Chapter 16
Market Initiatives of Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean: Innovation in Support of Sustainable Blue Economy

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Abstract The study of traditional marine stakeholders, such as small-scale fishers in the Mediterranean, represents a site of a changing seascape. This is characterized by impeding factors of the past but also a possibility for improved future trajectories. Small-scale fisheries (SSF) have played a crucial socio-economic role in the Mediterranean for decades, and they continue to comprise over 80% of the fishing fleets and provide direct and indirect economic contributions to coastal communities. Their contribution to blue economy has so far been described as low, but this is largely due to a narrow conception both of benefits to be drawn from the development of maritime sectors (which have focused strongly on economic growth) and types of innovation that are capable of supporting the transition to sustainability (which have overlooked social innovation). This chapter outlines the multi-scale contributions of the small-scale fisheries and presents innovative approaches of the sector towards the markets, both of which support the inclusion of SSF in the blue economy sector. The chapter focuses on key instances of recently developed initiatives by the SSF across the Mediterranean with impacts on the supply chain and the marketing of their products. We argue that these market interventions contribute to the ultimate governance objectives, and challenge the conception of SSF as a non-innovative sector. We propose that a richer engagement with the blue economy paradigm supports the perception of the SSF as a prospective sector, to match the promotion of aquaculture among others.

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16.1 Introduction

Blue economy has emerged as a policy notion to refer to the use of seas and oceans as the Rio+20 summit in 2012 reaffirmed the commitment to a sustainable future of the planet at the highest level.[1] The policy notion has effectively raised the profile of the marine and maritime space in global, regional and sub-regional contexts to an unprecedented level, but it has not been not without contestation. The development of “blue” visions of futures has been particularly problematic for taking place without the participation of, and careful attention to the needs of coastal communities that depend on and live within these stretches of space (Barbesgaard 2018); for lacking clarity of terms and supporting competing discourses (Silver et al. 2015; Keen et al. 2018; Penca 2019a) and for promoting wrong targets (Hadjimichael 2018; TBTI 2019). The notion of blue economy has managed to direct the political and public discourse and political action particularly to those sectors that bring new opportunities for investment and hold a potential for future development, such as marine renewable energy, coastal and cruise tourism, maritime transport, marine biotechnology and aquaculture. In policy reports, fisheries and particularly small-scale fisheries were for a long time not perceived as a prospective blue economy sector.

Small-scale fisheries (SSFs) constitute one of the sectors that are impacted by the dual nature of the policy notion of blue economy as both an opportunity and a threat for their empowerment. Small-scale fishers across the world have been key players in the marine socio-economic realm providing direct contributions to coastal communities in terms of local economies, nutrition and their identity, as well as indirectly to tourism. Various studies have highlighted the invisibility of SSFs in the blue economy discussions. For instance, SSF were not mentioned in any of the EU’s documents related to blue economy (Stobberup et al. 2017). Arguments have thus been made for SSF to secure their space in the marine realm globally (Cohen et al. 2019), with some going as far as replacing the rhetoric in the institutionalization of policies governing the marine space with new concepts, such as ‘blue justice’ (TBTI 2019), ‘blue commons’ (Standing 2019) and ‘blue degrowth’ (Hadjimichael 2018). Despite being key, and probably the pioneer users of the sea, SSFs remain the missing sector in the discussions surrounding the vision of blue economy and how it ought to shape the future of the marine resource use.

Convincing appeals have been made to consider SSF within the promulgation of policies, owing to the fact that the features of SSF are much more compatible with a blue economy and sustainable fisheries than industrial fisheries (Pauly 2018; Said and MacMillan 2020). The case for including the SSF sector in blue economy,

[1] Early policy documents and scholarly literature used the term ‘blue growth’ alongside ‘blue economy’, but this has gradually become fully replaced by ‘blue economy’, In 2021 the EU, an early advocate of the term ‘blue growth’ settled for ‘sustainable blue economy’ (EC 2021). This chapter intentionally avoids the discussion over the meaning of each and implied preference for one over the other. Instead, it uses the notion of blue economy as a policy paradigm that has a policy and strategic, but no legal, nature.

rather than pushing it outside, is rooted in their positive social impacts of the enhanced economic wealth and the avoidance of environmental risks (Cohen et al. 2019). According to this view, SSF can effectively be considered as contributing to blue economy insofar as they contribute, on a sectoral level, to achieving some other sustainability targets, such as biodiversity conservation, reduction of poverty, gender equality and climate resilience. SSF are aligned with the wider transformation required to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and sustainability (Said and Chuenpagdee 2019). One aspect from within the sector of SSF that has so far not yet been put to the focus as contributing to blue economy, is the SSFs dynamic and innovative adjustment to markets as a form of social innovation and building of resilience.

