

# THE TRAGEDY OF ENCLOSURE

## The Battle for Maritime Resources and Life-Modes in Europe

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Twenty fishing families from a coastal village in northern Denmark are establishing a brand new kind of guild in order to take out huge loans in the local banks. To understand why this is necessary and how they are doing it, the intriguing interplay between European governments and a whole set of life-modes struggling for mutual recognition must be explored, including EU politicians, civil servants in the ministries, workers' unions, private capital investors, regional authorities, environmental organisations, and self-employed fishing families. A new law introducing a forced legal process of maritime enclosure marks a turning point in the struggle. In the space of two years, this process has brought nearly 80 percent of all Danish fishing boats into the hands of venture capitalists. "Traditional" European inshore fishery, however, is not necessarily dying; the twenty young fishing families are part of a larger, more complex European battle for recognition of common maritime resources in the EU. A contrasting comparative European ethnology is needed to explore this type of on-going contradictory European cultural processes.

*Keywords:* maritime resource management, life-mode analysis, contrasting comparative method, inshore fisheries, field research

*We were told to bring along our slippers to the meeting at the life-saving station in Thorupstrand, where the floors are rather cold in December. The lifeboat operator, Per, didn't want to let anyone scuff up the sacred office at the local lifeboat station with their shoes. Not even invited distinguished guests from Copenhagen. In the case of an emergency at sea, the local fishermen could be ready for action from this station within six minutes. Seven short minutes after being called out, they would be racing across the waves at 70 mph. This place was essential to the local fishermen. We were meeting with a small group of young fishermen who had invited a lawyer, a consultant from the farmers' cooperative society and a consultant from the fishermen's association in Denmark, in an attempt to find a legal way to implement their plan to save their fish-*

*ing community on the coast of Skagerrak in Northern Jutland. They had to act very quickly before the consequences of a new law would cause the community to die out.*

*Just one month later, their efforts would succeed. "We're making history", a young fisherman proclaimed as twenty families in the fishing community had joined together to make a strong new cooperative to face the new threat of the enclosure of the maritime commons.*

In fact, exactly twenty fishermen, their wives and their children were making history. Before taking on the risk of financing any mortgages, two local banks had insisted that at least twenty local fishing families agree to participate in the formation of a cooperative company whose purpose was to invest in the newly

established, privately owned transferable fishing quotas known as TQ. The private ownership system set up for these TQs is part of a brand new law that overturns eight hundred years' praxis of Danish civil servants and fishermen. In light of this new law, each fishing family faced, as self-employed producers, the complex question of whether they would be willing to invest millions of euro to ensure the continuation of their way of life or whether they would let it go, for good.

The background of the new law is the increase in over fishing caused by EU policies and the subsidising of the so called "modernisation" of the European fishing fleet. Privatisation of the quotas became the Danish government's answer to the lack of sustainability in the fishing industry. The new law represents a shift from state regulation to privatisation, the two alternative strategies discussed in the classical *Tragedy of the Commons* debate (Hardin 1968). In an on-going study of the battle for *common goods* in European welfare states, we have followed the struggle for the recognition of European inshore fisheries, local reactions to EU fishery policies, and the modes in which they are exploited and resisted by distinct life-modes and at different places in Europe. The aim of our study is to explore the ways in which new contradictions, transnational relations and modes of cooperation are developing in relation to contemporary life-modes in the centres as well as peripheries of Europe. Our on-going field research in the five Nordic countries, the UK, Germany, France, Spain and Malta points to the need for European ethnology to use a contrasting comparative approach, which is able to explore and conceptualise distinctive contrasts between modes of life in Europe today. We think European ethnology might be able to contribute substantially to the public and political debate about the precarious relationship between the political intentions of the EU and the everyday life of European citizens. This calls for a mode of analysis of praxis, based upon long term participant observation, but also ethnographies carried out on several levels in the EU – from local communities to decision-making processes in Brussels. There is among both ethnologists and anthropologists a growing

interest in studying the bureaucratic and political institutions in fieldwork projects, and our study joins this tradition by not only doing fieldwork in different fishing communities, but also in the trade unions, in the finance houses, and in the ministry of fisheries, in commissions set up by the government and among fishery economists as well as in the Danish parliament and among European politicians.

