore and to start conversations between individuals within focus groups. Photos allow participants to engage with complexity and changing meanings (Beilin, 2005). They trigger memories, nuances and ambiguity, challenge as well as build rapport with participants and help avoid researcher misinterpretation (Hurworth, 2003). In addition to the primary research team, two other Azoreans helped facilitate some interviews. The primary data includes over 25 hours of interviews with people associated with fishing and past whaling, interviews with tourists; and 10 hours of interviews from whale watching tour operators and museum personnel, marine biologists, sailors and kayakers. A comparison with Newfoundland includes fishers from rural communities active in “traditional” fishing. Narrative analysis was based on participants defining the sea according to their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

This paper explores a research process that attempts to disrupt power inequities that act within the research process and similarly are manifest within the processes in which the ocean is socially constructed. In other words, we explore how researchers can serve environmental justice while investigating how injustices are manifest in knowledge construction. An important part of this approach is the recognition of the overlapping roles of research and education and the deliberate integration of both. In reporting on the preliminary analysis of the interviews, we offer the reader an opportunity to consider our assumptions about knowledge and how deliberately stepping off the podium of “expert” makes room for broader perspectives and potentially serves environmental justice.

3. PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS

We have begun to identify trends through individual review of the interviews and are exploring our first thoughts about what we think are some of the underlying assumptions of the stories told. These ideas are provoking further questions to ask of the interviews and of how each researcher is reading or “hearing” these stories. We offer a spiralling tale: our thoughts about the interviews, our thoughts about our thoughts, which lead to further reflections about the interviews.

3.1 *Glimpses of the sea*

When given a selection of photos from various locations in their immediate area or within the region (another Azorean island, or another part of the Avalon Peninsula in Newfoundland), fishers and their families spoke in great detail about their lives. When asked directly what the sea means to them, they offered short phrases like “it is my life”, or “I love the sea” and then discussed procedures and routines of working on or near the ocean. They told stories of being out on the sea, about having to leave school to fish with their families, about hiding in the boats so that they could go fishing because as girls, they were not supposed to go. They mentioned the hunger they felt when fishing was so bad that there was little food and the joy they felt when celebrating the bounty of the sea. Some spoke about leaving the islands to live in America but continually longing for the sea until they returned to the islands. Others spoke about yet another neighbour giving up fishing to work in the oil sands in Alberta. Statements about the sea being their “livelihood” and that it was neither good nor bad, but that the weather could make the sea dangerous, punctuated their narratives. When asked about experiencing dangerous situations, fishers told us that they did not like to talk about these and even when recounted years after leaving the sea, fishers and their wives mentioned the tension they felt in recounting any such stories. Some Newfoundland fishers told us that good fishers do not talk much about their time on the sea and that we should be weary of believing the loud storyteller. Some Azoreans also warned us about believing the ones who eagerly told exciting tales of hunting the sperm whale.

Many people spoke about the political aspects of fishing, of the quota systems and the other changing regulations that they needed to follow. They talked about feeling ignored and undervalued. They told stories about near misses with oil tankers that speed through narrow island filled bays. They worried about the consequences of a spill. Some told us stories of being sea sick every time they went out but that they still loved the sea and their work. One woman told us that she was sometimes nervous of being out in rough weather, but once she started jigging cod, she stopped noticing the weather. Her husband laughed when he told us that he sometimes thought that he would have to cut her line when he wanted to bring the boat in out of the developing storm because she wanted to jig “just one more fish”.

Artisanal whaling and fishing in the Azores like traditional fishing in outport Newfoundland involves the entire family and is integrated into many levels of society. Women and children, if they do not go out on the ocean, do much important preparations such as baiting the gamelas (square wooden tubs filled with hooks on long fishing lines, Azores), salting the fish (Newfoundland), getting food ready when a whale was spotted (Azores) or when the weather was good to go out for the day (Newfoundland). Women told stories of fierce waves destroying houses built near shore; they talked about pigs and chickens being swept out to sea by storms and about people being lost in the sea when collecting limpets from the rocks.

