Absence and presence of social complexity in the marketization of sustainable tourism

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ABSTRACT

The EU strategy for rural development 2014–2020 proposes a focus on tourism as a solution to bring economic, environmental and social aspects of sustainable development together. Using the case of fishing tourism in Sweden, we discuss the marketization of sustainable development on a destination market. We focus on the discursive and practical tension between ambitions for development and maintenance. In a two-step analysis, we problematize the win–win consensus of sustainable tourism discourse in relation to different stakeholders’ competing uses of limited resources in practice. We show how stakeholders understand the stakes of sustainable tourism as either lost opportunities for development due to failed regulation of a natural resource, or as deteriorating social relations due to failed maintenance of socio-cultural values. We argue for the acknowledgement of social complexity in market theorizations in order to transfer sustainable tourism from the agenda of business potential and traditional marketing to the domain of participatory politics.

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1. A market theorization of sustainable development

Among the ecological, economic and social dimensions of sustainability set out by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), sustainable development research and environmental policy have so far mostly focused on bio-physical and economic aspects. At the same time, environmental policies have been shown to fix environmental issues in a tight association with economic modes of valuation (Alexander, 2005; Fourcade, 2011; Hultman and Corvellec, 2012; Säwe and Hultman, 2013a). One result is that sustainable development has become a subject for marketization (Redclift, 2005). Consequently, the exposure of sustainable development to markets has been theorized as an aspect of neoliberalization manifested as the enclosure of natural resources and the privatization of ecosystem services (Banerjee, 2003; Fairhead et al., 2012; Heynen and Robbins, 2005; Mansfield, 2004).

At the same time, social complexity tends to become ignored in sustainability research (Fleetwood, 2007; Missimer et al., 2010). Peñaloza and Venkatesh (2006), discussing how to better understand processes of marketization, suggested that markets should be analysed as social constructions as a means of including societal, social, cultural and environmental values in market theorizations. By acknowledging a plurality of values, marketization research would join a political change agenda by understanding markets as ‘a dynamic, complex co-creation in which multiple actors have influence [but where] economic wealth alone should not determine market valuation because it privileges the interests of some actors over others and advances the economic domain over that of social domains’ (Peñaloza and Mish, 2011, p. 26). Accordingly, there are strong arguments to consider in more detail how the different aspects of sustainability are discursively and practically articulated in relation to each other. In line with the acknowledgement of the social character of markets we therefore put particular emphasis on: ‘the importance of ecosystem constraints and societal norms, as they are interpreted and employed by actors, as tools in advancing market and policy changes related to sustainability’ (Peñaloza and Mish, 2011, p. 26). Markets are imagined and understood differently by different actors, and this implies a need to pay attention to social complexity.

Our ambition is to investigate sustainable tourism through a critical analysis of the absence and presence of social complexity in discourse and practice (Bramwell and Bernard, 2014). We illustrate logics, rationales, conflicts and tensions evoked by the different aspects of sustainability in the case of fishing tourism. The
particular sustainable development market we study is a geographical one – a market of destinations. By a relational approach, rhetorically acknowledged by the European union as important (EC, 2005, 2011a), we intend to address a ‘lack of standing for non-positivistic environmental studies’ (Hall, 2013, p. 12). In tourism research, a number of actor-network theory studies have identified this lack and dealt with it by taking a symmetrical approach to human and non-human actants (Franklin, 2004; Gren and Huijben, 2012; Johannesson, 2005; Paget et al., 2010; Rodger et al., 2009; van der Duim, 2007; van der Duim et al., 2013). Drawing upon this ‘material turn’ in the social sciences with specific reference to environmental issues (cf. Braun, 2006) allows for a focus on ethical aspects of the conditions and effects of tourism. Our argument in this article has the same aim. However, the inclusive and relational approach we adopt has as an explicit empirical focus on social complexity to discuss sustainability and tourism. Hereby, we respond to a call made almost 40 years ago to inclusive and relational approach we adopt has as an explicit empiri

2. The introduction of social complexity to the market of sustainable tourism

Presently, the EU strategy for rural development 2014–2020 proposes non-agricultural activities to realize goals of social inclusion and territorial justice (EC, 2010, 2013; McDonagh, 2012). In this change process, there is an emerging focus on tourism as a solution to bring the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development together (EC, 2011b). A result of tourism becoming a preferred development path is that policy discourse prioritizes values such as attractiveness, quality and social capital (Governmental Offices of Sweden, 2010; Swedish Board of Agriculture, 2012). This raises issues of how such intangible values are defined and measured. How are socio-cultural characteristics and practices valued, developed and maintained? According to what logics are resources valued? Who values what? What are the various reasons for different stakeholders to maintain and develop socio-cultural practices? What becomes represented as sustainable in sustainable tourism?