In our paper we argue for an action-oriented ethnology, a tradition that has not been very strong in the discipline. Economists are not afraid of losing their disciplinary integrity, when they are taking part in the development of functioning structures together with politicians and actual economic actors. On the contrary, economic theory profits from the experimental data, deriving from applied economics. If ethnology keeps its political independence – which ought to remain possible at our public universities – it seems possible to develop a new kind of applied cultural analysis, which is taking part in the construction of "experimental situations", where groups of people get the legal and economic conditions that make it possible for them to develop forms of organisation either renewing or transforming their actual life-modes.

In the following we present such an experiment that we have followed closely over a long period, an attempt of local fishermen, lawyers, and regional banks. In this experiment we also were involved by giving advice to the local community and by our role as ethnological experts in a structure development commission set up by the national government. Action-oriented research is never unproblematic, but it needs to be developed. Experimental material from such applied studies and praxis-research might in return be a new and fruitful basis for testing the applied ethnological concepts (Højrup 2002, 2003b).<sup>1</sup>

Our aim is to show how a very radical transformation of resource management was the result of new EU policies, breaking up a firmly established Scandinavian tradition of fishing, and why this radical change met so little opposition from many of the involved, from fisheries administrators to labour unions. We also want to show how local actors develop strategies of resistance and how this resistance has

been furthered by contacts with local fishermen in other EU countries – a cooperation of the periphery, so to say. This is an interesting process for the ethnologist, because it generates new forms of organisation based on local European cultural experiences.

### **The Disappearance of the Share System in Fishing**

In November 2006, the twenty fishing families from Thorupstrand decided to come up with a compromise between selling and buying quotas individually. It consists of a collective financial solution to borrow risk capital from local banks and to buy quotas together as a cooperative.

Given the fact that every single one of the fishermen, with or without part ownership in a boat, had always been proud of being a free “share fisherman” (Monrad Hansen & Højrup 2001),<sup>2</sup> being able to independently plan his own life together with his partners on board, i.e. proud of being a working partner and not a wage earner. It was no surprise that they were willing to fight to find a solution despite being closed off from the old commons of fishing resources. But to the lawyer present, it came as some surprise to learn that the twenty fishermen all agreed that they would never be able to appropriate individually the potential increase in value of the qu-

otas being accumulated as collective property by the cooperative. This conclusion was drawn as a result of a formative process<sup>3</sup> that had made the fishing families conscious of the choice they had to make. At the final debate and organisational meeting for all the fishermen concerned, it became clear that there was no single solution that met every need. Every single person at the meeting had the opportunity to put forward their idea of what the main objectives of the quota company had to be. They were conscious of the fact that they would have to choose between the presence of collective quotas sufficiently large enough to provide a sound income for the fishing community, which included the option of letting new men and young men in when they felt ready to join, and the option of being able to tap the potentially increasing value of the assets of a quota company, open for individual private appropriation. From October 2005 to this meeting in November 2006, even before the new law came into effect, the price of a boat with quotas increased by 500 percent. No one in the fishing village had failed to notice that when the Icelandic government introduced Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQ), ownership of most of Iceland’s fishing industry landed in the hands of ten large private companies over the next twenty years. At the decisive meeting held in November 2006, the negotiations concerning what kind of rules for a quota company they could unanimously agree upon, ended up as a choice between a high risk life with the opportunity for high individual profits from the TQs, or a low risk life with no opportunity for the appropriation of individual profits from the collective quotas of the community. Two fishermen chose the former and left the meeting, but the eighteen fishermen and their families, who remained, backed financially by two temporarily retired fishermen, chose the latter. In all they were twenty. In 2007, the rules that were developed for the newly established cooperative company followed the often used motto of: “All for one, and one for all” (Højrup 2008). By January 2008 six young new fishermen from the village had also joined the cooperative quota company.

There is, however, one snag in having made history. Until October 2005, almost no one in the vil-

#### *Share Fishing in Thorupstrand*

*The distribution principle of joint income for a Thorupstrand boat with three crew members*

Variable costs such as the winch, diesel oil, cleaning, packing, and the auctioneer’s fee are paid in advance.

