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Place-based fishing livelihoods and the global ocean: the Irish pelagic fleet at home and abroad

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Abstract

This paper examines the development of the Irish pelagic fleet and how it has impacted place-based fishing livelihoods in southwest County Donegal, both positively and negatively. As part of this effort, we consider how shifting local and global sociopolitical realities have shaped linkages between resource access and people-place connections in southwest Donegal. We pay particular attention to how Irish fishing opportunities, both at home and abroad, are created and constrained under EU governance and how this drives the displacement of fishing livelihoods from coastal southwest Donegal. We identify power as a key and dynamic mechanism underlying fishery systems in the Irish context. Drawing on interview and ethnographic data we discuss how power is perceived and exercised among local fishery stakeholders, and how this in turn works to shape contemporary adaptive strategies in rural fishery dependent Ireland.

Keywords: Political ecology; Social-environmental systems; EU Common Fisheries Policy; Power; Irish fishing communities

Ireland's Premier Fishing Port: an introduction

The importance of the Irish fishing industry to coastal Ireland, particularly in the rural west and northwest regions of the country, is often eclipsed in a national narrative which takes Ireland from the largely agrarian society that it was up until the 1960s to the 'haven for multi-national corporations' it has become in more recent decades (Mac Laughlin 1994:28). This helps in part to explain why commercial fisheries are not a dominant area of social inquiry in the field of Irish studies.¹ Despite this absence, fisheries form the social and economic foundation of many rural Irish coastal communities. This is especially true of southwest County Donegal. Located in the peripheral northwest corner of the Republic, County Donegal is home to Killybegs—Ireland's Premier Fishing Port – as well as several smaller surrounding villages sustained by a combination of small-scale fishing and farming operations supplemented with seasonal employment in Killybegs fish factories.

Killybegs experienced rapid industrialization throughout the 1970s and 1980s due to the development of an offshore midwater pelagic trawler fleet targeting mackerel as well as herring, horse mackerel (skad), and more recently blue whiting and boarfish. The mackerel fishery brought a measure of prosperity and opportunity to Killybegs unheard of in a region often referred to as an employment blackspot, if not entirely 'forgotten' (see Donkersloot 2010).² Broadly speaking, this paper examines the development of the Irish pelagic fleet and how it has impacted Killybegs and place-based

fishing livelihoods, both positively and negatively. As part of this effort we explore the ways in which key processes impacting local fishing livelihoods are embedded in relations of power, especially in the context of fisheries policy, and how this works to inform local understandings of what is possible in place.

Key objectives: considering place and power in resource governance

This paper focuses on the complex and changing linkages between fishing communities, fishermen and fishery resources in southwest Donegal. We describe how historical relations and shifting local and global sociopolitical realities have shaped linkages between resource access and people-place connections in the region. We pay particular attention to how Irish fishing opportunities, both at home and abroad, have been created and constrained under EU governance and how this changing resource base drives the displacement of fishing livelihoods from coastal southwest Donegal.

Our approach is grounded in a political ecology perspective which combines “the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy. Together this encompasses the constantly shifting dialectic between society and resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself” (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987:17). We explicitly consider power here as a key and dynamic mechanism underpinning the development, delocalization and decline of fishing opportunities in northwest Ireland (Jentoft 2007; see also Bryant 1998; Schroeder et al. 2006; Blaikie 2001).

Jentoft (2007:433) describes power as an understated and understudied aspect of fisheries research contending that “if we want to understand how natural and social systems change, we should focus on how power works in fisheries and coastal settings.” Drawing on interview and ethnographic data, we highlight the ways in which power, operating across multiple scales and through myriad social, political, economic and environmental processes, is perceived and exercised among a diverse suite of fishery stakeholders in Killybegs. Specifically, we explore how power 1) underpins linkages in the condition and change of social/environmental systems (Robbins 2004), and 2) impacts contemporary adaptive strategies and perceived “potential for change” in southwest Donegal (Boulding 1990 cited in Jentoft 2007). An underlying objective of this paper is to broaden its resonance beyond the Irish context and advance efforts to more centrally incorporate social goals and place-based community interests and opportunities in fisheries management models (see for example Macinko 2007; St. Martin et al. 2007; Stoll and Holliday 2014).

Methods and materials

This paper is based on one year of ethnographic research carried out in southwest Donegal in 2007–2008, followed by a return visit in 2010. Fieldwork included more than 60 semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Participants included active and retired fishermen (e.g. vessel owners, skippers and crew), industry representatives, fish factory workers, community and regional leaders, fishery managers, and local youth from both fishing and non-fishing backgrounds. Interview questions focused on individual and family fishing backgrounds, work experience, sense of place and community, views on fisheries management and EU fisheries governance, and attitudes toward fishing as an occupation and way of life. Data for this paper comes primarily from interviews with 15 project participants.

Interview materials are supplemented with a more recent review of secondary sources and literature including data from the Central Statistics Office, fisheries news and media stories, government papers, industry reports, and academic literature. To begin, we provide a brief historical overview of the political and economic processes shaping Irish fisheries development. We then focus on fisheries governance issues, paying special attention to the EU Common Fisheries Policy from an Irish perspective.

The (under)development of Irish Fisheries

I'll never understand it. How can it be that we live on an island, that no matter where one stands in this country they're never really too far from the sea, but yet we've never valued our marine resources? We've never looked off the land. (*Fishery Manager*)

In this section we trace the trajectory of Irish fisheries development through periods of famine, colonization, independence and EU integration to evidence the ways in which the Irish fishing industry has been repeatedly undermined through hierarchical integration into larger political-economic processes and powers linked to Ireland's colonial encounter with Britain. In the quote above, a Killybegs man implicitly captures the chronic underdevelopment of Irish fisheries in the period since the colonization of Ireland. The following excerpt from *History and Antiquities of Killybegs* demonstrates how Irish fishery resources were first and foremost a 'commodity of the Queen' (Molloy 2004:31).