In this chapter, we argue that in addition to SSF's close alignment with sustainability, SSF have recently demonstrated a level of innovation in using markets, providing new prospects and jobs. We highlight the rise of tangible actions in different EU and some non-EU Mediterranean countries, related to organization of the supply chain of SSF as a means of overcoming the multiple structural challenges faced by the SSF. By taking into account these innovative activities in support of sustainability, we argue, the sector is well placed to be acknowledged as a driver of the sustainability transition.

We focus on the Mediterranean, but research has shown that the innovative marketing and selling activities by SSF are not unique to this region; their presence as means of resistance to mainstream monopolized markets has been observed in other parts of the world with relatively strong institutions (Stoll et al. 2015; Witter and Stoll 2017; Penca 2019b; Prosperia et al. 2019; Duggan et al. 2020). The Mediterranean initiatives have generated interest for the variety of activities, taking place against an alarming state of Mediterranean fisheries as well as the strong tradition of fishing and seafood consumption (Penca et al. 2021; Gómez and Maynou 2021). In this chapter, we focus on some instances of innovative marketing initiatives from across the Mediterranean, as gathered through a mapping exercise. We, present these as specific tangible opportunities for and by SSF in the context of the policy paradigm of blue economy. While these market activities have been overlooked in the reports of the further potential of the blue economy by the policymakers, they firmly position SSF within the ambit of a sustainable, job-generating and innovative economy of the future. As such, the described market initiatives defy the negative outlooks for SSF in the past decades and hold promise in the context of the future policy opportunities. We consider these market innovations underpinning community economies as driving forces for the recognition of the SSF within the core of future maritime strategies.

The chapter is structured as follows. By way of background, in Sect. 16.2, the chapter briefly outlines the history of the SSF's struggle for participation in the governance of the seas, characterised by the lack of voice by SSF in both decisions over the use of the sea and those impacting the markets of fishing resources, due to which the SSF have been pushed to the periphery. This overview of the past allows us to appreciate the recent signals of a more proactive intervention by SSF in markets and their supply chains. These are described in Sect. 16.3, which aims at highlighting the diversity of market initiatives, rather than their comprehensive overview. Section 16.4 highlights value of the SSF market activities first in the context of resilience and innovation, as two values underpinning blue economy, and secondly, as supportive of the policy impulses that are shaping the future of ocean governance to argue for their greater support than received so far.

16.2 Struggling to Be 'There': Historical Invisibility of SSF in Policies and Markets

Systemic marginalization of SSF has impacted on the specific resilience strategies. Although fishing in the Mediterranean was set off through the effort of small vessels with their passive gear, this sector became increasingly lost with the industrialized global development of the fishing sector. Driven by public policies aimed at economic efficiency, the growth of the large-scale sector came at a cost for the SSF and their role in the production of fish catches, ultimately impacting on their relative invisibility in the markets. While this is a global trend, it is particularly visible in the Mediterranean. Here, SSF fleet comprises 80% of the fleet and SSF account for 74% of employment in fisheries, but lands only 20% of the total landings (FAO 2018), making SSF thus unable to be the main players in the seafood markets. While facing market competition by both the large-scale and aquaculture productions, SSF – in the Mediterranean as much as elsewhere – have also been unable to differentiate their products and make them more visible. To a large extent this is contingent on the policies that made no effort to treat SSF as any different, or worthy of special measures and approaches. This section provides a brief overview of the unfavourable situation for SSF at two levels: (inter)governmental policies and strategies on the one hand, and the recognition on the markets on the other. Jointly, these seemingly independent spheres reflect the 'blindness' of the policy-makers to the significance and distinctiveness of the needs and complexities of small-scale fisheries.

16.2.1 The Policy Context

Over most of the history of fisheries management, and predominantly commencing in the post-war period, public policies (national and international) have been favouring large-scale fleets and not paying much attention to the small-scale sector (Chuenpagdee and Jentoft 2018). Through much of the twentieth century, globally SSF struggled to be included in the decisions about management approaches, funding and access to resource (vis-à-vis larger fleet, but also other users of the sea) (Griffiths et al. 2007; Carpenter et al. 2016). The emergence of the rift between the SSF and industrial fishing can be related to the governments' perception that trawlers are associated with 'efficient fishing', and a subsequent heavy support offered to them. Large-scale fleet became heavily supported by subsidies leading to overinvestment and overfishing (Schuhbauer et al. 2017; Jacquet and Pauly 2009). This led to a rapid growth in Mediterranean fishing fleet and a proliferation of trawlers by mid-twentieth century that enabled many more vessels to fish further offshore and in deeper waters (Pauly, 2018). In comparison with the much more dispersed small-scale sector, the large-scale fleet is considered as easier to monitor, negotiate with and extract data from. In addition, fishery policies and management systems were built on data that only large fisheries were required to provide (Kolding et al. 2014). In turn, also research has largely focused on industrial fishing (Smith and Bassurto 2019).