The remaining joint income is paid out as follows:

- 20% boat
- 20% nets, lines, snares etc.
- 20% skipper
- 20% second crew member
- 20% third crew member

As a partnership, in the event that the value of the catch does not exceed the variable costs, the partners are financially obligated to make this up, earning, in effect, a negative income.

lage had any loans or debt. Over the last decade, they had survived an 80 percent drop in the codfish quota, and were still going strong with help from local working-age children who were eagerly willing to face the challenge of gutting the dramatically increasing number of plaice that had replaced the cod. With their assistance, processing the much larger number of plaice necessary to offset the cod became possible. The approximately 25 youngsters were able to process the freshly caught plaice as E-fish, i.e. extra high quality fish to be sold at high prices on the market. This dedicated group of children and youngsters is therefore locally known as “The gold of Thorupstrand”.

Nevertheless, by December 2007, the fishing families in the village owed interest on the more than EUR

20,000,000 in loans but were still catching the same amount of fish. Borrowing money was necessary due to the decrease in value of the quotas measured in metric tons of fish and due to the dramatic increase of the TQ exchange value, which had undergone a 1,000 percent increase over two years. The yoke of debt and the interest owed are a heavy burden for the remaining families, especially the young new fishermen starting without any quotas given beforehand.

The reason why the fishermen in Thorupstrand are making history is that share fishermen, a system that has dominated in Scandinavia and in old west European sea powers as Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, Spain and Portugal for a very long period, are disappearing in the rest of Denmark, while the number of share-organised fishing boats with-



For more than thousand years this beach has been the home base of clinker crafts. Today the share fishing fleet of Thorupstrand consists of 23 modern clinker built vessels landing on the beach. Equipped with state-of-the-art technology these fisherman-owned boats are the most competitive form of fishing for the fresh fish market in Europe. (Photo: Thomas Højrup)

drawn from service continues to rise and will equal 85 percent of the total existing fleet. It is a life-mode struggling for survival (Højrup 1983, 2003a) – the question is whether it will only be preserved in a few scarce harbours as a cultural relic, or if it is going to create the germ of a sustainable fishing industry for the future.

Enormously transformative as the process may seem, not much has been said about it in the news. Over the space of two years, the biggest harbours have been emptied of fishermen; only the boats remain, waiting to be destroyed. The media's silence seems even more surprising considering that during this process one of the biggest gifts in Danish history has been given away. A small majority in the Danish Parliament gave away ownership of national fish resources valued at EUR 2,500,000,000 to 1,500 boat owners. Most of the owners have sold out, bringing in EUR 500,000–1,000,000 for their boat and the allotted quota. Thus, the fishing industry is being emptied of net capital, to be replaced by classic speculative venture capital. Furthermore, the share fishermen who do not own a boat or share of a boat, but who throughout the years have provided the boats with their “historical fishing rights” that have now been converted by the government into transferable quotas belonging to the boat owners are left with nothing and have no official voice to defend their cause.

### **Views from the Centres of Political Power - States, Capital, Managers and Worker Unions**

How can we understand this silence? Viewed from the praxis of state power at Christiansborg, the seat of the Danish government, we are witnesses to an administrative and political success. From the standpoint of the Danish government, the Danish fishing fleet had to be able to compete more efficiently with other large European fishing fleets, to capture future “historical rights” to fish stocks still unregulated by quotas (e.g. Atlantoscandic herring) in deep EU fishing waters. The economists at the Institute of Fishing Economy (FØI) and the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries operate with an economic model that calculates that the largest fishing boats

yield the most capital. Therefore, from a national point of view, they argue that the Danish fishing fleet is better off catching the total national quota of fish with a few large trawlers. Their assumption is that Denmark is able to increase the profit which the capital may gain from the national quota by forcing out the large, expensive fleet of smaller, fisherman-owned and share-organised boats that employ “too many” people. The result suits the industry on shore perfectly because there is currently a desperate need here for hands everywhere. This point of view demonstrates the specific praxis and conceptual world of the life-mode of civil servants in the central administration.

Seen from their cultural perspective, the new law will have the effect of a diminishing need for the extensive administration of inspections and regulations. The New Regulation<sup>4</sup> ensures, in this worldview, that the government will no longer have to finance an “old fashioned”, and unprofitable fleet, while simultaneously ensuring that the nation will be able to take full advantage of its resources at sea and increase the income of its fishermen. In short, this alternative is seen as much more beneficial for the national balance of payments. From the government's liberalist point of view, market forces are the player most suited to guarantee the “sovereignty work” (Højrup & Bolving 2007) and praxis of the state in the least expensive way. Critical comments from share fishermen and left wing political parties concerning the process of *enclosure of the commons*, claiming that the government is playing the brutal game of the capitalists, can – seen from the government's perspective – only be viewed as ideological voices that do not respect the common recognition of market forces by Western democracies. The fishermen have been paid a more than fair price for their fishing boats, and if a few fishermen still refuse to sell, well, that is their own choice – made on the basis of personal values.