As indicated by these questions, the very concept of ‘sustainable tourism’ is in itself problematic. We argue that one way to critically unpack sustainable tourism can be found in the transition from strategy to practice. Hägerstrand (2009, p. 27, our translation) describes this transition as a crucial moment:

The material world within reach for humans is not fundamentally changed through words but through handling. Word-makers might have the power, but in order for that which is decided to become more than vibrations in the air, somebody, somebodies or everybody must engage in the substance of the material world.

From the perspective of government initiatives and strategies, tourism is driven by a commercial logic. The objective is to displace consumption between continents, countries or regions as a means of ‘exporting’ place-bound resources, or between urban and rural areas to facilitate territorial justice. On all scales except the truly global, tourism strategy can be regarded as a zero-sum game. Destinations compete with each other, and tourists are the limited resource over which they compete. The means used to catch tourists are often labelled ‘locality’, ‘uniqueness’ and ‘authenticity’—pure marketing devices in so far as every actual place can be said to be local, unique and authentic. Tourism marketing and tourism strategy are top-down constructions, by necessity setting real-life complexity aside in order to be effective. This might be problematic: perhaps not for tourists but for local inhabitants. It threatens to ignore the social aspects of sustainable tourism, without which sustainable tourism itself becomes a pure marketing device.

The objects being commodified in tourism are often traditions, place-specific assets and landscape features (George et al., 2009; Hultman and Hall, 2012). However, these resources are impossible to frame within a traditional economic valuation paradigm through demand and supply models (Fourcade, 2011). But by proposing tourism as a priority for rural development—considering its commercial rationale—economic growth is given precedence and becomes the defining parameter of sustainable development. Social sustainability is assumed to result from monetary input to rural communities through displaced consumption. In a discursive sense, welfare and territorial justice follow from the reduction of the complexities of social reality.

An alternative mode of understanding sustainability can be gained from employing a bottom-up perspective. This is a way of framing sustainability objectives ‘so that they seem more consistent with that which people value and would like to preserve … in order to explore how residents interpret and incorporate concerns about the places in which they live and the world around them.’ (Vallance et al., 2011, p. 346). We will demonstrate how sustainability is associated with different values by a stakeholder approach to tourism development. We have chosen a geographically delimited coastal fishery and two stakeholder groups—anglers and subsistence fishers—as an illustrative case.

Coastal fisheries management in EU policy combines the issues of an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable rural development, natural resource management and funding for development projects through stakeholder participation. This combination forms the rationale for our choice of a case, together with the fact that fishing tourism is an area identified by the national government as a crucial growth sector in Swedish tourism, conditional upon the sustainable exploitation of a common good. According to professional fishers, anglers and subsistence fishers, sustainable fishing relies upon place-bound knowledge and practical experience—competences that from their own respective perspectives are being systematically ignored by authorities (Hind, 2014; Säwe and Hultman, 2012, 2013b). Hägerstrand (2009, p. 74, our translation) expressed this problem in a straightforward manner:

Catching and hunting demand a perception about places and routes of the prey, but such knowledge is not generated from a direct omnipresent gaze but demands accumulated experiences over a longer period of time.

In this context of coastal fisheries, we interpret ‘a direct omnipresent gaze’—although, or perhaps because, being an abstract concept—as the ideal and ambition for fisheries bureaucracy relying on modelling sciences such as biology and economics. This ideal becomes articulated in the formation of policy discourse (word-making) (Säwe and Hultman, 2013a). In contrast, we equal ‘accumulated experiences over a longer period of time’ with
fisheries practices (handling) not readily formalized in policy. In the example of fishing tourism, as would be the case in most if not all corresponding examples, we can understand sustainable tourism as both discourse and practice embedded in a dynamic between development and maintenance.