All our interviews with tourists and tour operators used the same photos that were used when we interviewed locals from senior centres (Casa do Povos), fishing communities and former whalers. As we had expected, tourists having just returned from whale watching trips spoke about the animals they had just seen and often about feeling connected to the whales. They spoke about the ocean being “calming” and being a fun and beautiful place that they associated with holidays. They described the sea as free of direct human influence and a kind of wilderness. Some also spoke about the power and potential danger of the sea but few had any experience being in or around the sea during storms. Some spoke about their need to be near or be able to see the ocean regularly. Few of the tourists or tour operators spoke much about other people or social structures when describing how they felt about the sea.

When tourists scanned through the photos which included people engaged in various preparations for fishing on land, fishing from the shore and from boats, their limited comments about fishing included vague statements about the existence of fishers or questions about whether there was much fishing in the Azores. During one such interview, the tourists were sitting overlooking the wharf in Horta and told the interviewer that they had not been eating fish during their stay in the Azores because they were concerned about large fishing trawlers. They were surprised to hear that the fishing industry is based on artisanal methods and is considered sustainable. The researcher suggested that they could walk over to the fishing boats to see the

catch as well as pick up a brochure about the sustainability of the Azorean fishery that she had seen in a pile on one of the whale watch tour operator's kiosk.

Because many of the tourist interviews were short, we also explored some of the messages tourists were given. A simple analysis of images used in tourism brochures of the Azores showed that humans were rarely in photos (40 out of 163, 24.5% photos had humans in "destinazores.com," 96 pp.; 29 out of 145, 20% photos has humans in "Azores the Living Nature Guide, 208 pages; 1 out of 37, 2.7% photos has humans in "Guide for Macronesia Treasures," 90 pages). The photos with people were mainly tourists or locals during festivals and no photos included fishers or whalers.

3.2 The power of visions

The photo analysis mirrors Fife's (2006) examination of how souvenir and tourism materials in Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland make local rural peoples disappear. Horta, Faial, one of the Azorean islands in the Channel, has a busy marina well known for the thousands of beautiful paintings along the walls and walkways on the wharf done by passing sailors. There is a concentration of activity on and around the wharf including rows of water tourism operators (whale watching, scuba diving, sailing, deep sea fishing), the sailing club, dry dock for small boats and the terminal for the passenger ferry which runs between the islands. The scene is immensely picturesque and tourists are welcome to explore fully. Within a few hundred metres of the ferry landing, forming the end of the protected harbour is the area where the fishing boats are moored and where they bring in their daily catch. The boats vary in size, but some are very small and all are comparable in size to the sailing boats and vessels used for tourism activities. The area is clearly visible and has open access to cars and pedestrians with no entrance gates or signs of restricted access. The fish buyers are located in the buildings immediately adjacent as is the Department of Oceanography and Fisheries (DOP) of the University of the Azores and the people undertaking the various regulatory processes of the fishing industry. In other words, there were no physical barriers to keep the tourists away from the fishing activities. The fishers and the activity of fishing however, are largely invisible to the tourists because the tourist's stories did not include fishers.

Additionally, these stories absent of fishers are hard to dispel if this is our initial understanding of the world. As humans develop, we come to know the world initially by experiencing it as real and we construct knowledge gained through later experiences in ways that complement our original knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). By choosing or creating concepts of reality that match our existing concepts, "cumulative continuity" and choosing social interactions with people who share the same concepts, "interactive continuity", we reinforce our world or "environment" as the truth (Fraser, 2001). Some stories block other stories and create a world in which only some stories can be told. Language, culture and type of knowledge play important roles in this process as well. Our research team has not started these discussions yet, but we will be specifically exploring our analysis accordingly since our research team comes from different language and cultural backgrounds similar to the differences between locals and foreign tourists and tour operators.

Scientific information is conceptualized as being context free - if deemed "true", is true regardless of who speaks the knowledge. This type of knowledge can be expressed with confidence by anyone and therefore usually "out-competes" more ambiguous stories. For instance, the feeding habits of a particular whale may take a stronger position in knowledge construction processes about the sea than the knowledge of a fisher who accepts that the ocean is uncontrollable and largely unknowable. Often some knowledge out-competes others because the knowledge is not recognized as science if it comes from a source other than scientists. Neves-Graça (2006) found that some famous whale biologists owed much of their knowledge to whalers and the whaling industry, yet the knowledge of whalers was not sought when regulations for whale watching were developed in the Azores.