Marginalization and resilience characterise the Mediterranean SSF fleet. Here, SSF have been historically very important both in terms of social contribution, catches and economic value, but have undergone a serious decline (Guyader 2008). Nevertheless, SSF still account for the greatest part of the fleet (circa 80%) in the region and more than half of the total workers employed in the sector, albeit with great variety across the region (FAO 2019).[2] As we see, multiple interrelated drivers of the structural support for a certain type of fishing and policy sequence set a long-lasting focus on industrial fishing, and a concomitant disregard towards the needs and challenges of SSF. Apart from the access to the resources, SSF have been heavily affected by other disenabling factors of environmental and governance nature. Competition for space from the spread of aquaculture, marine tourism, marine protected areas and maritime transport; threatened material base due to expanding pollution from land and sea, overexploitation and unsustainable fishing practices; hazardous and uncertain working conditions of the fishers, irregularity and seasonality of their income and low returns to their fishing are all factors that inhibit the progress of SSF (FAO 2019). As a result of these challenges, the SSF is largely unattractive to the young generation and is indeed not being rejuvenated.

The international policy framework has only recently given a new hope for the SSF. This came in the form of the adoption of Voluntary Guidelines on Small Scale Fisheries in 2014 and the SDGs in 2015, with a specific target on SSFs. On the Mediterranean regional level, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean is set to strengthen and support sustainable small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean region through a regional plan of action (RPOA), which was signed in 2018. This aims at setting the scene for better management of small-scale fisheries in the next ten years and beyond. Also, the EU seeks to make progress towards more socially, environmentally and economically sustainable fish stocks, and better integration of SSF, as stated in the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) (Regulation 1380/2013). Indeed, the criticism of an overly large EU fishing fleet, harmful subsidies and a lack of focus on ecosystem management have been the drivers of the reforms of the CFP (1992, 2002 and 2013). The most recent CFP reform contains the EU's declaratory statement in support of SSF ("the CFP

[2] In the EU alone, the SSF represent 80% of the fleet, and provide for around 60% of jobs but only 23% of landings (EC 2019).

should contribute to increased productivity, to a fair standard of living for the fisheries sector including small-scale fisheries") (Art 2.5(f) of Regulation 1390/2013). However, in practice, this still remains to result in any practical impact on SSF and to challenge the status quo (Said et al. 2020).

There are however some challenges to the full consolidation of a more positive policy towards SSF. In the EU, the SSF have not been brought into its blue economy discussions, previously dubbed as 'blue growth' (EC 2012). It has been argued that fisheries had not been considered because over 80% of the assessed stocks are overexploited and thus growth would simply exacerbate the worrying situation of the stocks (Da-Rocha et al. 2019). The EU's Blue Growth Strategy, which focused on economic benefits, rather than social and environmental aspects, highlighted the following priority sectors with a high potential for job creation and research and development: aquaculture, coastal tourism, marine biotechnology, ocean energy and seabed mining (EC 2012). The favouring of these sectors has implied a loss of attention with regards to some other prospective sectors, such as SSF (Said and Macmillan 2020). Also the subsequent strategy by the EU, issued in 2021 titled Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future and announcing a more holistic approach to the blue economy does not single out the SSF sector as in need of specific attention from within the fisheries and sustainable food systems (EC 2021). Reference as: European Commisssion (EC) Communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU: Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future. COM/2021/240 final. 17.5.2021.

16.2.2 The Market Context

Indirectly, markets have borne the impact of public policies that have, through laws, regulations and market interventions, "mainly focused on increasing productivity and facilitating the development of capital-intensive fisheries with larger and more productive vessels" (Pascual et al. 2019). They have done little to offset the heavy burden of globalised seafood markets onto local markets using traditional market systems (Gomez and Maynou 2021). A complex interplay of factors contributes to a situation of the fisheries markets supporting neither socio-economic well-being of the fishers nor the environmental sustainability. The intricate relationship between various pressures has been detailed in in-depth studies (Ertör et al. 2020; Penca et al. 2021; Gomez and Maynou 2021). In essence, small scale fishers suffer from heavy pressures imposed by globalised value chains, lack of transparency and traceability of these value chains, rigid consumer demand, and poor entrepreneurial attitude of most of fishers. In most parts, SSFs are deeply entrenched into the existing models to ensure everyday survival, which prevents them from transforming the existing socially exploitative and environmentally unsustainable marketing patterns.

Part and parcel of the predominant governance paradigm that pushes SSFs out of, rather than into centre stage, is the lack of systematic measures for ensuring visibility of SSF's products in the markets and for ensuring organisational aspects of their value chains. From a perspective of a market participant, the SSF product cannot be formally distinguished from the catch of the industrial fleets and aquaculture, and at best it can be distinguished informally. When placed on the market, SSF-sourced species sit next to catches sourced by other fleets, and their distinction can only be deciphered by specific knowledge that a consumer could potentially hold.