3. Methods and material

In order to understand how tourism has been rhetorically established as a means for sustainable rural development, we first outline the discursive meaning of sustainable tourism as it is represented in four institutional settings that together govern global, EU and Swedish rural policy. Here we ask the question how policy both defines problems and solutions (Bacchi, 2000). Consequently, we understand ‘A “policy” [as] a set of shifting, diverse, and contradictory responses to a spectrum of political interests’ (Edelmann, 1988, p. 16). In this, we simultaneously ‘Face the challenges of relevance in negotiating the tenuous bonds between theory and practice in dealing with major social issues such as [the environment:]’ (Penaloza and Venkatesh, 2006, p. 305). By treating policy as discourse, we wish to ‘draw attention to the meaning making which goes on in legal and policy debates’ (Bacchi, 2000, p. 46), thereby acknowledging the potential for policy to act as a tool for change and participation. In tourism studies, the rhetorical power of strategies has likewise been made explicit by Kietävänäen and Tuulentie (2013, p. 847): “strategies must be considered as a persuasive text, showing things from a certain viewpoint, although they are expected to contemplate all possible dimensions”.

In 2013, the Swedish Board of Agriculture and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management released the Swedish national strategy for fishing tourism, Swedish Recreational Fishing and Fishing Tourism 2020 (this document will hereafter be referred to in the text as The Fishing Strategy, TFS). The aim of TFS is to double the economic turn-over from fishing tourism between 2014 and 2020. To make sense of this document from a sustainability perspective, we have conducted a multi-site analysis of, first, its institutional embeddedness and discursive framing, and, second, its interpretation by involved stakeholders.

The discursive context was investigated through document analyses of texts from four of the institutional settings that govern sustainable tourism discourse in Sweden: the UN Environment Programme and World Tourist Organization guide to sustainable tourism (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005), The EU agenda for sustainable and competitive tourism (EC, 2007), the Swedish national strategy for tourism growth (Swedish Tourism Ltd, 2010), and TFS (the Swedish Board of Agriculture and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, 2013). We did a manual coding of this material to trace how sustainable tourism has been rhetorically established in international and national settings. The purpose was to outline a multi-scalar sustainability discourse by a qualitative content analysis of the documents. We paid particular attention to the rhetorical expression of sustainable tourism as either a win–win proposition or as a zero-sum game.

The practical context was investigated through a qualitative, self-completion, postal questionnaire where anglers and subsistence fishers were invited to reflect over issues raised in TFS and different fishing practices and fisheries management logistics. Questionnaires allowed us to capture the voices of a large number of respondents during a short time span. All respondents were local inhabitants of the same geographical area in southern Sweden. They received the questionnaire in their potential role as hosts, not guests, at a destination.

TFS was formulated in dialogue with anglers and subsistence fishers, and their respective fisheries are represented as central for the operationalization of the strategy. The term ‘recreational fishing’ in the title includes both angling and subsistence fishing: ‘Recreational fishing can be separated into angling and subsistence fishing depending on the gear used and the motive for fishing.’ (TFS, p. 9). Subsistence fishers fish with stationary nets for their own consumption on a day-to-day basis. Angling is a recreational and experiential activity where anglers use hand-held rods (Fig. 1).

This distinction between fishing practices according to gear would turn out to be crucial and structure large parts of the argumentation of the two groups. However, The Board of Agriculture and the Agency for Marine and Water Management include both anglers and subsistence fishers under ‘recreational fishing’. Subsistence fishers object to this since—according to themselves—this ignores the particular traditions and knowledges associated with subsistence fisheries.

Both anglers and subsistence fishers are locally organized. We asked the chairmen of both organizations to suggest respondents whom we then contacted directly. The motive for this strategic sampling was to collect data from the most engaged and knowledgeable members of each group. The questionnaire consisted of six open questions and a concluding open field for comments and reflections. We collected 20 answered questionnaires from each group. We processed the data in four steps. The first step was a detailed reading where each question was manually transferred to a table in which all answers were collected verbatim. This allowed us to get an initial understanding of how individual respondents as well as the two categories collectively argued in relation to the fish resource, different fisheries, tourism and aspects of sustainability. Step two was a question-by-question summary of the main features in the answers from the two groups. This acted as an orientation of how subsistence fishers and anglers respectively related to their own fishery, other fisheries, the national strategy for fishing tourism and rural sustainability.

To initiate step three we asked ourselves how the material could be animated differently. In order to be able to pose new questions to the material we left the design and organization of the questionnaire and instead filtered the material through five new question marks: Why?, How?, Where?, When? and Who?. The ordering of the material in this way aimed to show why subsistence fishers and anglers think something happens or has happened, how this happens or has happened, where it happens or has happened, who acts or has acted to affect this, and when something has happened or will happen. In the fourth and final step of processing the material, we manually coded it according to the dynamics that appeared when the answers from subsistence fishers and anglers were filtered through the five question marks and then put in relation to each other. In this way, we could unveil a rhetorical pattern that concerned the ontology of the fish resource, access to the resource and ethical issues associated with responsibility and freedom in the exploitation of the resource. All quotes from the questionnaire have been translated by the authors.