4. CONCLUSIONS OR COLLUSIONS

Our research seeks to privilege perspectives not regularly heard, maintain the integrity of the spirit in which the narratives were shared and recognize the limits to our ability and authority to make meaning from these stories. We deliberately articulate this seemingly obvious point because one of the premises driving our research is the existence of unsubstantiated claims about fishers and whalers, whose voices are not heard widely or often. In this study we heard statements by some tourists, tour operators, marine biologists as well as fishers about “fishers in general” which appear to us to be unsubstantiated. Lack of substantiation however, does not prevent the creation and continuation of normative discourses and strong narratives. This paper is about who speaks about what and what and who is included in normative narratives and which are excluded. We focus on the implications of these claims, and the implications of whose claims, substantiated or otherwise get heard, rather than evaluating the “truth” of these claims. Maurstad (2002) in discussing her work with cod fishers in Norway outlines the ethical problems with researching and publishing the local knowledge she uncovers. These dilemmas arise from the value of the specific knowledge and the implications of sharing this knowledge on the fishers’ ability to maintain their livelihood.

We thought about the implications of our analysis of interviews when we noticed distinct gender roles in the fisheries in both Newfoundland and the Azores. Researchers have played important roles uncovering and therefore potentially disrupting gender oppressions in many situations, and social dynamics within fishing communities no doubt have been or can be oppressive for women (c.f. Grzetic, 2004). However, we heard stories of working partnerships between husbands and wives on fishing enterprises as well as women and men speaking with pride about each others’ roles. Many of the same researchers who explored oppression also uncovered strengths and resilience within women’s work in fisheries. Reporting these stories is an important part of transformative research as this allows for a more complex social construction of fishers and fishing communities, beyond the stereotyped narratives of poverty and oppressed women. Why would a tour operator want to talk about fishing communities if they only knew these stories? Why would a teacher bring a fisher to speak to students?

In exploring the differences between different knowledges, we must look also for parallels across knowledges. Neves-Graça (2006) found such parallels between former whalers, deep ecologists, and dissident whale watching companies and saw how they supported and engaged one another across differences. In this study, we have asked people to theorize their own experiences including what they think others need to know about their perspectives. As well, we have found people who are particularly helpful as “translators” who also can bridge disparate worlds of fishers, marine biologists and tourists as they live in and understand more than one of these worlds and are skilled communicators in writing and artistic expression.

We also recognize that people are more than mere “tourists”. Tourists have complex relationships with other places and a capability to understand complex and ambiguous situations and multiple perspectives, but the discourse and normative tourism experience severely limit their ability to do so. Tourism can actively seek to bridge differences and privilege the local people by facilitating meetings between tourists and locals. The official code of safety and ethics for walking trails in the Azores (<http://www.trails-azores.com/etica.php>) published by the regional government’s department of tourism in the Azores, GATNER, invites walkers to consider the existing livelihoods of locals by asking them to close gates to keep domestic animals in their pastures and suggests they greet local people as they walk the trails that cross their lands. The ecomuseum of São Jorge Island (<http://ecomuseu-azores.org/saojorge/>) is a useful example from the Azores in which heritage and knowledge within procedural routine and embodied practice (Knudsen, 2009) is highlighted for visitors. Artefacts are kept within homes rather than separate museum buildings and locals share their oral histories with visitors. Oral histories and local knowledge have shown to give specific information that is missing from conventional scientific analysis of fishery issues (Ames, Watson & Wilson, 2000). This information can benefit tourists as well as Azoreans who are not involved in the fisheries.

We end this exploration of our in-the-midst research analysis with a suggestion for greater blurring of the research and education divide. One of the issues related to environmental justice for the Azorean and Newfoundland fishers and former whalers, is that the youth do not hear the stories of the sea or the perspectives of their elders. Instead of waiting for curriculum development which might reach schools two to three years after this research project is completed, we have created combined education and research activities. We have been sharing our interviews with youth, as well as facilitating meetings between fishers and youth so that they can read and hear local stories and perspectives directly from their communities. We are careful to share the stories and voices from the interviews but not present any interpretations of meaning. During these interactions, we have been asking for the youths' perspectives on the sea as well, and in this context, we can support dynamic and complex expressions and perspectives. By discussing the implications of knowledge construction around the sea, we also invite educators to reflect on whose perspectives they privilege in their classrooms (or whale watching lectures).

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