In the year 1556 an arrangement was entered into between Philip of Spain and Queen Elizabeth of England whereby Philip was to pay Elizabeth a thousand pounds per annum for permission to fish in Irish waters. [...] Louis XIV of France is said to have paid 10,000 for a like privilege and the Dutch and the Swedes also paid the English monarch large sums for permission to fish in our waters (Conaghan 1979:87).

Scholarly analysis and historical accounts reveal the ways in which the development of Irish fisheries under Britain's authority was at times discouraged, expended and sacrificed to serve colonial interests.³ This was not unique to the fisheries sector but part of wider colonial processes in Ireland. The effects of British maladministration throughout the 1800s were exacerbated by famine and ensuing emigration from coastal areas (see for example Molloy 2004:24). Killybegs author Pat Conaghan (1997:31) describes how marine resources spared coastal Donegal from the worst effects of famine, but how famine thwarted development of a viable industry (see also Tucker 1999; Conaghan 1979:97).⁴

Establishing an industry

The first organized effort at establishing a fishing industry in Ireland came in 1891 under the newly formed Congested Districts Board (CDB). The Board was established to alleviate poverty in the West of Ireland (see Bolger 2002). One of the primary tasks undertaken by the Board was to end people's dependency on 'gombeen men,' known for their high interest rates (Tucker 1999:88; see also Taylor 1981; Conaghan 1979:97; Conaghan 2003). In addition to establishing rural credit banks and cooperatives, the

CDB helped to lay the foundation for a viable fishing industry by buying fish directly from fishermen at guaranteed prices and improving access to markets through road projects and railway installations into ports (Molloy 2004:45). The CDB also made improvements to the catching and processing sectors, including pier construction (including the pier in Killybegs). Despite these advances, the greatest fishing effort to occur in Irish waters throughout the Board's tenure was done by foreign fleets (Conaghan 2003; Bolger 2002:669). When the CDB dissolved in 1923 following Irish Independence, it left a half-developed industry in the hands of a young nation burdened by civil war, recession, poverty, emigration and a tendency to value agricultural interests over fisheries (Bolger 2002:670).

The early decades

The inception of the Sea Fisheries Association (SFA) in 1931 further served to safeguard Irish fishermen from being exploited by gombeen men by improving Irish fishermen's access to markets. This point was emphasized by long-time Killybegs fisherman, James McLeod, during an interview in 2007. Invariably described by community members as the 'father of fishing' and a 'pioneer of the industry' in Killybegs, James stressed: "Had it not been for the SFA [in the 1930s] I would not have been able to be a fisherman. You've heard of gombeen men? Fish buyers here, if you gave it to them for free, they'd want it for half!"

Up until the 1940s, the leading fishing ports in Ireland were on the east coast. A rise in the importance of pelagic (especially herring) and shellfish landings in the 1950s spurred a westward shift in the distribution of fishing activity in Ireland. By the late 1980s, three-quarters of the national catch and employment was occurring in the west and northwest regions of Ireland (Gillmor 1987:172). In this way, the fishing industry played a pivotal role in regional development in some of the most disadvantaged and isolated regions of Ireland (ibid.). The Irish Sea Fisheries Board (Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) in Gaelic) was established in 1952 (BIM replaced the SFA). BIM built four boatyards, including one in Killybegs, and controlled fisheries loans (i.e. loan approvals) and vessel size and design. During this period some of the boat slips in Irish boatyards were lengthened to accommodate vessels up to 90 ft in length. The extension of boat slips to 90 ft guided BIM to set the upper limit on boat length in grant and loan schemes at 90 ft. This innocuous limit re-emerged amidst a changing Europe in the following decades as a barrier to development of the Irish fleet by denying vessels over 90 ft state financing through BIM's loan and grant schemes (see Mansfield 2011 for broader discussion on the ways in which state's more commonly supported and encouraged fisheries industrialization as an economic development strategy during this era).

The 1950s was a promising decade for Irish fisheries marked by increased landings and earnings, market improvements, vessel upgrades and major advancements in fishing technology (e.g. net-making and trawling techniques including the advent of mid-water trawling in Donegal). Gillmor (1987:167) notes "a seven fold growth in landings occurred in the period 1950–72." In 1972, Ireland, along with the United Kingdom and Denmark, joined the European Union. EU membership ushered in new uncertainties and challenges for the Irish fleet. Chief among these was how an increasingly integrated Europe would impact control over and access to the waters and fishery resources surrounding the small island nation.

The Common Fisheries Policy: an Irish perspective

We paraded the streets in Dublin. We picketed government buildings, but the agricultural sector wanted to go into the EU... We were a small group, a small industry. We hadn't the votes to influence political decisions. (*Community Leader*)

I repeatedly pose the question, why has Iceland, Norway and the Faroe Islands healthy fishing industries? Because they are not part of the European Union. How do you keep 14 or 15 countries happy around the table? (*Fishing Industry Representative*)

Following Iceland's decisive lead, EU member states extended their offshore Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from 12 to 200 miles in 1976. The extension to 200 miles highlighted the limitations of the original Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) first agreed on by the EEC-6 in 1970 and intended to govern a much smaller area.⁵ The extension kick-started the arduous process of CFP reform which spanned six angst-filled years (EU member states finally reached agreement in 1983). Gillmor (1987:174) identifies the lengthy process of negotiations as "a disincentive to invest in the fishery due to uncertainty over extent of access to resource and what would be granted to other member states."

