

Imaging the intangible: Fishing cultural heritage of NE Aegean and the challenge of recording for sustainable management.

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Abstract

Recent research on the fishing cultural heritage of NE Aegean, Greece, highlights the existence, there, of a complex, multifaceted and long-lived fishing culture that is currently under severe threat. Environmental, economic, demographic, political and other challenges transform fisheries and the livelihoods of the coastal fishing communities, with a pace and severity which is unprecedented.

The loss of material aspects of fishing cultural heritage, which is best exemplified by the destruction of the wooden fishing vessels, has attracted some public interest and raised awareness on the problem. Many aspects of the fishing cultural heritage, however, the ones that leave no clear, durable material traces, remain little known and appreciated, despite their value and significance.

The intangible fishing cultural heritage involves knowledge - biological, technical or other, embodied experiences, oral histories, gastronomy and the world-view of whole communities that are involved with fishing in one capacity or another. These ephemeral, intangible aspects of fishing cultural heritage have been transmitted from one generation to the next through apprenticeship and practice, evolving, changing and adapting over time. They are however particularly vulnerable to the breaking of this chain of transmission and learning.

This process of loss has already started and many elements of the intangible fishing cultural heritage are either lost as lived experience and knowledge, or are on the verge of being lost. The need to record, preserve, and make available these elements of intangible fishing cultural heritage to the wider community (scientific, professional, other) is urgent, and particularly challenging.

How can personal experience, memories, embodied knowledge (what Marcel Mauss defines as “habitus”) be captured, recorded and interpreted? Imaging technologies appear as an obvious answer to this, but their application faces a number of problems. Intangible cultural heritage may be known from images, from published texts, from narratives, or, they may still be alive as daily or occasional practice and experience. How can these disparate types of data be combined to create images of intangible fishing cultural heritage? How can these images be educational and informative, increasing at the same time the resilience adaptation potential of the described phenomena?

This presentation will discuss the challenges of imaging the intangible aspects of fishing cultural heritage as a means to record and sustainably manage it, drawing examples from the data collected as part of the PERICLES program (PERICLES-Preserving and Sustainably Governing Cultural Heritage and Landscapes in European Coastal and Maritime Regions, HORIZON 2020).