When the head of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries visits the harbours to see the effects of the new regulation, his point of view allows him to see a successful implementation: The biggest harbours have pulled out 90 percent of the fishing boats

and are still catching “nearly” the same amount of fish.<sup>5</sup> And: no important voices have complained.

This kind of structural rationalization has also been a long-term strategic aim of the former EEC and current EU systems of subsidies for agricultural and marine food production. When subsidies are transformed into the capitalisation of cultivated land, most farm families are slowly forced out, to be replaced by capitalist investors, wage earners and managers trying to harness the advantages of large-scale production. The same effect has been much more difficult to obtain in the inshore fishing industry. EU policies, however, have made it possible for national governments to find a new way out of these difficulties. Subsidising the construction of large, new trawlers, EU and single member states have obtained a situation where the total capacity of the fleet is too large compared to the natural resources available. Biologists and green organisations warned about “over fishing”, providing the EU and single member states with the opportunity to supplement construction subsidies with state aid for ship dismantling. The purpose behind this seemingly paradoxical combination of subsidies was the expectation that larger trawlers would be able to oust the smaller, fisherman-owned boats from the industry with their supposed large-scale effectiveness. Heavy energy expenditures and rising oil prices on the world market increased the debt trawler companies had, escalating their need for more venture capital dramatically. Banks, investors, managers, the EU system of subsidies, the national state bureaucracy, taxpayers, workers’ unions and green organisations all became interested in a quick, radical settlement of the debt and advocated for the liquidation of the numerous “old” boats whose share of the total quotas made it impossible to run the large trawlers at a profit.

It has been very interesting for us to observe, how conscious the experienced Danish civil servants have strategic plans hidden away for situations like this, to be brought out and realised when sufficient political factions can be briefly united to make an irreversible decision. During our fieldwork they explicated their own professionalism of “the art of government” with the aim of reaching a crucial decision by creating a

situation of political consensus. The visionary plan of the civil servants at the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries was to suspend and confiscate the old national fish-resource licenses and permits from the large population of share fishermen who did not have part ownership in a boat. Through this powerful move, all boats were given “their own” part of the confiscated quota, enabling them “to plan their fishery”. The essence of the plan was that boat owners were given the confiscated quotas as private property. Investors were able to pay off their debt with this gift from the state, enabling them to spend the venture capital regained to buy out small self-employed boat owners, thus monopolising enough resources to consolidate into a few large trawler companies. As a result, the New Regulation paved the way for three new life-modes in the Danish North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat fisheries: Wage earners, investors and managers.

One political aim behind the architecture of the New Regulation was to bring an end to the transfer of EU and single state financing that had supported the enlargement of the new steel trawling fleet and the dismantling of the “traditional wooden boats” over the years. Instead of artificial financial support, the industry was meant to henceforth attract venture capital from private investors. Investors buying quotas with an eye on profits very quickly became a brand new player in the field. With experience from Iceland, the investors knew that they could generate pure surplus profits on the rise in value of the TQ, but they also knew that if they could concentrate all their TQs in a specific area, they would be able to control prices. Moreover, they could start a brand new business earning money by renting quotas to fishermen without means. The competition for obtaining regional monopolies has taken shape amongst investors, leading to a situation where they not only compete about the price of quotas, but also about rental fees for cheap fish to fishermen without means, thus draining the market for quotas and creating a situation where people who would like to live by fishing alone have no financial incentive to buy TQs in the short run. So investors get rid of the competition from independent fishermen, and the

fishermen who continue to fish even though they do not own enough quotas are satisfied because they can still get cheap fish.

The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) seemed happy with the new policies, too, but for other reasons. From the point of view of trade unions, proper working conditions have never existed, legally or physically, among the small share fishing boats; only a few small-scale share fishermen have ever been trade union members. The unions will be able to negotiate more easily with the large trawlers because they are dependent on wage earners who demand that the companies provide acceptable working conditions. With a tradition among offshore fishermen working as wage earners in large state-owned fishing companies in former communist states, the new workforce is primarily being recruited in Poland and the Baltic countries, also because former share fishermen are unwilling to work as wage earners. Willing to work at sea for months at a time in a well-developed European welfare state like Denmark, far from home, these immigrant workers acquire new and better conditions of existence.