The extension of the EU Fishery Zone to 200 hundred miles forced non-EU fishing fleets (e.g. Eastern European fleets) out of Irish waters, but enflamed uncertainty and intense controversy over who within the European Community now possessed the right to harvest fish from the waters surrounding Ireland (Molloy 2004:72).

We joined the EU in 1972. The problem was the Common Fisheries Policy wasn't agreed [on] until 1983. So there was a period there where guys fished away. Brussels really didn't have that much influence on the total situation until 1983... From the time we joined the EU we were in discussion with the government regarding what kind of a deal, what kind of a quota regime, we were going to get out of Brussels. But the French and the Dutch dominated the scenes during that period. (*Fishing Industry Representative*)

The concluding sentence in the above excerpt in particular touches on two salient themes in interviews with Killybegs fishermen and residents: 1) Ireland's relative powerlessness in the realm of EU fisheries policy and, related to this, 2) a tendency toward the EU CFP to favor the most powerful European fishing fleets, especially France and Spain.

Relative stability in peripheral places

There is no commonality within the Common Fisheries Policy. Absolutely none. It's geared towards the advantage of those fishing countries, and the fishing countries in the EU are basically France and Spain and possibly a little bit of Portugal. (*Inshore Salmon Fisherman*)

The CFP is based on a system of 'relative stability' whereby each member state is allocated a fixed share (quota) of the EU's Total Allowable Catch (TAC) based on

historical catch record.⁶ Because relative stability is based on catch history, member states with a history of fishing off Ireland's coast (e.g. Spanish, French, Dutch) are allocated quota in the waters surrounding Ireland.⁷ Under relative stability, Ireland's share of the EU TAC is fixed at 16% for demersal (whitefish) species, 23% for pelagic species and 23% of shellfish (Cawley 2006).⁸

The Irish government, at the prodding of protesting fishermen, attempted to implement a unilateral conservation measure in the late 1970s which would have banned all vessels over 34 m from within 50 miles of the Irish coastline. A retired Killybegs whitefish fisherman lamented during an interview how the ban "only lasted 24 h. The Dutch fleet came in. They fished inside the limit. Two boats were arrested. It went to the European Court and Ireland's unilateral decision was thrown out." The EU deemed Ireland's efforts discriminatory because Ireland lacked vessels of that size. Efforts to implement the measure were abandoned by the Irish government in 1978 (Gillmor 1987). Similar accounts were offered up over the course of fieldwork as further evidence of the Irish government's failure to protect Irish fishing interests amidst a changing Europe. Even today, many fishermen cite Ireland's inception into the EU as the root of most problems plaguing the fishing sector.

When Ireland acceded to the EU in 1973, Ireland was in a very poor state economically. We had a huge untapped resource off the west coast here and we had a government who didn't particularly know what to do with it, or how to develop it. They didn't have the resources to [develop] it. So the government used it as its bargaining chip. (*Inshore Salmon Fisherman*)

The problem is, the problem was and still is, that when the CFP was agreed on in 1983, and the cake was divided out, we got crumbs instead of cake. (*Fishing Industry Representative*)

The sense of state neglect is especially prominent in County Donegal in part because it is intimately entangled with a broader place-based social consciousness saturated in sentiments of marginality and being 'left behind.' Donegal's land border is shared primarily with Northern Ireland. The making of Ireland's internal borders in 1922 worked to alienate Donegal from the North while peripheralizing it in the South (Wilson and Donnan 2006:159). Donegal shares only a sliver of six miles of land border with the rest of the Republic. The county's narrow mooring to the Republic continues to carry with it important political-economic connotations that remain palpable in the current economic climate as well as in contemporary local identities and attitudes (Donkersloot 2010).

At the end of the day the people in government don't really care about the people up at this end of the country. ...We're so far out in a peripheral region. We're out on the edge. (*Killybegs Youth*)

You could just tell a Donegal person from other people. There's a unique sort of culture or attitude or something ... I think it's because we're out on a limb, you know. We're sort of cut off from the rest of the Republic of Ireland. (*Killybegs Youth*)

Meaningful measures *were* taken in the early years of CFP reform to address Ireland's poor historical catch record. The Hague Agreement of 1976 (also known as the Hague Preferences) recognized the high level of fisheries dependence in coastal regions of Ireland and the UK and allows for Irish and UK fleets to access a better share of stocks when quotas are low due to low resource abundance. In the now 'famous commitment' (Molloy 2004:64), the Hague Agreement also allowed Ireland to double its catch from 1975 to 1979, an increase which would be taken into account in determining Ireland's share of the TAC. It was in part then in 'self-defense,' as one retired fisherman explained, that the Irish fleet welcomed five 120-ft 'super trawlers' to its ranks in 1979/1980. The first of their kind for the small island nation, their arrival marked the beginning of a new era for the Irish fishing industry.⁹

Killybegs: from boom to bust

Although the burgeoning northwest mackerel fishery of the 1980s ultimately put Killybegs on the pelagic map, earning the town the title of 'Ireland's Premier Fishing Port,' it was preceded and in many ways facilitated by a very lucrative herring fishery.¹⁰ Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, 'big money' was made in the northwest herring fishery due to herring closures in the North and Celtic Seas (Molloy 2004). These closures caused herring prices in the northwest to spike, luring fishermen from across Ireland and Europe to Killybegs (Molloy 2006:103). Such was the flood of fishermen to Killybegs between 1971 and 1981 that the population increased by 39.7% (from 1,634 to 2,282) (Central Statistics Office 1981). With the reopening of herring fisheries in adjacent waters in the early 1980s, herring prices plummeted in the northwest from roughly £20 a box of herring to £5. The fall in herring prices helped to inspire the establishment of a mackerel fishery.