The current markets for seafood are characterised by the overall blurring between the industrial, farmed, imported and even illegal products. The products by SSF are hardly explicitly distinguished from products heavily implicated in international trade. Symptomatic of the globalised markets is the wide presence of farmed Norwegian salmon or imported tuna across coastal towns of the Mediterranean, while the products caught in these markets are often traded somewhere else to receive a better price. With the powerful marketing that salmon receives, including regular presence and campaigns about its health benefits as well as due to the ease of its preparation, salmon has become a pervasive species replacing the traditional fish catches of local communities. Ironically, such campaigns are also able to water down the actual environmental and health concerns including those associated with viruses and eutrophication (Taranger et al. 2015). A significant challenge lies in ensuring transparency of the products, enforcement and consumers' awareness. Catch of the same species that enter the market from abroad is equalled to the domestic catch without consumers necessarily noticing it. An example which the authors came across whilst conducting research is that of swordfish from the Pacific sold as local in the Mediterranean regions, as well as common sea bream from Oman.

The mandatory product labelling rules, to the extent they are even required in different countries beyond the EU, do not mandate a sufficient differentiation either (Penca 2020). The EU's legal framework for labelling of seafood, for instance, had the ambition of providing a high level of protection to the consumer (EP 2011). However, while the EU regulations[3] require the statement of the fishing gear that was used and the origin of the product, it does not communicate the information in a way that allows the consumer to gain information about the exact provenance and freshness of the product (Penca 2020), to which also consumers have expressed complaints (Eurobarometer 2018). Thus, the EU's rules do not allow the consumer to infer whether a product was fished by a small-scale fisher, or instead an industrial fishing boat. In addition, the labelling system further suffers from a very low transparency of the supply chains and low compliance, where products are mislabelled or the mandatory labelling is missing altogether (Helyar et al. 2014; Esposito and Meloni 2017). The role of mandatory labelling is thus marginal in better communication about the product to the consumer.

One possibility for distinguishing the products in the seafood markets was private certification. Building on the experience from the forestry sector, seafood certification developed during the 1990 and proliferated in the form of various certifications schemes (such as Friend of the sea, Dolphin-free tuna, or the largest of

[3] European Commission (n/a), A pocket guide to the EU's new fish and aquaculture consumer labels, available at https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/docs/body/eu-new-fish-and-aquaculture-consumer-labels-pocket-guide_en.pdf

all, the Marine Stewardship Council -MSC) (Gulbrandsen 2009; Auld and Cashore 2013). However, certification schemes developed as a seeming solution to failed state governance and sluggish pace of change, primarily to the issue of overfishing. Conceptually, they do not respond to the demands of SSFs (Ponte 2012; Hadjimichael and Hegland 2016; Penca 2019b). They focus primarily on environmental attributes of the products and the environmental context of the catch. While in some cases those environmental indicators overlap with the SSF product, this is not always the case. While the currently dominant seafood certification scheme on the market, MSC, is not designed against the SSF, in practice SSF and fisheries from developing countries of the Global South find considerable obstacles to attain a label, mostly due to its costs to the participating fishers (Duggan and Kochen 2016). The certification schemes' focus on single-species is another significant challenge in the Mediterranean context, as Mediterranean small-scale fisheries mostly target mixed fisheries. The fact that certification process is performed in relation to the species in a particular fishery, rather than the fisher or community, is fundamentally at odds with the nature of SSF. The very low number of MSC-certified fisheries in the Mediterranean reflect the tension between the design of MSC (or any other certification scheme) and the needs of the Mediterranean SSF. Indeed, the MSC has itself acknowledged the difficulties of engaging the SSF and their relative underperformance, and as a consequence has devoted special attention to facilitating the SSF in the pre-certification phase (MSC 2019).

A considerably more meaningful response to the non-distinctiveness in the market have been various actions of collectivisation and cooperation between SSF. Triggered by the consumers' emergent interest for sustainably sourced seafood (McClenachan et al. 2016) and by the governance indication of the need to progress on improving the access of SSF to markets (SDG14b), a number of dissimilar activities relating to branding, marketing and retailing of SSF products have been observed in various parts of the world and have been dubbed alternative seafood marketing programmes (Witter and Stoll 2017; Duggan et al. 2020; Gomez and Maynou 2021) and market empowerment tactics (Penca 2019b). In these, SSF have started innovating in supply chains and the marketing of their products, as well as in cooperating within themselves more closely, with the view of gaining a stronger position in the market. Individually and collectively, these activities are believed to have brought about and made visible the benefits to SSF by increasing profit-taking, consumers choice and building a stronger community identity (Stoll et al. 2015; Duggan et al. 2020), as well as contributed to the empowering of the SSF as a stakeholder in policy-making (Penca 2019b).