Some environmental organisations concerned with the long-term damage done to fish stocks are pleased with the prospect of only a single owner who is most likely to take care of the utilisation value and exchange value of the available resources. From this point of view, the old common is a tragedy because it encouraged fishermen to catch as many fish as possible before anyone else could, the so called "Olympic fishery", leading to an over-exploitation of the existing fish stocks (Hardin 1968; Monrad Hansen 1997).<sup>6</sup>

At last, the Danish Fishermen's Association also seems happy with the development. To understand why, however, we have to look at a unique series of coincidences involving the chairmanship of the association. For many years, the chairmen had no interest in confiscating and privatising the old system in which every fisherman with citizenship had a right to openly catch fish. The association was "not a skipper union" as the fishermen said. Successive chairmen fought against such plans whenever they popped up. When the most recent chairman died

suddenly, the vice chairman, who owns a fishing company of large-beam trawlers, took over until the next election. Secretly and strategically wise he proposed the liberal party to inscribe privatisation policy in the next government bill and was afterwards not slow publicly to accept proposals from a fast-working administration that saw a unique opportunity to act quickly and implement its strategic plans concerning the privatisation of the national quotas. After a while the members of the Danish Fisherman's Association consisted mainly of the ship owners left in the fishing industry. The number of share fishers dwindled slowly in the organization. With the voice of resistance gone, the Danish Fishermen's Association now fully supports the development.

The process, then, is a sign of governmental universalism, which we as ethnologists may label as life-mode centrism (Højrup 1983). As we have seen, a number of central actors and organizations saw the new policies as a way of streamlining fisheries management, creating a system that would make regulation and standardization easier. Our argument is that the different local actors may perceive of such changes in a very different light, but that many of them lacked political experience and channels to voice their opposition.

### **The Need for Crossing Disciplinary Borders**

At the faculties of European universities it is common sense that an array of disciplines represents each of their parts of reality separately. For example, there are theoretical laws of economics that represent actual economic mechanisms; political theory that represents the way political power actually works and jurisprudence that represent the judicial reality. In this array of disciplines, the object of study of European ethnology is cultural values (traditions, discourses, ideologies, everyday life), which are also viewed as an indispensable part of an actual reality so separate that the study of it demands a discipline of its own. Each of these disciplines has the privilege of telling the others how its own part of the reality works. The statements from economists at the Institute of Fishing Economy are a brilliant example of how economic experts explain how economic laws

and mechanisms actually work in fisheries and in other industries. Although the explanations given to the politicians and administrative civil servants were only true for one sector of the fishing industry, namely the one consisting of venture capital, managers and wage earners, other ways of reasoning were at stake in the large fleet of share-organised fishing boats. Other quite distinct types of economic calculations, legal rights and political principles made up a mode of production of their own, differing principally from the capitalist mode that the economists' concepts describe. During our fieldwork we could observe, how the disciplinary discourse in the community of economists worked independently of and without any theoretical and cultural understanding of the economic praxis and discourse in the community of share fishermen, and vice versa. In a project like ours you thus have to carry out fieldwork not only in the local communities but among the economists as well. The complex of laws described by the economists represents a specific economic culture, a culture among other actual economic cultures in Europe. The mode of operation of the fleet of share organised fishing boats might be analysed as another kind of economic culture – or rather – as a distinct

economic, legal, political and ideological culture as a whole. Because the specific economic, legal and political relations of this whole are determining each other in a particular way, ethnologists may be able to describe coherently the way of life of share fishermen and their families as a specific cultural life-mode.

Using the word cultural, we underline that a way of life can only be theorized as a self-determined life-mode concept if it may be contrasted to the praxis of other ways of life in such a manner, that we can document ethnographically that people are making choices and acting in their lives in a way which – under the same circumstances – principally opposes the ways in which other people are making choices in their lives. Our field research documents that in the actual European fishing industry we find at least five structurally distinct ways to conceive of the good life, each of them appreciated by particular groups in the fishing communities. We have seen that even if the share fishermen are pushed out of their occupation most of them prefer to be replaced by wage-earners from abroad instead of taking a job in a trawler company as wage-earner.