4. Sustainable tourism as a part of or apart from society

The discourse of sustainability is in several ways structured around perceptions of wellbeing, concerning both the environment and people. From the EU agenda for sustainable tourism (EC, 2007) it becomes clear that the logic behind perceptions about wellbeing is related to economic growth. In this sense, development and maintenance perspectives are not opposed to, but conditional upon, each other.

Finding the right balance between an autonomous development of the destinations and the protection of their environment on the one side and the development of a competitive economic activity on the other side may be challenging. The work of the
Tourism Sustainability Group however confirmed that more than any other economic activity tourism can develop synergies in close interaction with environment and society. That is because the development of tourist destinations is closely linked to their natural environment, cultural distinctiveness, social interaction, security and wellbeing of local populations. These characteristics make tourism the driving force for the conservation and development of the destinations – directly through raising awareness and income support to them, and indirectly by providing an economic justification for the provision of such support by others. (p. 2–3)

The goal of a balance between economy and environment structure this argument. Rhetorically, this balance is the result of synergies, not a zero-sum allocation of limited resources. In this way, the reasoning around economic versus social and environmental aspects of sustainability raises a concern about the ontology of the relation between tourism and society. EU policy clearly makes a distinction between destinations and their ‘natural environment’ and ‘cultural distinctiveness’. So, tourist destinations might not actually be their environment, but they are ‘closely linked’ to it. Tourism and destinations can thus be developed, while societies and communities can be maintained. A synergetic balance between economy and environment, then, secures that the potentially problematic dynamics between development and maintenance is de-problematized. Hereby, tourism becomes the discursive driver of a sustainable development.

This conclusion is verified by UNEP and UNWTO. But as we move to the global scale, the issue of managing growth lacks competitive aspects. Sustainable tourism is instead referred to in relation to the importance of assuming a holistic view:

Over-dependency of an economy and society on tourism should be avoided. A holistic approach is also about taking account of all impacts and relationships within the tourism sector itself, and considering how all public policies may affect or be affected by tourism. (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005:16)

The holistic approach is also identified in EC (2007), but, again, here with an emphasis on competitive advantages:

Creating the right balance between the welfare of tourists, the needs of the natural and cultural environment and the development and competitiveness of destinations and businesses requires an integrated and holistic policy approach where all stakeholders share the same objectives. (p. 3)

On the global scale on which the UN operates, tourism is not a zero-sum game; Earth is not competing with other planets as destinations. But when tourism agendas and strategies are downscaled to continents, countries, regions and communities, tourism has the potential to become a zero-sum game. A tourist in one destination might represent an economic loss to another destination. However, as the EU quote demonstrates, within a given destination sustainable tourism is represented as a win–win game. In a holistic policy approach all stakeholders should share objectives since they all stand to gain from tourism growth.

But this argument once again raises the issue of how tourism and society relate to each other. The EU agenda identifies three objectives of sustainable tourism: to care for tourists, to fulfil the needs of the environment, and to generate economic growth for commercial actors in the destination. But local inhabitants are invisible, unless included under the heading ‘all stakeholders’. Their needs remain unidentified. Communities are separated from tourism, communities and destinations are not the same entity, and tourism needs are prioritized.

Implicit in the EU sustainable tourism agenda is the construction of nature and sustainability as competitive advantages, helping businesses to fulfil their need of economic growth. In the zero-sum game of tourism, sustainability represents long-term revenues. Sustainability becomes a selling point and a locus for innovation. Consequently, moving to the national scale where competition between countries over the tourist resource sharpens, nature and sustainability are even more explicitly positioned as business opportunities (Swedish Tourism Ltd, p. 3, our translation):

But competition is fierce and many countries see the same possibilities to help themselves to a growing international tourism trade. If Sweden is to be competitive, this demands strategic focus, pro-active investments and constructive cooperation. We also need to include sustainability issues in this work in a much more systematic and integrative way.

Here, ecology has become a means for economy which should be systematically utilized. Further on in the Swedish national strategy for tourism growth, the social complexities of sustainable tourism have been reduced to innovation and economic growth. The premise in the sustainability discourse can even be understood as ‘sustainability equals satisfied customers’ (p. 27, our translation):

In the concept of sustainability, economic sustainability and business growth are included. This is principally impossible to attain without satisfied customers. Firms and destinations need to gain deeper insights of how sustainability work can result in new business deals.

