

Youth in Fisheries Communities – Themes from the CURRA Symposium

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The CURRA symposium included a workshop, session and keynote on youth in fisheries communities. The workshop asked the question “Is there a place for youth in fisheries communities?” and brought together stakeholder organisations, community representatives, researchers and youth to discuss multi- and inter-generational strategies for rebuilding fisheries communities (see the Workshop Synthesis Report for details). The session titled “Youth living and working in fisheries communities” focused on young people living and working in fisheries communities in Newfoundland and Northern Norway. Two presentations (Kate Dupré and Moss Norman) reported findings from the *Rural Youth and Recovery* component of the *Community-University Research for Recovery Alliance* (CURRA) program of research. The third presentation (Siri Gerrard) described a recent initiative by the Norwegian government to recruit youth into fisheries. Finally, Nicole Power delivered a keynote titled “Reflections on Sustainable Fisheries Communities -- A Youth Lens,” which drew on *Rural Youth and Recovery* research. This document aims to synthesize some of the themes that cut across the workshop, session and keynote address.

First, CURRA researchers found that young people in NL fisheries communities have extremely limited work options and opportunities, and these differ among youth, particularly by gender. In particular, young people reported few direct experiences with or opportunities to be engaged in fisheries work. However, young men and boys in fisheries communities are more likely than girls to engage in fisheries work, directly (e.g., fishing with a male relative) and/or informally (e.g., selling cod tongues salvaged from the plant), or to want to pursue fisheries work as a career. There are a number of obstacles that impede youth from entering harvesting, including the current high cost of enterprises and licenses. CURRA researchers found that youth are explicitly discouraged from entering fisheries for employment. Instead of transferring fishing property to children, fishing families may need to recoup their heavy investment by selling their enterprise to get market value. In contrast, Norwegian youth have an opportunity to register as youth fish harvesters and fish the quota designated to youth; they do so as special youth crew aboard a (male) relative’s small boat or via a municipal youth fishery.

Second, CURRA researchers found that young people in NL tend to view the fishery as largely dead, no longer relevant as a way to make a living, except perhaps as a cultural commodity to sell to tourists. Survey research with youth in NL found that most respondents agreed that fishing is a tough way to earn a living and youth reported less life satisfaction when they see the fishery as important. These views reflect and reinforce the dominant political discourse on the need to rationalise (i.e., downsize) the industry, as well as the messaging from educators, parents and media. Likewise, CURRA researchers found that youth largely concur with the dominant portrayal of their communities as in decline and in crisis, with implications for how they see future options and their place in the community. Young people’s negative appraisals of fisheries communities exist in contrast to their positive evaluations of other, more urban places. CURRA researchers found that NL youth perceived greater opportunities for employment and recreation in urban places, and that young people characterize urban places as progressive and rural/ fisheries communities as conservative and limiting. Young people living in fisheries communities report being encouraged by parents, educators and friends to invest in education and leave their communities. By extension, staying tends to be perceived as a personal failure and indeed the very success or failure of rural/ fisheries communities

becomes linked to these “failed” youth – after all, the “best and brightest” have left. Options to stay, leave or return to fisheries communities are not the same for all youth, and they are shaped by local and deeply entrenched gender and class orders. Women tend to fill the jobs created in the expanding service and tourism sectors or go to university, while men are recruited by male relatives and peers into migration pathways to Alberta or elsewhere.

Third, at the same time, it was clear from qualitative research that NL youth have strong emotional connections to their fisheries communities and geographies. The material and cultural imprint of fisheries on their communities seems to offer young people an emplaced sense of stability and continuity within a broader context of economic uncertainty. Participants in the qualitative study recognised that fisheries have made life in their communities unique and that fisheries remain important economically in terms of tourism. While young people tend to see fisheries as important to their communities, it is less clear what this means for their engagement in fisheries work or communities. Qualitative research found that youth describe their communities as safe, affordable, family friendly places in contrast to cities. However, survey results indicate that for those youth who see fishing as a tough way to earn a living, they are less likely to see job opportunities, more likely to see the NL way of life as deteriorating, and less likely to feel like a member of the community.

Fourth, young people’s involvement in fisheries and engagement in their communities is about inter- and multi-generational equity. The implementation of the Norwegian youth quota was a strategy in part to address the generational inequity that resulted from the introduction of the boat quota system that meant that young people were no longer able to sell fish to the fish plant as they had traditionally done. The shift from family or household based fisheries to a model based on IQs or ITQs has implications for communities, not just fish harvesters. While it is not yet clear that the Norwegian youth quota will have the long-term effect of recruiting youth into fish harvesting, it does seem to be having other important effects including providing opportunities for summer employment for youth in northern fisheries villages and intergenerational contact and knowledge transfer, and creating young people’s and politician’s positive views about youth fishing. In particular, it has opened up employment opportunities for young women to fish (the youth fishery has a higher rate of female participation than the professional fishery). In NL, there has been no official intergenerational succession plan in the fishery, and opportunities for intergenerational contact and knowledge transfer are limited with the shift from cod to crab harvesting that requires harvesters to fish farther from shore, and for longer periods of time.