Much like the golden days of herring, the development of the mackerel fishery engendered a Klondike mentality. Killybegs pelagic fishermen soon became known as 'mackerel millionaires,' a title resented among the fleet due to its perceived dismissal of the high risks and hard work underpinning their success.¹¹ Gillmor (1987:167) describes the unusually short time span in which the mackerel fishery developed as well as its low-value, high-volume nature in noting the "total catch increased abruptly in the period 1979–82 by 127% in weight but by only 7% in real value terms." Despite the westward transboundary migration of mackerel stocks into Norwegian, and more recently, Iceland and Faroese waters (which has provoked political instability among North Atlantic coastal states), mackerel continues to be the most important species landed in Killybegs in terms of earnings, onshore employment and exports (Russia, Japan, Nigeria and Egypt comprise primary markets). Today, the modern Irish pelagic fleet is comprised of 22 trawlers (plus one factory trawler). The largest trawlers in the fleet are known as the 'Big Five.' These vessels are between 60 to 62 m in length and tow nets with mouth openings of 1,600 m (Molloy 2004:65). The pelagic fleet comprises 1% of the overall Irish fleet and 40% of the capacity (Cawley 2006).

The feverish local economy of Killybegs took a dramatic hit in 2004 with surfacing of allegations that Killybegs pelagic fishermen were involved in widespread practices of illegal fishing (e.g. falsified log books, underreported catches, and ignored quota restrictions and closed fishing areas). The allegations spurred a multi-year investigation and raids of Killybegs fishing vessels, fish factories and homes by Gardia from the National

Bureau of Criminal Investigations, resulting in some vessels losing all or part of their annual quota for certain years. The incident incited an intense wave of fisheries regulations and restrictions, including the insertion of fisheries offenses in the 2007 Criminal Justice Bill and the establishment of the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) in 2006.¹² More broadly, the incident provided fodder for local and national media outlets and left the community and the fishing industry in a state of flux.¹³

Fishing is so quiet and everything is doom and gloom around this town like. It's all bad news, bad feelings between fishing people. Nothing good seems to be happening. At all. Sometimes I do think to myself, why am I still here? (*Killybegs Youth*)

Yeah, I'm sure you've heard of the whole [fishing investigations] situation. Since that thing it's just turned into a sort of cultural, sort of a community, like everybody is thriving on doom and gloom. Bad news. ... People's spirits are down, it just seems to have sank with the fishing industry. (*Ex-Crewmember, Pelagic Vessel*)

On the surface, the scandal suddenly crippled the community of Killybegs, both morally and economically. Between 2002 and 2006, while the overall population of County Donegal increased by 6.8%, the population of Killybegs declined by 8.3% (CSO 2006).¹⁴ The declining population of Killybegs is significant because it marks the first time since the inception of the Free State in 1922 that Killybegs experienced population decline. Unemployment rates also spiked following the incident reaching 17% for females and 25% for males in 2006.¹⁵ All of these factors combined to create a common local consciousness which imagined emigration as the 'only option' for the town's young people.¹⁶

We argue that the above incident is both symptom and source of the problems plaguing the Irish fishing sector today. It is an expression of both the Irish pelagic fleet's contested power and peripherality in the sphere of EU fisheries. Moreover, we argue that the above incident only partially explains the problematic community-level trends noted above. Pointing to a more complex deep-rooted culprit is the fact that of the top ten communities in County Donegal to experience the greatest rates of population decline between 2002 and 2006, nine were along the coast. In addition to Killybegs, these include the nearby communities of Kilcar (−11.5%) and Glencolumbkille (−6.3%) and the vital fishing communities of Burtonport (−22%), Rathmullen (−8.8%) and Greencastle (−7%) (CSO 2006b).

Power and potential for change: problems at home, problems abroad

Underlying the mayhem following the well-publicized scandal in the pelagic sector was a compounding though much quieter crisis spurred by the twin forces of declining access and rising operating costs. In this section we draw on examples emblematic of this crisis and illustrative of how power, perceived and real, is integral to how local fishery stakeholders make sense of and cope with resource decline and economic volatility.

To illustrate, skyrocketing fuel prices threaten the viability of the EU fleet at large but the full impact of the price spike is not felt evenly across the EU fleet. Member state fleets are differentially insulated from narrowing profit margins due to the weight of the sector's political and economic capital which can be leveraged to secure support

such as state-sponsored fuel subsidies.¹⁷ At the time of fieldwork, the politically powerful French and Spanish fleets were shored up by state fuel allowances covering 20–25% of fuel costs. Lacking comparable clout, the Irish fishing sector failed to secure similar government support leaving the fleet more vulnerable to escalating operating costs. The account of costs below, tallied by the owner of a pelagic supertrawler, exemplifies the rising problem.

You're quotas are so tight, you pay so much of that in fuel. We're looking at almost €18-20,000 Euro [per day in fuel] if you're fishing a full day. In 2000, it was less than €5000 a day in fuel to run the boat. Our insurance has gone from what should be €50,000 to €60,000 a year, or about €1,000 a week in insurance. We're at €200,000 [now]. So you're earning less money and your costs have just jumped to high heaven. So there's so little margin for error now, I mean, if you got a bad year you could be bankrupt before you know it (*Pelagic Vessel Owner*).

Rising fuel costs reverberate through the fleet and fishing community in myriad ways. Increasing costs have had an especially harmful effect on crew well-being and wages in the Irish whitefish sector which has suffered significant decline in recent decades due to low stock abundance. (Proposed quota reductions for the 2015 season include a 64% cut for cod and a 41% cut for haddock).

