Sustainability and Cultural Heritage in the Catalan Coast

Eliseu Carbonell Catalan Institute for Cultural Heritage Research Parc Científic i Tecnològic. Ed. Narcís Monturiol Emili Grahit, 91 17003 Girona Spain

Abstract

This paper proposes to consider two questions that are being increasingly involved nowadays: sustainability and cultural heritage. That is, the relationship between the concern for a sustainable development of marine resources management, and the concern for the preservation of maritime cultural heritage seriously damaged due to the coastal tourism development. On one hand we observe the emergence of cultural discourses about nature (e.g. the case of marine protected areas) where the limits of natural and cultural heritage are blurred. On the other hand, we observe how the attempt for the preservation of certain tangible and intangible cultural heritage (e.g. traditional methods of catching fish, fishermen's ecological knowledge) is done on behalf of environmental sustainability. In this paper I propose a reflection and debate on this issue from some ethnographic examples of my current research on the central Catalan coast in Western Mediterranean Europe.

Keywords: Sustainability, Cultural Heritage, Maritime Heritage, Small-Scale Fishing, Catalonia

1. Introduction

In this article, I wish to give some examples of my current field work on the Catalan coast (Western Mediterranean Europe, North-Eastern Spain), which addresses new directions in the field of maritime heritage. I will explain how discourses on cultural heritage and discourses on sustainability converge and are intertwined. This paper is divided into four sections: introduction, fishermen, fishing boats and conclusions.

Small scale fishing has been declining from the 1980s until now, when the sector is undergoing a severe crisis. According to Breton Renard (1987), the differentiation between artisanal or small-scale fishing and industrial fishing emerged in Catalonia during the decade of the 1970s in a context of strong industrialization. Competing for the same resources, small-scale fishers are at a disadvantage to industrial fishing, since they have a much lower level of production (Alegret 1987). At a global level, small-scale fishing are now facing major challenges, including the gentrification of their communities (Jones 2003) and especially the alarming decline in catches (Andreatta and Parlier 2010; Achenson 2011), due to several factors, including overfishing and water pollution (Andreatta, Nash, and Martin 2011).

As stated by Driessen (2004), maritime anthropology has had a marked tendency in recent years to focus on the study of governance and management of marine resources by communities of small-scale fishers affected by global crisis, leaving aside other ethnological approaches such as symbolic and cultural dimensions of the relationship between people and the sea. However, as I will try to show in this paper, the symbolic and cultural aspects, such as those contained in the use of cultural heritage, can also be related to the management of marine resources by small-scale fishers. Maritime heritage is used in Catalonia today as a strategy to call the attention of politicians and the public to the problems of small-scale fishers, as I will try to show in this article.

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Much has been said in recent years about the creation of natural heritage and the political ecology of protected natural areas (Pascual and Florido 2005; Pascual and De la Cruz 2008; Fraga and Doyon 2008; Campbell, Gray and Meletis 2008, Siniscalchi 2010). I aim to address these debates in my research, in relation to what is now occurring in the field of maritime heritage. In other words, I will try to link the production of cultural heritage with discourses on the sustainability of the maritime environment and small-scale fishing.

2. Fishermen

I would like to present two Catalan fishermen. The first is Josep. Josep is president of the *Confraria de Pescadors de Sant Pol de Mar. Confraria* in Catalan, or Cofradía in Spanish, is the name given to traditional and ancient fishermen's organizations in Spain. They began during the Middle Ages as religious organizations that evolved, in the modern era, into *Gremis* –guilds– of craftsmen organizations. Both *Confraries* and *Gremis* were created under the protection of a Patron Saint. According to Alegret (1999), the *confraries de pescadors* in their origins were fishermen organizations with friendship, mutual protection and cooperation aims. In the 18th century, they evolved into organizations co-managed with the State. In the second half of the 19th century, under the influence of capitalist liberalism, guilds were abolished and different kinds of organization were created. But during the Franco dictatorship they were re-imposed as public organizations with some cooperative functions with the State. Presently, the *confraries* maintain their status system of co-management, despite the aim of the European Union (EU) of transforming it into Producer Organizations (POs), and in competition with new Owner's Associations and the few Fishers Unions created recently.