However, a specific conceptual world like the one of share fishermen cannot be self-determined, if it is



“The Gold of Thorupstrand” is a group of youngsters processing the freshly caught plaice as extra high quality fish to the European market. The youngsters became the first secret weapon of the share fishing fleet in the battle for resources and life-modes. (Photo: Thomas Højrup)

not possible to reproduce the praxis of share fishing as a viable mode of existence. Capitalism is just as old as offshore fishery from European ports. The simple commodity mode of production has rarely existed alone in the fisheries. If share fishery has never been more than a transitional form, we cannot expect to be able to specify it as a self-determined life-mode concept. If, on the contrary, we are able to describe and demonstrate its reproduction and its necessary consequences ethnographically and specify its logical structure ethnologically, then we have to do with a life-mode concept of its own, which may be helpful to explore the complex processes and relations between the different voices and practices of the industry. In the following we will sketch briefly how it is possible to carry this out.

### **Hunter or Guildsman? From Enclosure of the Commons to the Formation of a Common Good**

Fishing in coastal waters throughout northern, western and southern Europe is based upon quite widely dispersed resources. Hence it is, in fact, difficult to obtain the advantages of large-scale fishing companies based upon wage earners and joint-stock capital, since the real efficiency in production in inshore fishing and the satisfaction of market demand for good quality, fresh fish calls for fishing units to be fast, flexible, knowledgeable, committed, suited to harvesting small concentrations of fish and able to switch between different species and different gears (Peak 1985, Randon 2007). Under these circumstances, fishing undertaken with a share fisherman fleet of small and medium-sized fisherman-owned boats equipped with state-of-the-art technology is the most competitive form of fishing for the fresh fish market (Trondsen & Vassdal 2005).<sup>7</sup> Because of that, confiscation of the common right to catch necessarily became the ultimate means to facilitate the capitalist alternative. This is the reason why it became necessary to carry out an *enclosure of the commons* at sea if the life-modes of venture capitalists, managers and wage earners were to be able to compete with the life-mode of self-employed share fishermen in the inshore fishing industry. The ne-

cessity of doing this was the first ethnographic litmus test to be passed concerning the formation of a genuine life-mode concept of self-employed share fishermen.

The process gave us the additional new insight, that there must be internal relations between the right of catch and the share system fishery. It means that the general (free) right of catch for citizens inside a domain of sovereignty has always had to be protected by the king or state power against the spread or retention of lineage-, feudal-, or property rights. In the Baltic area for instance, the land-based state forms were not dependent upon competent seamen, these kingdoms did not defend a free inshore right to catch, and the feudal rights dominated the inshore fisheries until recent times (Hasslöf 1949). In the last three years we have been witnesses to a comparable kind of culture historical “experiment” in the northern seas, where the enclosure of the maritime commons and removal of the old west Scandinavian right of catch proves to undermine the basis of share fishing. We witness when the new owner of a quota consider it as a property or investment of his own and do not find it reasonable any more to share the gross income from it with his crew. Crew members may get a wage for their time spent working on board, but in his view they have no right to profit from his property of quotas. This paves the way for the ethnological thesis, that it was the early medieval sea-borne warrior kings who in the process of centralizing the local fleets of Viking warships became dependant upon conscription of competent crews in the shore districts of their domains. To secure enough competent men to recruit, the sea kingdoms may have installed the maritime commons and the generalised right to catch and travel by boat for their coastal subjects in return for these peasant fishermen’s and seamen’s military service in times of war. We know this kind of sea defence system and its relation to fisheries from early modern sea powers like Great Britain (Fulton 1911), and it would be interesting to study the formation of the share system in fisheries and shipping at sea in the early medieval times from this perspective to explore if the thesis can be verified. The initial result of these ethno-

graphic observations and ethnological deliberations is that the reproduction of the share system necessarily involves the defence of the maritime commons and right of catch system at the political level.

In the middle of the actual enclosure process a warning sign appeared in the community of Thorupstrand: people became aware that an investor with a huge amount of capital had convinced one of the promising young skippers of limited means to embark on a joint venture, and the youth thus became the tool of a speculative venture capital investment project. The investor needed the skipper to be able to form a legal body with the right to buy TQs earning profits over time by selling the quotas. The skipper needed the investor to make it possible to obtain access to the expensive market of quotas. The next phase of this educational thriller took place when, one morning, the young man explained that they in partnership had purchased a large ship and moved all their quotas and fishery to a distant harbour. We witnessed how these events threatened maintaining the resources of the fishing community and facilitated the formation of a self awareness in the share fisher families. The new self-consciousness enabled them to make the decision to counter the enclosure process by establishing a cooperative quota company for the *common good* of all share fisherman families in Thorupstrand. They call it the Thorupstrand Guild of Inshore Fisheries. In contrast to individual profit seeking, the purpose of the guild is to ensure a future of enough common resources to live by as well as a sense of solidarity in Thorupstrand. As guildsmen they have managed to set up modes enabling them to distribute fishing rights to all the share fishermen, thus replacing the state as the guarantor and manager of that common good. This is the prerequisite of a share organised fishing fleet and community.