You have 40% of your catch going towards fuel, never mind insurance and other expenses. Basically the only way the boats can work now, especially in the whitefish sector, is smaller crews. You're going down a long line then, men are working longer hours and it's leading to more accidents... Whereas straightaway now, the French and Spanish are getting 20–25% off the top. (*Crewmember, Whitefish Vessel*)

The crew member quoted above went onto suggest that the implementation of an upcoming vessel decommissioning scheme may help to enhance the profitability of the struggling whitefish sector but skeptically concluded:

As long as they don't turn around now, the way the French are pushing it now with Ireland decommissioning 22 boats, they reckon Ireland's quota should be cut next year because of that. The way they're looking at it, because we [will] have less boats, they want more quota now. The French and the Spanish are doing it that way. So it could backfire on Ireland, what they've done, by decommissioning the 22 boats.

In a final example of how power disparities potentially shape adaptive strategies and local perceptions of potential for change, a long-time fisherman and industry representative details how recent efforts to implement an EU conservation measure to protect whitefish stocks (which would have temporarily increased net mesh size from 80 ml to 180 ml) were blocked by the voting power of other member states.¹⁸

The Spanish and the French fleet, they're big players with big votes. We got three votes around the table at the EU. Spain has ten. France has ten. The UK has ten. So if one or two of those big countries vetoes, you're shagged, you can't get it through you know. And the Spanish, they got a five year hold that they wouldn't have to go

past 80 mm. So actually we've got a voluntary 120 ml here in the UK and Ireland and they're at 87 you know. So it's very hard to tell our fishermen, "Hey, you've got to bring up your mesh size when the guy fishing next to you is catching smaller fish you know."

Taken together, this discursive suite of examples highlights not only the myriad socio-political and economic processes impacting fishing livelihoods in southwest Donegal today, but also how these processes are embedded in relations of power which inform local understandings of what is possible in place. The juxtaposing of Irish to French and Spanish capabilities to affect and respond to change is characteristic of a broader tendency among local stakeholders in southwest Donegal to situate themselves, quite precariously, at the margins of decision-making and governance of local fishery resources. This is the lens through which we refract local strategies and perspectives discussed below.

The underlying ethos of overdevelopment

Roughly 75% of European fish stocks are currently overfished and EU fleet capacity continues to exceed resource availability.¹⁹ This enduring imbalance is perhaps the most marked example of the overall structural failings of the EU CFP (European Commission 2009; Farrell et al. 2012, see also Hoffman and M. Quass 2014). Despite Ireland's late start in the game of commercial fisheries, the small island nation has not evaded problems of overcapacity. The pinnacle of overdevelopment in Irish fisheries came in 2001 with the arrival of the *Atlantic Dawn*, the largest supertrawler in the world at the time. The *Atlantic Dawn* was controversial from the outset in part because the Irish domestic fleet (and EU fleet) were overcapacity prior to vessel construction. While waiting for Irish and EU authorities to figure out how to include the *Atlantic Dawn* on fully-flexed national and EU fishing vessel registries, (the vessel was initially added to the Irish vessel registry as a troop carrier), the vessel spent its first two years fishing off the coast of Mauritania under a private agreement with the Mauritanian government.

At 144 m in length and 24 m in breadth, the *Atlantic Dawn* has the ability to catch, process and hold 7,000 tonnes of fish. At the time of its launching, vessel owner, Kevin McHugh, was quoted in a local newspaper saying that he "wanted to bring fishing in Ireland onto a par with the rest of the world."²⁰ Ireland's Minister of Marine dubbed the vessel's arrival as "one of the proudest moments of the Irish fishing industry."²¹ Though exceptional and disconcerting, the story of the *Atlantic Dawn* is symbolic of the direction and underlying ethos driving fisheries development in Killybegs in recent decades.

The modern pelagic fleet of Killybegs has undergone multiple rounds of renovations since the start of the fishery in the early 1980s. Ireland's first five supertrawlers launched in 1979/1980 have transformed into today's 'Big 5.' Signs of overcapacity in the Irish fleet as early as the 1990s have not stopped vessel owners from vessel improvements and expansions allowing the fleet to fish further offshore and target new species (e.g. blue whiting, boar fish).²² The most recent round of vessel upgrades in the fleet occurred in 2003/2004 when seven 'new' vessels rejoined the fleet (Molloy 2004:83).

The larger trawlers in the fleet typically spend a significant portion of the fall fishery fishing for mackerel in Norwegian and Scottish waters (and further westward in more recent years as stocks shift), where the mackerel are fatter and of higher quality and

value.²³ During these times, Irish vessels land their catches into foreign ports. Beyond the North Atlantic, Irish pelagic vessels are also increasingly looking to EU-Third Country Agreements, such as the EU/Mauritania Fisheries Protocol and the EU Fisheries Treaty with Morocco, as a means to enhance vessel viability and avoid increasing fishing restrictions at home. In 2009, four Killybegs pelagic trawlers were also granted licenses to fish in international waters beyond Chile's 200-mile EEZ in the South Pacific. A Killybegs pelagic vessel owner described the fleets' growing exploitation of foreign waters as a survival strategy: "If we are to survive we have to go out and fight for it."²⁴ The growing delocalization of the Irish pelagic fleet is working to remake people-place connections in complex and diverse ways, some more visible than others.

People-place disconnections in southwest Donegal

The Atlantic Dawn was sold to a Dutch company in the mid-2000s but around a dozen southwest Donegal fishermen continue to work aboard and abroad under Dutch ownership. A favorite story circulating through Killybegs at the time of fieldwork described 'local lads' coming ashore on Easter Island on a container ship as part of an Atlantic Dawn crew change. The crew was subsequently picked up by the fishing vessel and continued onto fishing grounds in the South Pacific. The more widespread spatial expansion of the Irish pelagic fleet ensures that there are more local lads joining the ranks of global fishermen. A crewmember interviewed for this project connected his global fishing experience to his sense of identity and shifting connection to place: "I would see [myself] as more European than Irish. We're fishing with a Dutch company. Last year it was a Scotch company. You have to go away from home to work at this point in time." He continued:

I fished Mauritania and while I was fishing there I was landing in Las Palmas and Agadeir in Morocco. I fished in European waters from the north of Norway to the south of France... And then fishing in the international waters off Chile I landed in Peru. I've come ashore on a container ship to Easter Island in the middle of the Pacific. I got collected by a container ship in Puntarenas in the south of Chile and went ashore to Fallpalaso. And I've seen more airports that you can shake a stick at.