Sant Pol de Mar is a town of 5,000 inhabitants in which fishing was the main economic activity until the midtwentieth century. However, this activity gradually diminished with the emergence of tourism in the 1960s. This coincided with the construction of a fishing port in a neighbouring town (as the fleet in Sant Pol operated from the beach). The last fishing boat in Sant Pol was abandoned on the beach, and finally burnt in 1989. The *Confraria de Pescadors de Sant Pol* still exists today, even though all its members are based outside the town in the Port of Arenys. It has just 20 members, who all work in small-scale fishing with boats made from wood or fibreglass that are no more than fifty years old.

The fisherman Josep fishes hakes using a demersal longline. Unlike most small-scale fishermen in the region, his family did not work in this trade. He had a vocation for fishing, sparked by his passion for the sea. Every day he returns to the Port of Arenys at noon to sell his catch at the fish market there. However, in the afternoons, at weekends and on public holidays, Josep devotes his time to his other passion: maritime heritage. With a small group of friends, Josep founded the association *A Tot Drap* and became its president.

The association *A Tot Drap*, which means full speed ahead with sails unfurled, is dedicated to the conservation and dissemination of Sant Pol's maritime heritage. However, not all the members of this association are fishermen, but people in this town with different trades such as architects, electricians, computer programmers, businessmen and so on. They are mainly men and also some women, mostly in their fifties. It has approximately 40 members, of whom 8 or 10 are very active.

They have restored several small fishing boats (7 to 9 metres), called *llaguts* in Catalan (see Figure 1). These are usually small motorized fishing boats built in the mid-20th century. The group installs the equipment needed for lateen sails, a triangular sail which was traditionally used in the Mediterranean until motors were introduced. Thus, the group converts the boat into a so-called traditional vessel, despite being just motorized fishing vessels equipped with lateen sails rather than real fishing boats with such sails. In fact, the category of "traditional vessel" is disputed in Spain, especially by Apraiz, Aguirre and Böell (2000) and Apraiz (2007). These authors call into question whether the category of traditional vessel can be applied to vessels substantially different from the old models. As stated by Apraiz (2007: 234), "Instead of investigating our maritime memories we are reinventing: Replicas of originals that have never existed, sizes and designs of sails never used, Latin or Breton gears (in Basque boats), oversized paddles, maneuvers never conducted, etc, etc." (Translation mine).



Figure 1. "Traditional vessels" *llaguts* in the beach of Sant Pol, 2011

In addition, the association *A Tot Drap* has restored a small building that was constructed on the beach in 1932 to house the engines used to tow boats out of the sea and up the beach. This building has been made into a small museum that explains the town's fishing past. Finally, the association has reconstructed a *sardinal*, a typical fishing boat for catching blue fish from the French and Catalan Mediterranean coast used in the 19th century for long fishing trips from Catalonia to the Atlantic coast of Andalusia or the Gulf of Lion. This boat emerges as important later in the analysis.

A Tot Drap also organizes many activities related to maritime and fishing heritage, including traditional boat events, mainly involving *llaguts* with lateen sails, and demonstrations of traditional fishing methods. These events and demonstrations are organized in the context of the many festivals that are held on the coast, mostly during the long summer holidays. In 2010, I recorded 11 demonstrations of small-scale fishing during the year in Catalonia, nine of which involved a system known as *artó* or 'shore seine', in which nets are hauled in from the beach. It was widely used by small-scale commercial fishing fleets in the Mediterranean, including Greece, Italy and Spain, (Armeni-Argiovlassiti and Adamidou 1997), where it was employed extensively until it was banned in 1994.¹

In fact, in the past, this fishing system could be found all over the word, and still is used in some countries such as Ghana (Kraan 2006, 2009), Benin, Mozambique, Togo, Perú, India and Sri Lanka (Tietze et al. 2011), although it is in a declinine in most cases. It was prohibited in Spain for environmental reasons, as it damages marine bed habitat, particularly in reef and seagrass areas. It is specifically banned in the EU's sustainable fishing regulations.² Nevertheless, it is now used in Catalonia in the context of public festivals as an example of traditional fishing, which is presented as more environmentally friendly than modern industrial fishing, as we will see later.

The second fisherman that I would like to talk about is called Ramon. He is also a member of the *Confraria de Pescadors de Sant Pol* and has his boat moored in the Port of Arenys. Unlike Josep, Ramon comes from a long line of local fishermen. He is not only a small-scale fisherman, but also an activist, fighting for the survival of small-scale fishing. In February 2011, Ramon, with the help of the NGO World Wide Fund (WWF Mediterranean Programme Office), held a meeting in Arenys for fishermen from France, Italy, Greece and Spain and formed a platform of Mediterranean small-scale fishermen "for sustainable fishing that respects the region's ecosystems"³.