In this process we, as fieldworkers, came to combine different roles, as observers and participants, because we chose to make our knowledge of “the workings of the system” available to the local fishermen, helping them in initial contacts with both the ministry and the banks, with whom the fishermen found it very difficult to talk business and explore

legal questions. In applied research such balancing acts are always complicated and call for reflection. We chose to participate and register the whole process as an ethnographic laboratory, taking part in the direct discussions between people and observing of how people were actually choosing between different solutions, facing essential questions in their own life, and with necessary consequences for the life of their children and the future of their business and community (Højrup 2008).

This double role gave us unique insights into the way the fishermen – given the window of opportunity – were determined to take the opportunity to establish and expand the cooperative guild. Today, the guild is one of the larger quota companies in Danish sea fishery. This process became the next ethnographic litmus test concerning the liveability of a life-mode of self-employed share fishermen. The case of Thorupstrand is now an example of an alternative way of handling the new EU policies, and a strategy that is being discussed by fishermen in other parts of the EU. Our field study was, for example, referred to in the Central Association of Swedish West Coast Fishermen’s newspaper and picked up by the Swedish central administration, not to mention some of the most important fishing communities on the west coast of Sweden. Civil servants are considering how to introduce the enclosure process in Sweden and the share fishermen in some of the communities on the west coast are cooperating with the Thorupstrand Guild of Inshore Fisheries to be prepared for the upcoming struggle with the state apparatus, joint-stock fishing companies and venture capitalists.

In Norway, the new Sami minister of fishery, Helga Pedersen, interrupted the Icelandic-inspired enclosure process to give small- and medium scale share fishermen from the innumerable Norwegian coastal communities a breathing space in the struggle for recognition and survival. Danish and Swedish fishermen are also very aware of this struggle. Sami researchers and politicians have asked us to explore and discuss if it is possible to specify a life-mode concept for reindeer herding and a post-modern pastoral mode of production (Labba et al. 2004; Nordin

2007). Doing field work in Sami land we have had the opportunity to study how the systems of common grazing rights of reindeer herders and elk hunters are organised by the Sami village (the reindeer district), the Siida (the partnership of herders) and the Báikedoallu (the specific form of household), which is very interesting because the heritage and experiences from this life-mode are now interfering with the struggle and discussions about the tragedies and enclosure of the commons in fishery. Affected by what is happening, Sami politicians are also closely following the enclosure process in the Scandinavian fishing industry.

While our studies in Iceland have shown the most extreme variant of the enclosure of the commons, the Fishing Commissioner of the EU, Joe Borg, now takes an opposing view and talks fishery politics in

relation to local cultural traditions backed by experiences from his home country of Malta, the island-state at the other end of Europe that represents an extreme contrast to Iceland. Tourists often stand mesmerised by the Maltese fishermen landing their picturesque, though modern, well-equipped luzzu boats bringing fresh and exotic fish and shellfish directly to the restaurants where the tourists pay the gourmet prices indicative of an advanced experience economy (Randon 2007). From this point of view, the ongoing Nordic enclosure process and the industrialisation even of even inshore fishery looks misguided and old fashioned, a sentiment fishing families on holiday from Thorupstrand visiting Marsaxlokk in Malta, Barbate in Andalusia, Camogli in Liguria, Sete in Languedoc-Roussillon, or Hastings south of London (Peak 1985), fully share.