16.3 Mediterranean SSF Innovations in Markets

The Mediterranean towns and regions have been part of the trend of the rise of novel approaches to marketing and selling the product by SSF. In this section, we identify such activities as tools by SSF to counter the past negative policy trends affecting

SSF, including the impact of export markets on the prices of their local produce, their inability to access quotas, and other challenges that have watered down their resilience, such as competition from recreational fisheries (Said et al. 2018) and reduced fishing grounds due to coastal development (Said et al. 2017). In this section, we offer a brief account of the various strategies that have been set off to differentiate the SSF seafood from the rest of the market, seek to retain the value in the SSF sector or add value to their product. In line with the prior studies on SSF marketing initiatives (Verhaegen and Van Huylenbroeck 2001; Kitts and Edwards 2003; Devaux et al. 2009; Barham and Chitemi 2009; Kaganzi et al. 2009; Foley and McCay 2014; Pascual-Fernández et al. 2019; Penca 2019a; Duggan et al. 2020), our account highlights the range of activities across the Mediterranean region, set off by the small-scale fishers. We prioritise the breadth of the initiatives over a more granular analysis of an individual case, precisely to highlight the diversity of the activities in the movement and its uncoordinated materialisation. We give but some examples of various types of such initiatives, rather than a comprehensive account of them.

To begin with, the Mediterranean small-scale fishers are increasingly becoming engaged in awareness-raising and promotional activities that seek to showcase the quality of SSF products and highlight the specificities of their catch. These are probably the most widespread of the approaches to alternative marketing and empowerment. The ultimate objective of these activities is widening the SSF markets and valorisation of SSF products. Awareness-raising can be done through compiling and distributing consumer information about the value of SSF, including by concrete consumer guides as to what fish to eat in a certain area and which not. QuickFish Guide by Fish4tomorrow NGO in Malta provides an example of surveying commonly purchased species, evaluating their sustainability and providing a recommendation on their purchase. A more proactive approach to promotion and awareness raising is typically run in form of food shows, festivals, classes and similar gastronomic events that introduce new types of SSF products or facilitate their preparation, and thus contribute to their popularity. These activities can be implemented either on an ongoing basis by a local community or association of fishermen, but are often kicked-off by a publicly-funded project. A few examples of such campaigns are the Cephs & Chefs project working on promoting the use of cephalopods (squid, octopus, cuttlefish) in the Atlantic area; the summer festival called Barche aperte ("Open boats") run in a coastal town of Caorle in the Veneto region, Italy that welcomes people to fishing boats and allows them to purchase their fish directly from fishermen; the Mediterranean Culinary Academy in Malta that trains chefs in preparation of local seafood according to old and forgotten traditions; or open-air cooking shows by an association Pescados con Arte in Cartagena, Spain.

Another popular approach to improving the position of small-scale fishers is the setting-up of short supply chains. The idea in these activities is to either improve the distribution or the valorisation of local catch by SSF by involving as few middlemen as possible. Short supply chains encompass direct sales at local markets or individual stands that are characteristic of many towns across the Mediterranean. Some initiatives involve the use of agreements between SSF and restaurants or hotels on the purchase of the 'catch of the day'. For example, some high-end hotels in Istria, Croatia, have secured the purchase of the locally caught Norway lobster. In Slovenia, as in some other countries, fishers are allowed to sell seafood directly from the boat up to a certain amount – in this case up to 50 kg daily. Direct sales by the fishers reduce the middleman costs, securing higher profit margins from their catches. But short supply chains do not necessarily result in less kilometres travelled. Fresh seafood can be sent to where the expected value is higher. Quite often, urban centres provide a better selling point because of the higher purchasing power. Thus, seafood caught by small-scale fishers from the Gulf of Lion in France is sent over 700 km away to Paris to supply the high-end restaurants with quality fish.

Efforts in ensuing short supply chains have in recent years also made use of technology to expand their customer base, improve logistics and valorise the product. In many cases, the use of technology allows the fishers to reach new customers, for instance younger and more urban generations that would otherwise have chosen a competing product (farmed, imported or processed). Some online markets specialise in SSF products, typically informing the consumers of the daily catch of the artisanal fisher through an online platform or communication system, sometimes even before the landing. The project Fresh Fish Alert taps into the Sicilian market and scales up the practice of direct communication. In many other places, the predominant form being used to reach the customers is a simple text message with an indication of the catch of the day.