In addition, Ramon, like Josep, is passionate about fishing and interested in all its traditions, history, popular knowledge, etc. He is a member of another association called *Grup Llebeig* that participates in festive events related to the sea. It is named for one of the 8 winds (*Llebeig*) of Catalonia associated with the cardinal and intermediary directions, that organizes and participates in festive events related to the sea. When I asked to Ramon why they chose the name *Llebeig* for their association he replied: "The *Llebeig* is a wind coming from the 3rd quadrant, between *Garbi* (SW) and *Mitjorn* (S). It blows from sea to land, like the transfer of knowledge we do, from sea to land. Besides, it is a rare wind, but when it blows it is quite intense".

Ramon takes part in a food fair that is held in Arenys in the autumn to promote the consumption of local fish. Among other activities, his involvement consists in organising a "traditional open outcry fish auction" (see Figure 2), which is a Dutch auction⁴. During the auction, Ramon describes the qualities and characteristics of the fish that are caught in the region and makes comments to promote small-scale fishing. Those attending the auction can bid for the fish.



Figure 2. Open outcry fish auction. Festival Calamarenys. Arenys de Mar, 2010

Recently, Ramon has addressed another kind of public about the fish trade. He has given talks to cooperatives or responsible consumers to promote the purchase of "environmentally-friendly fish", in other words, fish caught by small-scale fishermen using traditional fishing gear.

As it was difficult for the regional government to control the process of selling fish in open outcry auctions, they have been replaced by electronic auctions. The penultimate open outcry auction in Catalonia was prohibited two years ago by the Ministry of Health. This ban sparked many protests, as people used to buy fish directly from the fishermen, to the mutual benefit of both parties⁵. Controlling the sale of fish increases the product's price, but is good for the government and the dealers. Today only one open outcry fish auction remains, in a town very close to Barcelona. The local authorities have included in June 2011 this auction in the provincial list of "intangible heritage"⁶ to try to stop the regional government (which has powers over fishing) from prohibiting it. The auction is attended by local inhabitants who go there to buy fish at a better price than in the market. As this auction is now included in the list of the province's heritage assets, it is protected. It has been classified as heritage as it is "the last" open outcry auction. This has paved the way for its use in culture, education and tourism.

At the same time, open outcry auctions have become increasingly widespread in Catalonia as part of public festivals, demonstrations or representations. Currently, we know of nine towns whose festival programmes contain a demonstration of an open outcry auction, as an example of marine tradition and in recognition of the environmental and cultural values of traditional fishing.

3. Fishing Boats

A severe crisis is affecting nowadays the small-scale fishing fleet in the Mediterranean. According to WWF data,⁷ small-scale fishers make up over 70 percent of those employed in the fishing sector in the Mediterranean, although they are responsible for only 30 percent of the catch. Compared with industrial fishing, their fishing methods are characterized by their low environmental impact. Their catch is mainly consumed in local markets, which also reduces the environmental impact caused by transportation. But, despite all the advantage of small-scale fishing, it is in severe crisis. In Catalonia in the years from 2000 to 2011, the number of small-scale fishing boats dropped from 949 to 363.⁸ In other words, 586 fishing boats disappeared in the last decade.

However, I will now discuss a fishing boat that has reappeared rather than disappeared. It is a boat built from a model of a *sardinal* called *Sant Pau* (see Figure 3) that dates back to 1905 and is from the town of Sète, in the South of France. Several molds of the hull were made in fiberglass before the original *sardinal* was destroyed. Several molds of the hull were made in fiberglass before the original *sardinal* was destroyed. The *A Tot Drap* association discussed earlier bought one of these molds and used it to build a new *sardinal* with a lateen sail. This 10-meter boat is sailed at traditional boat events and events related to maritime heritage. The members of *A Tot Drap* do so to represent the maritime past of Sant Pol de Mar, even though it does not really belong to the past of the place, but to that of a town in the South of France.