When sustainability and economic growth have been discursively equalized, it is once again necessary to question if tourism is
an integral part of society or rather something that acts upon society. In this regard, the discourse of sustainable tourism is fluid. When analysing the documents from a global to a trans-national and finally to a national level, it appears that the holistic view of sustainability changes its conceptual meaning. In the UN context it is obvious that tourism is a social issue on the community level (p. 16):

Planning and development of tourism should not take place in isolation. Tourism should be considered as part of the sustainable development of communities, alongside other activities.

Moving to the EU, the discourse is more about how tourism can be understood as an economic activity with specific potential. The holistic approach is still present but now as a synergic force geared towards economic growth. In the discourse as it is articulated in the Swedish national strategy for tourism growth, there is an even sharper emphasis on sustainable tourism as something acting upon society in the form of potential for businesses, innovation and entrepreneurship. The holistic view now equates sustainable tourism with destination attractiveness. Sustainability turns into a brand, something sellable (p. 27, our translation):

Sweden is among the most environmentally friendly countries in the world, and according to The World Economic Forum the one country with the most favourable conditions for a sustainable development. ... This is a good starting point and a great business opportunity.

Here, the ‘domination of economic over social and environmental signification and valuation’ (Peñaloza and Mish, 2011, p. 25) characteristic of traditional marketing theory is explicit. Alternative valuation principles have become invisible. To see how this is operationalized, we turn to TFS. Here the discourse of sustainable tourism illustrates how social values are invested with economic potential. Fishing tourism is particularly important in rural areas, and by facilitating economic growth it results in territorial justice. The driving mechanism in the discourse can now be expressed as tourism as an activity that contributes to sustainable rural development (p. 7, our translation):

Many small businesses based on recreational fishing are rural where they create jobs, tax income and conditions for other businesses. Recreational fishing therefore contributes to regional development.

To be able to contribute is to be both an integral part of society and simultaneously acting upon it as an outside force. A contribution can be rejected – not letting tourism ruin the aim of maintaining socio-cultural values – or gradually integrated – allowing tourism to power the economic development of places in ‘a continual process of improvement’ (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005, p. 12). We can finally conclude that the fluidity of the discourse when it comes to the ontological status of sustainable tourism in relation to society is present from the global to the national. Despite the win–win rhetoric resulting from the business potential logic of sustainable tourism, the one common denominator in the discourse as it moves from the holism of the UN to the particularities of recreational fisheries is the acknowledgement of a zero-sum situation. In the final instance, it is a matter of competition over limited resources:

Its [sustainable tourism's] impact on other sectors, in terms of competing resource use ... should be considered.

(UNEP and UNWTO, 2005:16)

In other words, sustainable tourism contains conflicting interests around any given practice over any given resource – for example fish (TFS, p. 7, our translation):

Recreational fishing and fishing tourism often have the same interests but sometimes they compete over the same resource. In these cases, regulation of access in time and place for different fisheries must be considered.

This is as far as the discourse analysis goes in unfolding the meaning of sustainable tourism. To come further in understanding how sustainable tourism discourse and practice are played out as a dynamics between development and maintenance, we turn to the anglers and subsistence fishers themselves.

5. The necessity of tourism from different perspectives

The TFS was packaged and presented as a consensus document (cf. Kietäväinen and Tuulentie, 2013). Both anglers and subsistence fishers were given the opportunity to give voice to their concerns in relation to a doubled economic turn-over from fishing tourism between 2014 and 2020. The two groups agreed upon the importance and necessity of tourism for rural development. In this regard, the causal connection in the TFS between sustainability, tourism and rural development seemed unproblematic. But what happens when this consensus is unpicked with the help of the qualitative questionnaire?

The questionnaire was designed to tease out the rationales behind why the two categories of fishers could agree to the promotion of tourism as a means towards a sustainable development of coastal areas. The answers revealed that anglers and subsistence fishers respectively approach the means (development and maintenance) towards the same end (sustainable tourism) differently. Both groups compete over the same limited resources – fish, place and time – but they use different gear, and their fisheries are regulated differently.