The departure of Killybegs pelagic vessels has instilled in many community members, especially of the younger generation, the sense that the fishing industry is quite literally vanishing from the local landscape.

There was fish being landed all the time. All of the bigger boats were landing back home too. The smaller pelagic and the medium sized pelagic [vessels], they'd all be landing local so they would. Factories were getting regular supply all the time.

(Killybegs Youth)

You'd see fish being loaded and unloaded constantly in huge amounts and that really doesn't happen anymore so you don't actually see the industry actively going on as much. ... The streets used to be covered in fish, they were falling out of lorries they were so full... *(Killybegs Youth)*

You'd be unloading, you're actually standing on the pier, working nets. ... You used to get the gang gathered there [at the town pier] every morning but you never see it now. (*Crewmember, Whitefish Vessel*)

The outpacing of resource availability by advancing fishing technology paired with shifts in local resource abundance and expanding global opportunities (many times encouraged through controversial subsidies) is working to push the pelagic fleet beyond the benefit of southwest Donegal coastal communities (see Watson, Zeller and Pauly 2011:2; Sumaila et al. 2010; Mansfield 2011). The excerpts above paint, albeit with broad strokes, a picture of how places like Killybegs can be affected by local and global shifts in resource access patterns. The last excerpt in particular touches on the ways in which local social relations are potentially disrupted by changes in access to fishery resources. Britton (2014) alludes to the social change associated with this shifting dynamic in noting the rise of "men's sheds" in Killybegs.²⁵ Men's sheds can be understood as an attempt to recreate the social space and practices underpinning relations and identities once forged through and around the local fishing industry.

The restructuring of ties between fleet and community has also greatly impacted the lives and livelihoods of Killybegs fish factory workers, perhaps the most understudied and least visible group of local fishery stakeholders. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s employment in the Killybegs processing sector grew to comprise 83% of all employment in the local shore-based fishery sector (Donnchadha et al. 2000:30). Donnchadha et al. (2000:30) identify the number of people employed directly in the fish processing sector in Killybegs in the late 1990s as 1,533 (with 659 of these full-time, permanent positions). This means that Killybegs fish factories employed 4.4% of persons at work in County Donegal, and 24.6% of the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries sector (ibid). During these years Killybegs fish factories provided employment for the entire southwest region of Donegal. Each day busloads of workers were transported from surrounding communities to the factories in Killybegs.

At the start of fieldwork in 2007, Killybegs fish factories were still reeling from the slowdown in supply stemming from the investigations into illegal fishing. The once abundant employment in fish factories had become an intermittent and unreliable source of work. While residents of Killybegs and surrounding communities are acutely aware of the increasing precariousness of local factory work, easily quantifiable hardship stemming from loss of regular hours and income remains somewhat difficult to discern.

Part of the problem we have in Killybegs is that the unemployment figures haven't shown themselves dramatically as yet because what you have is workers that are still employed, seasonal workers in a seasonal industry, who are still, as I would put it, nominally employed who would have previously worked a nine month season and now are reduced to a three or four month season with an awful lot of days off within those three or four months. So less than half their previous time at work, less than half of their earnings. (*Community Leader*)

The decline in local factory work coincided with the closure of the commercial salmon gillnet fishery in 2007, an outcome of an EU Habitats Directive. Many fish factory workers in southwest Donegal supplement their seasonal factory income with inshore fishing opportunities in the summer months, especially salmon and lobster. The

compounding and destabilizing effect of the loss of both fishery dependent livelihoods is driving some (primarily male) Donegal residents to find work outside of the region, often traveling to urban centers such as Galway and Dublin. Typically, these new 'commuters' spend the work week away and return home at the weekend. A long-time resident and inshore salmon fisherman reflects on this new work-home cycle below.

We've allowed our marine resources to be taken over by Irish and foreign offshore interests. We've driven out our artisanal inshore fishermen. We've negated them. We've made it worthless and not worthwhile. You have people like myself now that travel 150 miles to work. And work away for the week and then come home. I don't want to do that. I don't have any choice. And it's wrong. And the biggest reason it's wrong is because it's not sustainable. What I do is not sustainable. How many years is it going to be before I can't afford to drive 150 miles to go to work?

Steeped in sentiments of frustration and resentment, there is a lot to unpack in this passage. Central here is the distinction and imbalance of power between offshore and inshore fishing interests (see also St. Martin 2001), the value attached to the latter, a sense of increasing insecurity and exile from one's home community, and the implications this has for one's quality of life. Another participant refracted the weekly exodus of local residents through the lens of the community describing how neighbors and friends were missed when no longer able to act as full participants in community life and culture. Specific examples ranged from empty boat harbors to one's absence at a neighbor's funeral to unfilled roles in local pub life, music and theater, and especially in the arena of local sports as participants, spectators, coaches or referees.