A special type of a short supply chain are fish boxes (fish baskets). Originating from North America, in recent years they have made their way to the Southern parts of Europe. They operate in a number of countries, for instance in Italy under the name FishBox, in Portugal as Cabaz do Peixe or in Gökova Bay in Turkey. This model is particularly appropriate for taking into account the Mediterranean characteristics of a large variety of species and a high degree of unpredictability of the catch. In a typical arrangement, the consumer agrees to receiving a certain weight, rather than the exact type of seafood and thus accepts an element of surprise as to what to receive. The fish basket system usually involves communal distribution at an agreed place (e.g. a public square, school etc.), but a personalised delivery at the customers' door has also been observed.

A distinct method of branding of the SSF product is the creation of individual labels testifying that products have been caught by SSF. SSF labels are mostly of very recent origin and many of them are only developing their recognition. One of the better-known ones is a label Golion which marks the products that have been caught by SSF in the Gulf of Lion, France and mostly sold to restaurants in Paris and some other big cities. At the national level, the idea of a nation-wide French label for SSF products has been considered in detail (Petit Peche) but not yet applied. There is considerable interest by consumers for a similar national label to be implemented also in other countries (Zander and Feucht 2018: 40). In Tunisia, Association Blue Club Artisanal has put in place a system, whereby artisanal Tunisian fishermen are providing identifiable, traceable and quality-controlled SSF products to certified restaurants, including to Sicily, Italy. Such a collaboration across national jurisdictions is a very rare example of the transboundary initiative.

Despite the close proximity of borders in the Mediterranean and straddling fish stocks as well as cross-border fish trade, the initiatives have been mostly targeting the customers of the same region or country at most. There had been very little consideration of transnational efforts towards the joint objective. The only form of cooperation in SSF product branding involving multiple countries can be found in the efforts led by the Slow Food Foundation, through its Slow Fish arm. Slow Fish operates a network of SSF across the world and is gaining popularity in the Mediterranean. Its activities include a logo that small-scale fishers, who are concurring to the principles of the movement, can use on their processed (not fresh) products. The Slow Fish movement subscribes to the slogan of "good, clean and fair fish" that demonstrates a commitment to the values of social benefit, low environmental impact and quality product. Slow Food also labels restaurants that subscribe to this vision and offer SSF products. As such, it represents a rare instance of an international scaling-up of the SSF efforts.

The most structural response to the fragile socio-economic situation facing SSF is the strengthening of SSFs organisation in order to address the fishery marketing processes alongside fishery management processes. Activities can take the form of establishing cooperatives to establishing Producer organization (PO), as a body with a particular capacity to lead to strengthening the participating SSF representation as well as their organizational and governance capacity, established under EU fishery laws (Cazalet and O'Riordan 2020). Two examples of strengthened SSF's representation are the establishment of the PO of artisanal fishers in Lonja de Conil from Spain and a proposal for a PO submitted by the Golion Economic Interest Group from France.

16.4 Significance of SSF Initiatives: Resilience and Innovation

Initiated and run either by small-scale fishers or other stakeholders on their behalf, SSF marketing activities have been borne to resist the status quo for SSF. A clear feature that emerges from an overview of initiatives is that all the initiatives are local or, at best, regional in nature. Interestingly, the initiatives do not show any ambition of expanding geographically, responding instead to highly local-specific functioning of the markets. While being limited in scope and character; the initiatives aspire to build bridges among themselves only informally at best, and mostly do not reference one another or coordinate among them. Their resistance to globalised and largely similar value chains seems to be demonstrated precisely by insisting on their limited, local outreach. Two sets of qualities related to SSF emerge from observing the initiatives: resilience and innovation on the one hand, and their contribution to sustainability.

16.4.1 Recognizing Resilience and Innovation

The initiatives were triggered by different reasons and pursued different tactics. Some sought to secure a market for their high-quality product and established a delivery to upscale markets, even if these were located further away. Others focus on a local distribution of common and less-valued species. In so far as they have responded to different needs, also their impact on the fishers and the consumers varies. Yet, what they jointly demonstrate is the underlying rationale of the SSF attempting to differentiate their product in the seafood markets through branding, marketing or retailing. The development of distinct channels of recognition or sale is a tool for resistance to market competition from large-scale fishery products, foreign imports, and aquaculture products. With the regulatory frame on labelling as well as distribution not conducive to differentiating the SSF products (consumers in the value chain were not able to trace the product or to differentiate between large and small scale fishers), small-scale fishers were subjected to competition in globalised trade conditions. The initiatives deployed improvements in infrastructure (ice carrying, distribution logistics), marketing (use of apps, development of new channels of sale) or organisation (clustering the SSF fishers to jointly present their product) in order to position SSF as suppliers of a distinct, high-quality product.

