

LOKAL STRATEGIES FOR MOBILISATION,
POSITIONING AND ENHANCEMENT.
THE SURVIVAL OF THE COASTAL COMMUNITY OF
RØST IN RELATION TO THE COMMON FISHERIES
RESOURCES.

IASCP 5TH WORLD CONFERENCE
REINVENTING THE COMMONS
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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

It's a great pleasure and honour to have you as our guests at Røst. I hope you will feel comfortable and enjoy your stay here.

Historically and up to now nature - our common resources - has given life to the community of Røst. From the beginning people living close to nature and natural resources have been allowed to harvest - and they mostly harvested in a sustainable way.

As to the fisheries the small coastal fleet - waiting for the fish to come close to the shore - is characteristic for Røst. Nature itself made the regulations through climate and availability, thus resulting in a sustainable catch.

In 1989 when the ecological crisis was a fact a strict quota system was imposed. Each vessel had its fixed quota that could not be overfished. The reduction in the cod quantity varied from 50 - 80 % per vessel. This implied a dramatic fall in income. People were shocked. Everybody feared bankruptcy. We had to do something to keep up the spirit, to create a reason to stay.

A committee chosen by the people consisting of fishermen, producers/exporters, fishermen's wives, workers and representatives from the municipality took care of the problems of both individuals and the society. For two months meetings dealing with anger, frustrations and constructive solutions were held every day. The committee was using media including the local radiostation very actively and clearly appeared as the spokesman of the population. As the leader of the fishermen's union put it: "We'll never move!" This seemed to be understood as a threat by central authorities: "Shan't we get rid of them?"

The activity strengthened our minds, made us stick together, be one and feel united and strong. This became very important for the growth in population, building of houses, kindergardens, home for the sick and old, buying boats with quotas, increasing the export and so on. And we reached some of our aims as to the future regulations.

To us central authorities are a greater challenge than nature itself. The system being introduced in December 1989 linked fishing rights to the boat and its owner. Ordinary fishermen had no rights and were not allowed to fish unless he/she was hired as a crew-member. This system led to a privatization of common resources and common riches. Living, swimming, not caught fish could be sold together with a boat. A change of principle was launched. The new regulation system had the following effects:

- no new fishing boats were built because of the small quotas
- almost impossible for young people to enter the trade - being a fisherman
- quotas could be purchased
- an extensive black market developed - fishermen were giving away the common resources which were not recorded
- making price problems on the world market for every producer/exporter buying and selling legally
- neighbours looking very closely at each other - is he a criminal? - or does he know that I am?
- a loss of respect for the system
- not taking care of traditions, excitement and competition - who is the best?
- a fisherman became a worker - wages were almost fixed - hard work didn't pay any longer.

Growth during hard times.

Through the local mobilisation one main objective appeared: We will never give in ! We'll show those bastards ! They shan't be able to destroy us and our local community.

- The municipality spent quite some millions on infrastructural matters like housing, children, care for the old and sick, making a better harbour, secure the water supplies, encouraging people to buy fishing boats and increase the production of fish products. We are also making some money from keeping sheep.
- We have had a 12 % growth in population - youngest population in the county of Nordland - the highest percentage of people between 0 - 15, few beyond 80.
- The production of fish and fish products rose to 200 mill. kr. in 1994 - close to 300' per inhabitant.
- 2/3 came from direct export, mostly to Italy.
- We deliver close to 1/3 of all the stockfish consumed in Italy.

Our export is steadily growing. We also play an important part as a producer of cod roe in addition to salted and fresh fish, also salmon.

As a result of the growth in population we have built more houses and flats these three last years (almost 30) than ever.

Røst is totally dependant on the natural resources by which the island and the population are surrounded. This means the fish first and foremost, the seabirds and the opportunity to keep sheep. Any regulation will have a serious impact on every day life.

National regulations are very often inefficient. They either lead to over- or underexploitation thus creating problems for stocks and human beings. The population is paying the price anyway.

Models for local regulations might be able to take care of local concerns in a proper way, but what about national or global concerns ? Historically national regulations have had a series of weaknesses. The break down of the herring, capelin and cod stocks are frightening examples. And there have been warnings all the way for local societies.

Can it be that the local knowledge and local responsibility are more suitable to do the management of natural resources than the national generalism ? And do the national line do harm to local culture, local observance, local dependency on the resources and the common faith man and nature share, locally in the first line. Do central bureaucrats and politicians generalize in a way that is dangerous both to natural resources and man ?

At Røst there has been a tradition from "the first morning" to pick eggs from seagulls and other birds. There has - up to this very spring - been a catch of sea-birds - especially the puffins. We can't see that this catch has represented any threat to the actual species. As to the puffin - let me illustrate:

There are approximately 600.000 couples producing eggs - 1,2 mill. individuals plus young birds and old birds. All in all there are between 1,5 - 2 mill. puffins.

The natural death rate of adult birds is 6 % per year. The local catch limited to 2000 birds represent 1 ‰ (1 per 1000). When the catch is over there are 999 per mille left, while the natural death takes 60 per mille. We are not allowed to do this catch which has been going on for ages - and there are still puffins by the hundreds of thousands.

2/3 of the municipality will be put under so called environmental regulations. For some parts people are not allowed to go ashore. The users of this area who are also the guardians have to stay out. This area is put under heavy regulations out of national regards and national considerations. Of the same national considerations we

- are searching for oil near by
- motivate for mass tourists
- are overexploiting marin resources so that the young birds starve.

It is not easy to understand the overall national policy and it is hard to discover an understanding for local culture, local traditions, local way of life that makes it worth living here, creating values for the nation as a whole. Our identity is closely linked to fish, birds, the sea and all the powers in nature. There is no room - so far - for local specialities in the national general policy. We seem to be treated the same way whether we live in Oslo or at Røst regardless of traditions and cultural differences. To save nature, the environment and resources we are punishing the local guardians putting at stake resources of global interest by letting industrialism have free way

- may it be the oil industri or the industrialised fishing or tourism.

Who represent the real threats ?

To us - when we go to the birds' mountains we say we go westward

- a local version of the American Dream
- a fantastic experience
- an adventure
- with birds, fish, the sun and the storm
- a way of real life
- a means of relaxation and enchantment
- the good life - the best of lives
- an important part of our identity
- we are about to lose it
- this cruelty can't be defended.

Therefore we intend to defy any attack on our local culture - a culture that does not represent any threat or harm to any stock or specy.

We have to find ways of regulations that take into consideration both national and local aims. The local management has proved to be sustainable, the national has very often not. Therefore we are willing to fight to the bitter end for our right to exploit the local natural resources within an ecological frameword and in a sustainable way not letting central philosophy destroy what means so much to us. Nature should not be kept as a beatiful picture only, it should be actively used for the best of human beings, the society and nature itself.

I hereby ask you as scientists to help us create new models for the management of both regional, national and global resources - for a better life for every part.

Thank you very much for your attention !