Figure 3. The sardinal Sant Pau, September 2012

Since 1988 a "Festival of Catalan Fishing" (*Festa de la Pesca Catalana*) is held in a different port every year. This social event is attended by representatives of all the *confraries*, political authorities and local fishers. The Festival of Catalan Fishing is planned as an informal meeting to encourage the exchange of experiences and projects between the different *confraries* of Catalonia. It includes activities for the families of fishers such as plays for children and exhibitions, a lunch and a concert of maritime folk music. Finally, the head of the Department of Agriculture, Livestock and Fishing of the Government of Catalonia and other politicians make their speeches.

In 2009, on the occasion of the Festival of Catalan Fishing (*Festa de la pesca catalana*) in the Port of Mataró, near Barcelona, two traditional vessels were moored in the fishing port for the townspeople to view. One of these was the *sardinal Sant Pau*. Her deck was decorated with old objects related to small-scale fishing and even some old photographs, as if there were a small ethnographic exhibition on the deck. In addition, a placard hung from the lateen yard which read "sustainable and responsible fishing".

The *sardinal* was moored in front of a large trawler. Small-scale fishers classify trawling as irresponsible or unsustainable fishing, as it is incompatible with the preservation of the marine environment. Therefore, hanging the banner and docking the boat next to the trawler constituted a political act, in which heritage was used to defend the interests of an economic sector. By means of the objects exhibited on the deck of the *Sant Pau*, today's small-scale fishers declared themselves the legitimate descendents of the small-scale fishers of the past. In addition, they labeled themselves as "responsible and sustainable," –as other artisanal fishers in the world actually do, as Einarsson (2011) has recently demonstrated– and thus linked cultural heritage to the sustainability of the environment.

Almost all the many small-scale fishers of Catalonia with whom I have spoken believe that fishing is threatened by overfishing -which they attribute to industrial fishing- and pollution of the marine environment. This view is also shared by many scientists (Andreatta, Nash, and Matin 2011: 279). The Catalan small-scale fishers's association, *Associació d'Armadors d'Arts Menors de Catalunya* (ADAMEC)⁹, founded and chaired by a member of *Grup Llebeig*, also uses this discourse. We can also find it used in global environmentalist NGOs such as the WWF or European organizations such as OCEAN2012, and also in the European Association of Mediterranean Artisanal Fishers launched in Arenys in May 2011¹⁰. Cultural associations devoted to the conservation and dissemination of Catalan maritime heritage, such as *A Tot Drap* and *Grup Llebeig*, also share this discourse. This can be seen in actions like placing the *sardinal* and its message hung from the lateen yard in front of a big trawler to be seen by political authorities and the general public.



Figure 4. Fishers protest against the Railway Company in Sant Pol de Mar, 1892.

But the struggles of the fishermen in this area in defense of sustainability are not new, although the use of the concept of sustainability is quite new. To illustrate it with an example, I would like to show an old photograph of this area in 1892 (see Figure 4). These boats were of fishermen who were protesting against the widening of the area taken up by the train tracks. This train line, which is the oldest in Spain, runs along the coastline. To build it, many fishermen's houses and small shipyards were demolished. As a result, the fishermen were always against this modern infrastructure that mainly benefitted industrial development (Pomés, 1992; Carbonell, 2012).

Once the train line had been built in 1859, sea storms, which are very common in the autumn, covered the train tracks in sand or eroded the ground under them and the trains frequently had to be halted. Consequently, in 1890 the railway company began to reinforce the tracks with stone walls. This was to take up a greater area of the beach on which the boats were moored. The fishermen protested again and confronted the company with various actions, some of which were diplomatic whilst others involved direct action, for example sabotage. The photograph shows one of these fishermen's protests against the railway hanging black flags in their boats. The boats are moored in the bay with flags up as a sign of disapproval. Like the action in 2009 involving the *sardinal* Sant Pau and its placard for "responsible and sustainable fishing", this 1892 fishermen's protest with black flags can be interpreted as an action in defence of the natural environment in which the boats operated, in the face of human intervention to alter the coastal area.

4. Conclusions

In recent years, we have seen a proliferation of festivals and celebrations dedicated to maritime heritage. These fiestas "recover", "recreate" or "reinvent" the seafaring past of the Catalan coastal towns. Some examples of the many events are "Festa de la anxova i la sal" (The Festival of Anchovies and Salt) in l'Escala, northern Catalonia, which recreates the important local industry of preserving fish, or the "Festa del Carme" (Festival of Carme) in Cambrils, southern Catalonia, that recreates a religious festival, in which townspeople dress as "old fishermen" and act out a recreation of the seafaring past. Other activities are related to the recreation of "traditional boats", such as the *Sant Pau* that I described earlier, and many others that I could mention. These always aim to achieve the value of "tradition" and "authenticity", despite the many inconsistencies at historical and ethnological levels, as I have shown in this article. But, as stated by Rob Van Ginkel (2005: 72), despite all the theoretical critiques that can be made about the concepts of tradition and authenticity, they are still important for people today. Finally, various activities recreate former fishing methods or old ways of selling fish, which were banned for environmental, economic and hygienic reasons. Now these methods are demonstrated as representative of the lost values of responsible, sustainable fishing.

