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For an eco-anthropological approach to changes affecting fishing communities in the eastern Baltic

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Abstract

Coastal communities in the eastern Baltic Sea have been affected by environmental, socio-economic and political changes for decades. Ethnic minorities, especially Finno-Ugric and Kachubian peoples, but also island or maritime peripheral region societies are even more exposed. The poster proposes to expose a research project conducted on changes that affect these communities, and how the populations deal with them. The approach is based on concepts of eco-anthropology, disciplinary subfields relevant to study the evolution of human-nature relationships (Descola, 2005) and maritime anthropology (Geistdoerfer, 2007) in this spatial and temporal context. Explanations are based on important field materials collected during ethnographic surveys and archival funds.

Key words

Eco-anthropology, Ethnobiology, Interdisciplinarity, Fisheries, Coastal minorities, Coastal communities, LTK, MTK, western science, Nature/Culture, Finno-Ugric, Baltic Sea.

An eco - anthropological approach of the fieldwork

Study of the Man/Nature relationship

- Use of human ecology, history, geography and ethnobiology tools before, during and after the fieldworks times, with participant observation to discover cosmogonies.

An ethnographic survey in the communities

- Data acquisition through questionnaires, semi-directive interviews and life stories on hunters and fishermen's environmental practices and empirical knowledge, work on archives and museums collections, with ecological scientists.

A social sciences analysis

- To apprehend SES and its changes as a whole, work with the conceptual framework of social sciences: socio-anthropology, political science, supplemented by natural sciences analysis.



First results

Rich field materials:

- The eco-anthropological approach allows for the acquisition of data that is usually not very well collected, but nevertheless very rich. Their analysis requires the implementation of original collection and treatment protocols adapted to coastal and community contexts.
- Gigantic local environmental knowledge on fauna, flora, habitats, weather and climate, almost not mobilized in decisions concerning communities.

Changes not about to stop:

- Major emerging projects: new pipeline (NordStream 2), new large ports, creation of new MPA without concertation, building of new RME off-shore parks, new rules for fishing and hunting, fleet exit plans, ..., leading to a "sea enclosure" and reduced access to common environmental goods.
- Continued climatic disturbances, in particular the reduction, or even absence, of winter pack ice (specifically in semi-enclosed marine areas like lagoons and bays).

Strong community willingness to participate:

- The communities surveyed do not understand the top-down decisions, which penalize their traditional uses of the environment (like seal hunting ban), still for many food producers.
- However, they are open to the explanation and transmission of their knowledge, especially within the decision-making bodies.



Questions & hypothesis

What kind of approach is among the most appropriate to understand changes?

- Is an interdisciplinary approach efficient ?
- How to take into account traditional local knowledge in local conception (LTK: Ingold, 2012) and western science?
- What association is possible for indigenous communities with this research project ?
- What kind of ontological benchmarks structures the Baltic coastal communities cosmogonies ?

Work hypothesis:

An eco-anthropological approach based on an immersive field survey with coastal communities of the Eastern Baltic allows the study of their LTK and their cosmology. The study is coupled with an analysis of the data concerning the evolution of the Baltic social ecological system (SES). This interdisciplinary approach leads to a better understanding and apprehension of the changes affecting these coastal indigenous communities, in a perspective of sustainability.

A multi-sites fieldwork

7 sites in 6 countries of Eastern Baltic Sea

- Seven sites qualified as « peripheral maritime regions », with important cross-border issues and the presence of strong fishing and sea hunting communities, all affected by the end of Socialism and decollectivization of fishing kolkhozes.
- The existence of five indigenous minorities, Slavic and Finno-Ugric, distributed among the six countries, coupled with the presence of island and coastal communities.
- Particular landscape dictated by islands, isthmus and peninsula, estuaries and deltas, but the same Baltic lake croup ecosystem on coastal area (northern forest and dune system).
- Different salinity and temperature conditions ; variable sea ice formations during winter time.
- Sea hunting and fishing: marine mammals (seals), migratory birds (ducks, geese), fish (herring, sprats, flets, salmon, eels, lamprey,...) . Small-scale coastal and estuarine fishing.

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Perspectives

From local to global, from past to future, from nature to culture:

- For a better consideration and nesting of the different forms of ecological knowledge : take into account LTK and MTK (traditional knowledge in modernist conception), in perspective with western science (Ingold, *op. cit.*).
- Develop an approach integrating nature/culture, with interdisciplinarity (Gunda, 1984 ; Descola, *op. cit.*).
- Have a look at past environments and socio-economies (Chmielewski, 2007 ; Ojaveer and MacKenzie, 2007) to organize sustainable futures.
- Understand power rules and games, from local to global arenas (town council, national assembly, HelCom, Ramsar convention, EU parliament, IPBES, UNESCO, FAO) to organize answers face changes.
- Have a new reflection to develop new anthropological approach from Baltic area and era (Mahieddin, 2018), based on regional SES.