Former crewmembers of local whitefish vessels are among those who leave home for the work week. The Irish whitefish fleet is comprised of 1,573 vessels, and the vast majority (1,360) of these vessels are under 12 m in length (approximately 300 more vessels are between 12 and 24 m) (Cawley 2006). This means that contrary to the global maneuvering taking place in the pelagic sector, whitefish boats are entirely dependent on local resource abundance. Today, crew positions aboard Irish whitefish vessels are increasingly filled by foreign agency workers from Eastern European and Southeast Asian countries. Despite the incredible rise and decline of the pelagic fleet in Killybegs, one long-time fisherman considered the biggest change in the local fishing industry in his lifetime to be "that you couldn't get crew for whitefish boats." He continued:

Up until the late 1990s there was a good living to be made in the whitefish. We had an all Irish crew in every one of the boats. And you had plenty of time off. Fishing was good and you had time off. But from 2000 on really, foreigners started to come on then, you just couldn't get crew to go out. I don't know. Money was too good ashore. Like a lot of the boys that I fish with, they all left to go to Dublin. You could make better money in Dublin and you were home every weekend, that's the way they looked at it.

Conclusion: recognizing the importance of place in fisheries policy

You have to be very careful what progress does. I seen progress. Progress to me wiped out our fishing community. (*Fish Factory Worker*)

In this paper we have worked to reveal the ways in which shifting local and global socio-political realities affect people-place connections and place-based fishing livelihoods in southwest Donegal. As part of this effort we help to locate Ireland in the broader literature on industrial fisheries in the Global North. What is unique about the particular trajectory of fisheries development in southwest Donegal is the underlying power dynamics driving development which remain rooted in inequities stemming from Ireland's colonial encounter with Britain (see also Bryant 1998; Schroeder et al. 2006; Blaikie 2001).

Although our intended focus has been on the modern pelagic fleet, we have also broadened the purview of fisheries dependence in southwest Donegal beyond the offshore pelagic fleet. St. Martin et al. (2006:223) call for "broadening attention to the social dimensions of ecosystems, [including a need to shift] social science understandings of fishing toward context and inter-relationships amongst and between fishermen and fishing communities; a sensitivity to locations and how they are inhabited by communities and socio-economic processes and fish harvesting practices across multiple scales." The implications of lost or increasingly limited access to local fishery resources are often overshadowed in the dominant narrative of Killybegs which revolves around the rise and decline of the industrial fleet. A political ecology perspective attentive to intersections of place and power creates space for these accounts and connections to emerge from the margins as a central dimension of fishing community sustainability. Folding these livelihoods into this narrative of place reveals a dynamic and diverse collection of social, political and ecological events and conditions at play in the remaking of people-place connections in southwest Donegal. What is happening in Killybegs is a sea change of sorts, with multiple drivers of change contributing to multi-sector decline and the displacement of local fishing livelihoods.

In previous decades, the fishing industry rendered southwest Donegal largely immune to the economic turmoil and emigration that afflicted the rest of Ireland, particularly throughout the 'tumultuous 1980s.' It is the particular trajectory of fisheries development and decline outlined here that has kept Killybegs, until very recently, impervious to Ireland's long-time affair with emigration. Unfortunately, when Ireland's Celtic Tiger economy began to stagger in 2007 the fishing industry in Killybegs was ill posed to shelter the region from the wider political-economic problems of the national and global economy. Today, as the industrial fleet departs for fishing grounds as far away as the South Pacific, the local whitefish fleet ebbs and endures resource decline and economic hardship. Inshore salmon fishermen remain ashore.

Here we have drawn on a diversity of perspectives and experiences – from 'mackerel millionaires' to a new class of global fishermen to displaced whitefish crew, fish factory workers and small-scale fishermen. This disparate group of stakeholders is differentially empowered but united by an assorted set of adaptive strategies which demand dislocation from place. As a collective response to changing local conditions, "in many ways, they are leaving in order to stay" (Neitschmann 1979:22). Political ecology serves as a powerful analytical tool to better understand the ways in which places, livelihoods, household economies and social relations change as fishery access changes. It can also serve as a powerful tool to inform policy (Walker 2006).

Well-documented shortcomings in the EU CFP prompted important changes in the 2012 CFP reform including greater focus on social objectives and enhancing the viability of fishery dependent communities. Key components of the reformed policy include decentralized governance and support for small-scale fisheries, such as extending the right for member states to restrict fishing within 12 miles of their coastline until 2022.

As described here, Ireland has been unable to fully exercise this right. “That’s how bad our negotiators were at the time,” stressed one fisherman.

Key social objectives of the reformed CFP include reversing the decline in employment in the fisheries sector and promoting economic growth and jobs. These goals mark a fundamental change of approach in EU resource governance with an emphasis on the viability of fishing communities and regions. These changes offer potential promise for places like southwest Donegal, but the path from broad policy objectives to specific and sustainable outcomes needed to maintain local fishing livelihoods and community-based opportunities over the long-term, especially in rural regions, is rife with political, economic and social barriers (see for example Langdon 2008; Carothers 2011; Stoll and Holliday 2014; St. Martin 2001). Nevertheless, clearly identifying these objectives in the fisheries policy arena is a critical first step. A re-centering of fisheries policy around place-based livelihoods and fishery dependent communities and regions can help to better define and address the challenges, inequities and insecurities encountered in fisheries and fishery dependent regions today (Menzies 2007; Mansfield 2011; Carothers 2015; Carothers et al. 2010; Pinkerton and Davis 2015). Fishery systems and fishing communities will be remade and reimagined in the global wake of shifting 21st century ecological and political-economic constraints and opportunities. Whether these shifts prompt policy measures which protect and empower places is integral to ensuring that the rich narratives of people-place connections across coastal Ireland continue to include accounts of livelihoods and life ways wrought from the surrounding sea.

Endnotes

¹The exception here is the literature on salmon fisheries in Ireland (see for example Taylor 1981, 1987; Britton 2014).

²County Donegal is one of the most disadvantaged regions of the Republic of Ireland (Donegal Baseline Study 2007).

³See Molloy 2004:50–1 for example of how the Irish industry was allowed to collapse to appease English and Scottish jealousy; see Conaghan 1979:90–1; Tucker 1999:109 for examples of oppressions in trade; see also Conaghan 2003.