Some authors (Nadel-Klein, 2003; Frigolé and Roigé 2006, 2008; Prats 2006; Frigolé and Del Marmol 2008; Roigé and Frigolé, 2010) have shown that the selection and recreation of some elements of the past can be interpreted as a strategy for the production of local identity in the context of globalisation. The aim of such a strategy is to distinguish and position oneself within the system of hierarchies between different local areas. Thus, the re-emergence as heritage of traditional activities that have fallen into disuse could be interpreted as a response to external factors that change the local reality: in this case a new, tourism-focused economy.

The economy of Spain depends, to a large extent, on tourism. Within this country, Catalonia is the main tourist destination. It receives 15 million tourists a year, mostly in coastal areas. Although maritime heritage events risk becoming a tourism product, today they are aimed at supporting the construction of a local identity that is linked to the seafaring past. In the face of the great impact of tourism, as a paradigm of globalisation, we find a social need for local maritime identity and traditions. These activities are a response to the need for a local identity that, as shown, is the result of globalisation and the phenomenon of tourism itself.

However, another aspect should be taken into account in addition to the recovery of maritime heritage. The boats, the fishing equipment and the activities linked to the traditional fishing industry are associated with current small-scale fishing, the need to conserve the marine environment and fishing resources. In this paper, we have seen how there is a social need for identity based on a seafaring past, combined with the need of the small-scale fishing sector to draw social attention to the environmental problems that affect them. Therefore, I consider that when we talk of heritage and fishing we are speaking of an area in which discourses on nature conservation are intertwined with discourses on the conservation of culture and identity: in other words, sustainability is linked to cultural heritage.

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Notes

¹ Reglamento (CE) núm. 1626/94 del consejo, de 27 de junio de 1994, por el que se establecen determinadas medidas técnicas de conservación de los recursos pesqueros en el Mediterráneo.

² "Fishing with trawl nets, dredges, purse seines, boat seines, shore seines or similar nets above seagrass beds of, in particular, Posidonia oceanica or other marine phanerogams shall be prohibited." COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1967/2006 of 21 December 2006 concerning management measures for the sustainable exploitation of fishery resources in the Mediterranean Sea, amending Regulation (EEC) No 2847/93 and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1626/94.

³ http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/smart_fishing/target_fisheries/bluefin_tuna/?199388/New-platform-gives-voice-to-Mediterranean-artisanal-fishers (accessed on: 15/06/2011)

⁴ A "Dutch auction" is an auction in which the price is reduced until some participant is willing to accept the price. This is also known as an open-outcry descending-price auction.

⁵ www.eltotdigital.com/clausuren-1%E2%80%99historica-llotja-de-peix-per-denuncies-del-gremi-de-peixaters/ (accessed on: 15/06/2011)

⁶ www.maresme.cat/ca/cultura/cerca-de-patrimoni.html?view=ficha&id=NOU0001 (accessed on: 15/06/2011)

 $^7\ www.wwf.es/?17801/WWF-y-los-pescadores-artesanales-se-unen-por---un-cambio-radical-en-la-pesca-del-Mediterrneo$

⁸ Source: Idescat, Statistical Institute of Catalonia. (www.idescat.cat)

⁹ ADAMEC is an association of small-scale fishing boat owners in Catalonia created to defend the interests of small-scale fishing in the face of industrial or semi-industrial fishing. ADAMEC is member of OCEAN2012 (http://ocean2012.eu/), a coalition of European organizations created with the goal of pressuring the EU to ensure that the 2012 reform of the EU Common Fisheries Policy responds to their demands to stops overfishing and end destructives fishing practices.

¹⁰ Information about this meeting can be found at the WWF web site:

http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/smart_fishing/?199388/New-platform-gives-voice-to-Mediterranean-artisanal-fishers (accessed on: 05/10/2012)