By recognizing the role that small-scale fishers have had in developing bottom-up marketing strategies within different contexts, a clearer link emerges between the small-scale fishers' ability to valorise their products and their contribution to the blue economy strategy at the Mediterranean level. The initiatives defeat the portrayal of the fishers as passive actors, lacking the ability to change the way livelihoods are earned. Instead, they speak of a proactive attitude in resisting the challenges related to resource access in regulated environments (in the EU, these are even highly regulated) and to change the course of action, by improving the visibility of SSF products, their marketing or the organisation of the value chain. In this respect, the initiatives demonstrate once again an inherent resilience of SSF and their long-term viability (Nayak and Berkes 2019).

These efforts should be recognised as social innovation, a segment of innovation as a central concept of the notion of blue economy, alongside jobs (Bluemed 2018; OECD 2019; EC 2021). Innovation in this case is not about instituting new kinds of material production (or technological breakthroughs in key technologies) – these are difficult to influence as the fish is fixed natural resource. Instead, innovation related to SSF lies in tackling challenges (of the organisation of the market, changing consumer preferences etc.) with new immaterial approaches to them, such as IT selling tools, marketing strategies or preparing the product in a way to better correspond to consumers' needs. SSFs marketing approaches often combine the agentic factor (entrepreneurial attitude) with structuralist factors (aiming to change the fishers' collectives and ways in which they organise) (Cajaiba-Santana 2014). By coming closer to the consumer's interests and enhancing sustainability, they accrue the value to society as a whole rather than only its own sector (Phills et al. 2008). Social innovation has been largely overlooked by the key policy documents on blue economy that have focussed on science and technology to propel economic growth. The dominant framing of innovation as technological change is restrictive to maritime sectors with inherent but unexplored capacities to challenge systemic structures for social progress. As a consequence, these are pushed out from policy attention and priorities. However, in the case of SSF, social innovation contributes to the establishment of a customer base, widening of the outreach and optimisation of the supply chain, and ultimately a better profitability and viability of the sector. In turn, improving profitability in the markets can set off a positive upward spiral of the formalization of the fisher profession in the sector, their improved welfare and finally also improved fisheries management (FAO 2019). The value of market initiatives in triggering the dynamic change should be recognised.

16.4.2 Transitioning to Sustainability

Not only have the market initiatives by SSF provided a way for SSF to sidestep the legislative and policy obstacles that they have been facing (from struggles to ensure fishing opportunities to damages from unfair competition by subsidized industrial fishing), they are a promising tool to transform governance structures because they embody a synergistic sustainability practice at the intersection of environmental, economic and social objectives.

The sustainability-centred approach offers a considerably richer perception of SSF and their role in the blue economy. It highlights that growth in fisheries can be constituted in terms other than growth in landed catches, such as an increased value of the same volume of fish, accomplished for instance through improved marketing and retailing. It draws attention to the social implications of those catches on fishers and coastal communities. Moreover, it brings to light that SSF and their market initiatives are capable of a number of positive synergies with other maritime activities (Stobberup et al. 2017).

Indeed, such a holistic consideration of SSFs is more in line with the FAO interpretation of blue economy, which is inclusive of SSF and has been used to boost messages of sustainability and to further promote the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (adopted in 1995) as well as other relevant instruments, including the Voluntary Guidelines on Small Scale Fisheries (FAO 2014). The same view is found in the vision of ocean-based sustainable economy, put forth by the Ministerial declaration of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which recognises the importance of building a more cohesive and sustainable Euro-Mediterranean region. The understanding of blue economy in the Euro-Mediterranean has the ambition to have a positive distributional effect and reduce disparities (Penca 2019a) and explicitly recognises the role of fisheries as a sector and the work done by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean in that regard (UfM 2015). Finally, a consultation process at the national levels in 9 EU and non-EU member countries that looked at ways to develop a healthier, productive, resilient, better known and valued Mediterranean Sea has confirmed that SSF have a role to play in that vision (Bluemed 2018).

The SSF market initiatives are consistent with key policy documents to which the states in the Mediterranean have committed. The first among these is the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (Art 1) and the Mediterranean ten-year RPOA, signed in 2018 by the contracting parties of the GFCM encompassing both EU and non-EU countries. The RPOA calls for increased focus on the key elements for SSFs value chain. In that context, RPOA encourages new ventures for SSF products, such as the creation of cooperatives, producer organizations or other organizations. The plan also calls for improvements in the profitability and viability of SSF in so far as these are environmentally sustainable, through increased quality and traceability. These provisions of the RPOA support the implementation of a system that differentiates SSF products at the market level and promotes their visibility to consumers. This would include enhancing the link between harvesters and consumers through direct sales and awareness-raising campaigns of SSFs catches, especially of an underutilized nature. Finally, the RPOA also promotes the role of certification and branded labels to increase the visibility of small-scale fisheries catches.