5.1. Resource management versus place-making

Angler and subsistence fisher practices differ most explicitly in the gear used. Anglers catch one fish at a time and are bodily active during the fishing. Subsistence fishers place their nets, leave them and return some time later to harvest the catch. Anglers refer to subsistence fisher nets as ‘mass-catch gear’, something subsistence fishers strongly object to due to the negative connotations this expression carry. Instead, they prefer to use the term ‘passive gear’. This distinction between active and passive fishing emphasizing the fish resource and the place resource respectively – is reflected in the focus that the two groups regard as the central aspect of their respective fisheries (Fig. 2).

Anglers begin from the fish itself, and express their own fishery as a resource managing practice:

Fishing tourism is difficult as there is a lack of fish [here]. But if fish is thrown back into the water, as anglers usually do, then this [tourism] is good.

In several answers, anglers return to the practice of catching and then releasing the individual fish. Here, the fish is constructed as an active subject, interacting with the angler and creating the continuous potential for co-creation of value without exploiting the fish resource in a destructive way:

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A fish can be thrown back and be caught again, if it wants to. A net-caught fish does not have this possibility.

Anglers contrast their own ‘modern’ fishery to the ‘outdated’ fishery of subsistence fishers. When they describe their own practice, they stress how ‘Modern angling has developed an even more resource conserving approach where catch-and-release has become a permanent aspect’. Describing subsistence fisheries, anglers regard ‘subsistence fishers as an ancient remains that must be abolished’ and ‘subsistence fisheries [as] merely an unlicensed form of fishery that should be forbidden’.

From the perspective of the active practice of angling for individual fish, anglers thus draw upon ethical arguments in expressing the interaction between angler and fish. While subsistence fisheries are described as irresponsible, the tradition of angling:

- ensures a respect for nature and the prey. It hands down a spirit of sportsmanship.
- From this focus on the individual fish and the respectful relation between angler and fish, anglers then trace the path to development in time and space of the tourism industry:
  - angling naturally open up for a prolonged season for cabin rentals, bed-and-breakfast businesses and so on. [Our angling organization] has the greatest number of events during autumn and spring, that is, outside of the normal tourist season.

Subsistence fishers argue from a different viewpoint. Using passive gear that fish for an extended period of time without the fisher being present, subsistence fishers articulate a socio-spatial rationale in the understanding of tourism. The fish might be important in itself, but it is the-fish-in-context that attracts visitors. For the tourist, it cannot possibly:

- be very uplifting to arrive during winter to a half-asleep community with a fully-asleep harbour.

A repeated theme in the answers from subsistence fishers was therefore the importance of the harbour as a social arena for interaction between different stakeholders. The contextual practices of subsistence fisheries give life to places, resulting in touristic value. But notice the words ‘in earlier times’ in the quote above. From a subsistence fisher perspective, the social life of harbours is in the process of being regulated away. It is only the remaining but decimated subsistence fishery that can illustrate the potential of recreating the touristic value of harbours:

The harbour comes alive and attracts tourists. Nets are hung up and many hours of get-togethers and discussions attract people. And what happens now to the old folks with their fyke nets for eel – now when these are not allowed anymore?

The point made by subsistence fishers is that they, although being crucial for maintaining the social life of harbours and thereby destination attractiveness, are not getting any credit or encouragement for this work. They are not valued according to their role in realizing tourism strategies, either by authorities or anglers.

According to subsistence fishers, anglers – with their active but introvert fishing practices – do not themselves contribute to the social life of harbours or even to coastal communities in general:

Angling should have its place but it contributes little to the needs of local inhabitants. Anglers are little noticed in society!

The win–win situation described by sustainable tourism policies and strategies does not get any input from anglers, then, according to subsistence fishers. They do not contribute to the needs of local inhabitants, which is a central aspect of sustainability. In fact they are hardly even noticeable. They contribute to their own needs however, but this does not generate advantages for local economies:

In our community, anglers contribute very little. But I can understand that they think it’s significant for health and recreation. But economic gain for local businesses is not created.

Depending on whether emphasis is given to resource management or place-making, the result will be more or less opposing perceptions of how to best contribute and be useful in the context of tourism promotion.

5.2. Lost opportunities for development and failed maintenance

As the account of the answers so far demonstrates, anglers and subsistence fishers attach different values to the fish. The anglers adopt a natural resource-based logic, where the fish as such is the important attraction for tourists. The subsistence fishers, in contrast, adhere to a context-based logic, where the fish is represented as a social cement and a place-maker. This social and transformative ability of the fish is then what tourism and therefore rural sustainability result from.