⁴Famine had a disastrous effect on Irish fisheries. Molloy (2004):51) notes the number of Irish boats and fishermen decreased by more than 50 percent immediately following the Great Famine of 1845–51. Famine relief schemes focused on developing infrastructure to improve access to marine resources (e.g. piers, roads), but the effects of starvation often drove fishermen to sell what they could (e.g. boats/gear) to buy food or simply left them too weak to go to sea (Molloy 2004:34; see also Bolger 2002).

⁵The EEC-6 includes Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg. Ireland, Denmark and the United Kingdom joined the EU in 1972.

⁶Several shortcomings have been identified with the principle of relative stability including quota swapping between member states and out flagging or ‘flags of convenience’. Relative stability has also been identified as an impetus for inflationary pressure on TACs because a member state that wants to increase its quota must seek an increase of the whole Community TAC (European Commission 2009).

⁷The Marine Institute (2013:6) notes that in 2013 international fleets harvested more than 1 million tonnes of fish from the waters around Ireland with an estimated value of €1.161 billion.

⁸The principle of relative stability intends to provide balance and a sense of certainty and fairness to member state fleets. In reality, changing ecological circumstances, shifting resource abundance and political compromises flex the boundaries of stable allocations. The recent westward transboundary migration of valuable mackerel (as well as herring) stocks into Icelandic and Faroese waters is one example. The migratory shift in fish stocks set off a four year firestorm of failed negotiations between North Atlantic coastal states resulting in total mackerel catches exceeding levels recommended by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (Bates 2010). At the heart of what became known as the 'mackerel wars' was a fundamental disagreement over entitlement of these newly minted Icelandic and Faroese fish historically harvested by Norwegian and EU fleets (see Standal 2006 for blue whiting example).

⁹See 'New Supertrawler Leads Our Ocean Challenge,' *The Irish Independent*, October 3, 1980.

¹⁰Writing on Irish fisheries development, Gillmor (1987:169) notes that "initial fishery expansion was based on herring... Herring landings accounted for 45% of the value of the catch at Irish ports in 1974 but only 10% in 1984."

¹¹See 'Netting the Millions,' *Ireland on Sunday*, June 14, 1998.

¹²This was not the first time that the Irish pelagic fleet's fishing practices had been called into question. A 1998 *Irish Times* article suggests that one of the reasons underlying Ireland's failure to secure a favorable quota for horse mackerel (skad) in the late 1990s was due to looming EU investigations into Irish mackerel catches. It was agreed during the annual negotiations over EU quota allocations (held in Brussels every December) that the investigations would be dropped if Ireland accepted a skad deal which favored the Dutch fleet despite stocks being primarily found in Irish waters.

¹³See for example: 'Killybegs Under Scrutiny, Again!' (*Donegal Post*, July 7, 2007); 'Killybegs Fishermen to Face Fraud Charges' (*Irish Mail*, October 29, 2006); 'Fishery Officers Get Court Order to Inspect Killybegs Plant' (*Irish Times*); 'Gardai Raid Fishermen's Homes Whilst Drug Smugglers Run Rampant' (*Marine Times* August 2007).

¹⁴The population of Killybegs (1,297) continues to hover around 2006 numbers (CSO 2011).

¹⁵This is well above both state and county rates which remained insulated by Ireland's 'Celtic Tiger' economy until it faltered in 2007–2008 with the onset of the housing and banking crises. In 2006, Ireland's male unemployment rate was 8.8%. County Donegal's male unemployment rate was 14.4%. County Donegal's 2006 female unemployment rate stood at 10.8%, slightly higher than the national rate of 8.1% (CSO 2006).

¹⁶See 'Emigration Only Option for Young People in Killybegs,' *Donegal Democrat*, January 18, 2007.

¹⁷Sumaila et al. (2010) identify fuel subsidies as comprising 15–30% of total global fishing subsidies.

¹⁸For a more recent example which finds Ireland at odds with proposed EU measures to conserve whitefish stocks see: Environmental groups criticise Coveney stance at EU fish talks, *The Irish Times*, December 15, 2014. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/environmental-groups-criticise-coveney-stance-at-eu-fish-talks-1.2038611>. Accessed 16 December 2014.

¹⁹In the Atlantic, the proportion of overfished stocks is estimated to be around 47% (Marine Institute 2013:14). Looking specifically at the 59 stocks of interest to Ireland, 24% are currently overfished and the status of another 42% is currently unknown (ibid.).

²⁰See Killybegs Online News 2009.

²¹See McHugh Leaves €72m Estate, *Mayo News*, July 7, 2009. Available at: http://www.mayonews.ie/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7063&Itemid=26. Accessed December 22, 2014.

²²See Supertrawler Sale a Sign of the Times in Killybegs, *The Irish Times*, January 20, 1998

²³Although Norwegian and Scottish mackerel markets tend to pay a higher price due to fat content, one of the main reasons for the lower prices paid in Killybegs was the landing of illegal fish which created a glut in the market and depressed prices. During this time, Norwegian buyers were paying roughly triple the amount of Killybegs buyers.

²⁴See *The Chile Coast for Killybegs Trawlers*, Killybegs Online. Available at: http://www.killybegsonline.org/Article_Details.aspx?article_id=14&tscategory_id=53. Accessed May 2, 2009.

²⁵Britton (2014:160) describes men's sheds as a "community-based initiative that brings men together from the community (from fishing and non-fishing backgrounds) to learn new skills or apply existing skills to traditional maritime crafts such as boat building, as well as building on the success of other community-based initiatives such as the Rural Social Scheme."

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' contributions

RD carried out all ethnographic fieldwork and interviews for this project. RD drafted the manuscript. CM provided guidance throughout fieldwork and reviewed earlier drafts of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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