Share organised inshore fishing with colourful wooden boats is a core feature in the advanced experience economy of Malta. (Photo: Thomas Højrup)

## Concluding Remarks

We started out arguing for new research strategies in understanding the workings of EU policies on local and national levels, an approach that compares local reactions to general policy-making but also carries fieldwork to the centres, to the government agencies, investment firms, economic research institutes and the arena of national and EU politics. The world looks very different from such different life-mode perspectives. The case of new maritime resource management policies and the ways in which local fishermen try to handle them is but one example of such conflicts between centres and peripheries. There is a rich ethnographic field for further studies of EU policy-making. What we found especially interesting was the ways in which peripheries can start to cooperate and create a stronger voice in EU politics and economic development. In the special case of Thorupstrand we came to combine the role of ethnographic observers and participants in the fight to preserve and renew a local life-mode: share fishing. Such a kind of participant observation calls for constant self-reflection, but we believe it is a kind of applied project that will become more common in the ethnology of the future.

## Epilogue

*In a little house in Övre Soppero north of the polar circle in Northern Sweden, an old Sámi siida patriarch and activist told us that he would “go to the king”. Last time he went in a protest march heading for Brussels, he intended to walk all the way to Belgium – but took a break in Copenhagen. It was the first thing he told us after watching the daily Sami TV news. The politicians were about to steal the Sami’s old royally appointed rights to the pasture area of their reindeer, he said. The Swedish government was looking for a compromise with different interest groups, but in the real world a compromise meant that the Sami would lose their rights, he feared. This old, experienced Sami was going to speak out in public, appealing to the king. For his entire life he had fought to be free of politicians, fought for a legal confirmation of the old “tax land”, which prohibits farm owners from dividing up the common pasture land into pieces. At the age of 80, on his last*

*walk to Stockholm, he would be dressed in traditional garb and plead his case before the king. In the future his sons and sons’ sons would be fighting the same fight, but they would use other strategies, drawing on their knowledge of the political system, university research and UN policies. He was convinced that they would continue the struggle for recognition and the protection of a common good.*

*To keep abreast of the scope of popular and political activities, transnational debates, and flows of information characterising the actual cultural processes of Europe, European ethnology must adopt a contrasting comparative, coherent and consistent approach. The on-going struggle for recognition in the EU between the different states, distinct life-modes, and centres and peripheries is a remarkable field of such ethnographics of EU policies.*

## Notes

- 1 The field research was started in 1999 as a part of the project *Life-Modes and Welfare-States at a Crossroad?* In this project ten ethnologists, a historian, a sociologist and a psychologist worked together in a new kind of action-research paid by the research council of the Danish state. At the basis of Thomas Højrup’s earlier ethnological research ([www.lifemode.eu](http://www.lifemode.eu)) the Danish minister of fishery asked him to join a structure commission on the development of the fishing industry to be set down by the government in 2004. The research for the commission became supplemented by traveling, fieldwork and participation in several fishermen-driven movements at grassroots levels ([www.havbaade.dk](http://www.havbaade.dk).) The two authors of this article, Jesper Andresen and Thomas Højrup, have cooperated on this work, been members of several commissions within the theme, and cooperated on related teachings at the University of Copenhagen since 2005. The research project is ongoing and includes several European countries.
- 2 We translate the Danish terms *partsfisker* and *partsfiskeri* as “share fisherman” and “share fishing”, respectively, as they are, according to The Scottish Fishermen’s Federation, the equivalent expressions used by fishermen and the administration in Scotland and Great Britain. Share fishing, however, should not be confused with joint-stock fishing companies owned by capitalist investors who appropriate profit through their “shares” in a joint-stock company. Share fishing is a variant of the simple commodity mode of production. The principle of share fishing is illustrated in the Fact

box: *Share fishing in Thorupstrand*.

- 3 We use the term “formative process” here in the sense of the German term *Bildung* or *dannelse* in Danish.
- 4 New Regulation, the cunning name of the law of privatisation of the fishing quotas in Denmark, was negotiated in a late night session on 26 October 2005. Very consciously the politicians and civil servants – among whom we commit participant observation – in the public called it a new “regulation” and not a radical new regime.
- 5 The catch of some stocks decreased around 40 percent the first year after privatisation because investors’ saw buying quotas as most important, rather than being able to immediately catch or rent the right to catch the quota to fishermen without means.
- 6 The fish resources were not a common in the sense of Garrett Hardin (1968) but a means of the Danish sea power to maintain competent seamen for the navy. “Fishery is a very important ‘nursery’ of seamen to the fleet” (Fulton 1911: 58). Because of this, the state held on to the old issue of protecting and regulating the right of catch against “the tragedy of the commons”.
- 7 This is documented by prof. Torbjørn Trondsen and Terje Vassdal at The Norwegian College of Fishery Science, NCFS, Tromsø.

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