Value for the two categories of fishers is the result of different processes and competences. In TFS, where both groups get the opportunity to express how they understand value creation with regard to fishing tourism, these differences become demonstrated through the use of words and concepts (Table 1).

Anglers express an instrumental approach where an aggregated economic scale is privileged and an implicit social order is upheld with the help of management and regulations. Subsistence fishers express a tacit approach, an implicit social order maintained through tradition and contextual knowledge about fish and fishing practices.
But with the help of the answers from the questionnaire, understandings of value and value-creating practices can also be turned inside-out. In addition to suggesting their own respective practices as facilitators of sustainable tourism, both anglers and subsistence fishers approach the issue from the perspective of failure: opportunities for development can be lost, and maintenance can be dysfunctional.

From the angler perspective, a sustainable development is conditional upon regulations. Having a resource-based focus, they object to the ‘mass-catching’ gear and practices of subsistence fishers. One angler respondent contrasts the purported attractiveness of the social life of harbours associated to ‘mass-catching’ gear with what s/he considers is the real nature of subsistence fishery:

Those who are involved in subsistence fisheries are mostly older gentlemen and their households are small. But sure, people think it looks cosy with the nets hanging to dry in the village harbour, and the harbour feels somehow alive. But it is the nets of death we’re talking about.

According to the angler logic, the passive fishing practices of subsistence fisheries bring death, not life, to coastal communities. The sustainable development of tourism becomes impossible if the fish resource is exploited to death. Fish are then not allowed to reach sizes that optimize their value for angler fisheries. This gear-centered argument activates the ethical issue of responsibility and freedom. Here, subsistence fishers also give input to the matter of life and death:

it happens all too often that anglers cut subsistence fishers’ nets and gear to pieces. And anglers usually tear apart the mouth of the fish before they throw it back. For these reasons you can hardly say that anglers contribute with anything, rather they destroy the fish.

The quotes paint a picture of controversy and different understandings of responsibility towards the fish resource as well as the place resource. For anglers, the need for strict regulations therefore becomes an absolute necessity for development:

Freedom is never freedom from something but freedom to something. I’m free to do this but not that. Rules must exist and humans must relate to them. This concerns the sea most of all where there seldom is anyone to control that the rules are obeyed. It is about freedom under responsibility. If you don’t follow the rules, you shouldn’t be allowed to continue fishing.

Anglers put specific emphasis on gears and practices when considering the conditions of tourism development: ‘If subsistence fishing with nets is stopped, we have great possibilities to attract fishing tourists from near and afar’, and ‘One must ensure that nets don’t deny fish access to the coast. In other words, it’s important to give both fish and fishers access to the coast.’ In this context, anglers become explicit on the need of strict regulations of access to the fish resource in time and space to attain sustainable coastal development. They imply that subsistence fishers and their ‘mass-catch’ gear systematically transgress regulations, for example by selling excess fish. Opportunities for development are thus lost when assumed interests for economic profit take precedence over sustainable resource management:

A sustainable coastal development means that everybody must respect laws and regulations. The punishment for violations should be hard. Your own economic profit should not have precedence over long-term considerations. It is important that subsistence fishers don’t catch more than they need.

Subsistence fishers counter this with reference to the inherent responsibility of their fishery, and refer to a temporal perspective that spans several generations:

The sea has been free for centuries in order for coastal people to fish as they wanted. If you want to fish you should of course assume responsibility for the fishery and not catch more than what can be re-generated.

But subsistence fishers also refer to the importance of complying with rules and regulations, but from a different direction. Here, regulations are problematized as too rigid or even detrimental for the maintenance of socio-cultural values. In the answers from this group it is repeatedly stated that the access to the fish resource for subsistence fishers has been continuously reduced over a period of time. The resulting failure to maintain the social life of harbours makes the idea of tourism and sustainable development pointless:

As the possibilities for subsistence fisheries have become limited, harbours are transformed to marinas with a completely different content, and this is a loss for all. The Board of Agriculture should work to help municipalities and others to stop this transformation and instead facilitate the development of subsistence fisheries in the harbours. Too limited possibilities for fishing decreases the interest to fish at all, and this won’t attract any tourists.

This illustrates an experienced paradox embedded in the communication from responsible authorities. TFS is articulated from the explicit aim of tourism growth as a result of increased possibilities for fishing, but the Swedish Board of Agriculture simultaneously decreases access to the fish for subsistence fishers by regulatory means. According to subsistence fishers, the resulting failure to maintain socio-cultural conditions necessary for sustainable tourism can be countered by a return to different historical circumstances. The solution is to ‘develop coastal fisheries to the way it was before with both professional fishers and subsistence fishers in every harbour.’