Another key document is the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, adopted in 2014, by the FAO Committee on Fisheries. The SSF Guidelines have specific segments on the role of the markets for SSF and means through which market access can be enhanced for SSF. For example, the SSF Guidelines state that countries "should foster, provide and enable investments in appropriate infrastructures, organizational structures and capacity development to support the small-scale fisheries post-harvest subsector in producing good quality and safe fish and fishery products, for both export and domestic markets, in a responsible and sustainable manner". This speaks of the need of increased investment in capacity building, also to strengthen the organizational capacity of fishing communities to become better involved in the marketing of their products. In the context of the Mediterranean, this could imply capacity-building for fishing communities to establish marketing plans and strategies, or if no organizations are in place, to establish groups or associations to improve the role that SSF play in the markets.

The overarching roadmap to take into account sustainability as a more long-term, overarching and legal norm (Bosselman 2017) are Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015. Having been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, the SDGs enjoy a high level of international consensus and commitment. SDGs contain specific targets on SSF (SDG 14.b), which aims at "provid[ing] access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets". In this respect, progress is planned with regards to "application of effective legal/regulatory/policy/institutional framework, which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries." Moreover, the empowerment of the SSF sector contributes to a number of other SDGs apart from the ocean-focused one (14), notably the eradication of hunger and malnutrition, and increase of small-scale producers and sustainable food production (Targets 2.1–2.4.), promotion of sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products (Target 8.9), promotion of gender equality

(Targets 5A and 5C) (Said and Chuenpagdee 2019). In the era of increased policy convergence, where only the causes that are embedded within (a few) broader goals can survive, SSF activities through markets need to be recognised for the contributions they are making to other policy agendas.

Finally, SSF initiatives are conducive to the direction of the required sustainability transition in the domain of food systems. As food systems are subjected to pressures from increased population as well as more urbanised population, a greater focus on localising food production, and re-establishing the linkages between urban centres and their rural surroundings has been suggested (Jennings et al. 2015; SAPEA 2020). A closer re-connection between urban and rural areas, through more effective provision of ecosystem services, shorter food supply chains and encouraging regional food businesses, are believed to deliver more sustainable ecologic and socio-economic returns (Jennings et al. 2015) and are experiencing a particular renaissance after the Covid-19 pandemic (Vittuari et al. 2021). Additionally, they are sought after by the rise of conscientious consumers (Fiorino et al. 2018) and their preference for non-market values, including to creating a conscious food governance (Witter and Stoll 2017). In that context, SSF market initiatives contribute a concrete practice to demonstrating that transformative change is possible and that it can emerge from bottom-up.

16.5 Conclusion

Reflecting the reality of many other parts of the world, SSFs of the Mediterranean demonstrate the benefits that are daily drawn from marine resources, and play the role as their custodians. However, small-scale fishers of the Mediterranean have continually struggled over a number of issues of ocean governance, including disadvantaged access to fish resources, competition for space and a diminishing material base. Additionally, their products have been systematically under-appreciated by the consumers. The rise of the policy rhetoric of blue growth provided yet another episode in that struggle, as it has downplayed the contribution of SSF in future visions of the seas.

In this chapter, we deployed the rhetoric of blue economy not as inhibiting the visibility and support to the SSF practices and interests, but as enabling the value of innovative practices by SSF and their resilience. We offered to acknowledge the existing endogenous capacities by small-scale fishers to innovate through the organisation of small-scale fishers, the operation of their value chains and marketing of their products as concrete means to valorise their products, create jobs and improve socio-economic growth, while having a low impact on the environment. These values are in line with the key motivations underlying the blue economy notion, understood originally as “the final frontier for humanity and its quest for sustainable development” (n/a 2014) and supporting sustainable development and cohesion of the Mediterranean (UfM 2015). As such, we suggest to consider the blue economy policy paradigm, especially when it is embedded in the overarching goal of sustainability, as conducive to the needed policy transformations and a more prosperous future of the SSF.

The conceptual re-framing of the blue economy from a threat on SSF to an opportunity allows us to depart from the complaints over the lack of attention of existing policy priorities on the SSF and instead highlight concrete actions and activities by SSF that are both innovative and sustainable. By recognising the recent SSF market initiatives as valuable, we can also identify the points of entry for adequate governance interventions. For such initiatives to scale-up and multiply, active engagement is needed in form of stimulating networking, learning and capacity building. Targeted policy measures (public campaigns for promotion and valorisation of localised, artisanal and small-scale production, tax incentivisation, increase in funding dedicated to starting-up and scaling-up), can also be beneficial for the development of these positive SSF activities (Penca et al. 2021), alongside an acceleration of the policy process dedicated to improving access to resource of the SSF (Said et al. 2020). Finally, better coordination among the existing initiatives regarding marketing innovation and capitalization on various, unconnected efforts would result in a stronger voice of this traditional sea-centred activity and its role in the future of oceans.

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