Subsistence fishers also argue that, regulations and prohibitions, compromise responsibility and deny them the possibility to assume responsibility and to organize encounters between locals and visitors over the fish. They argue that: ‘Tourists should for example be allowed to make fishing tours with subsistence fishers and also buy fresh fish from them.’ So while subsistence fishers regard deregulation of their own fishery as the most effective way to avoid the loss of socio-cultural values necessary for sustainable tourism, anglers propose increased regulation for fisheries other than angling to make tourism development possible. An angler focus on regulations can be contrasted to a subsistence fisher focus on relations.

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6. Concluding discussion

The two categories of fishers differed in three ways in relation to the fish. The first was how they understood the *ontology* of fish as either a natural resource or as a place-maker. The second was how they approached the issue of access to the fish resource expressed as a conflict between formal and social regulatory mechanisms in time and space. The third was how they regarded the *ethics* of the management of the fish resource in terms of freedom and responsibility. All three themes, however, address the question of the social role of fish, that is, what effects and consequences fishing knowledges and practices have for coastal communities.

By tracing TFS across spatial and institutional scales, we argued that the discourse of sustainable tourism stripped sustainability strategies of social complexity. Following the general rationale of tourism as displaced consumption, de-problematizing the complexities of social life is a necessary maneuver to invest destinations with competitive power. But this comes at a price. In accordance with the market theorization argument of Peñaloza and Mish (2011, p. 27):

> meanings appear to exhibit more value among some actors and domains as compared to others. These disjunctions of signification and valuation raise perplexing challenges among actors to maintain certain meanings to survive culturally, especially when these meanings are not validated in the economic domain.

We have animated social complexity by paying attention to how economy, environment and social issues interact. It has become obvious that the consensus concept of sustainable tourism is contested. Fig. 3 illustrates this by summarizing what the two stakeholder groups in the study consider to be at stake if opportunities for development are wasted or if the maintenance of socio-cultural values fails.

However contradictory the regulatory and relational logics might appear, they both aim towards a sustainable coastal development through displaced consumption. TFS represents this goal, but not the complexities that the goal stems from and is embedded in. The rhetorical co-creation efforts between fisheries practitioners and authorities are not realized in practice. Through our empirical demonstration, competing resource use contained within the economic growth area of sustainable fishing tourism emerges as a choice between individual fish of a size that generates local economies, or living harbours that sustain coastal communities. According to the respondents this is not primarily a win–win situation, rather a zero-sum game. The resource over which anglers and subsistence fishers compete is fish, but also place and time. We have shown how this is an issue of regulation and access, and how it is contested as word-making (discourse) is confronted with handling (practice). In TFS, value-creating potential rests upon a generalized approach to time and place; it contains no problematization of the relation between development and maintenance.

In contrast to the black-boxing of social complexity performed in TFS, the empirical data in our study shows that situating the value-creation potential of fishing on an individual level. It is individual anglers displacing their consumption that are crucial for tourism and development. They focus on how angling generates economies and how local communities can earn incomes from an accumulated mass of visiting anglers. Subsistence fishers, on the other hand, stress the collective nature of the value that can be extracted from fish and fishing practices. They argue from the necessity of inheriting traditions and possessing place-bound knowledge, regarding fish as means to living communities and, as a result, tourists.

The regulatory logic of anglers versus the relational logic of subsistence fishers is an example of how the future practices of sustainability — instead of falling back on de-complexified strategies derived from marketing — can gain from acknowledging the relational and contradictory dynamics between the different aspects of sustainability. There can be no sustainability in practice without a discursive acknowledgement of social complexity. We have shown how sustainable tourism problematizes the relation between the concepts of maintenance and development. Both concepts are framed by a marketization discourse. Depending on how different stakeholders relate to this relationship, different answers about what to maintain, what to manage and what to invest in will emerge.

We would argue that such a discussion should begin with a transfer of sustainable tourism from the agenda of business potential and traditional marketing to the domain of participatory politics and co-creation of values. This would imply reflections over the location of ‘the bottom’ in bottom-up approaches to planning, strategy making and funding for sustainable tourism projects. To achieve this, strategy articulations need to be grounded in analyses of how all stakeholders relate to natural resources instead of in the prioritization of an economic logic.

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