



Book reviews

Fish for Life: Interactive Governance for Fisheries. Kooiman J, Bavinck M, Jentoft S, Pullin R (Eds.), MARE Publication Series, No. 3., Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam (2005).

Interactive Fisheries Governance: A Guide to Better Practice. Bavinck M, Chuenpagdee R, Diallo M, van der Heijden P, Kooiman J, Mahon R, Williams S. Delft, Eburon Academic Publishers, The Netherlands (2005).

The recently-published book, *Fish for Life: Interactive Governance for Fisheries* (hereafter referred to as *Fish for Life*) and its applications-oriented companion volume, *Interactive Fisheries Governance: A Guide to Better Practice* (hereafter referred to as *Guide to Better Practice*), together comprise one of the most innovative, ambitious, and holistic efforts for addressing the world's fisheries problems that has been seen in many years.

The two volumes are the result of a multi-disciplinary and multiple-contributor effort that was organized by Jan Kooiman, Prof. Emeritus of Public Management at Erasmus University, Rotterdam, and who was principal author and architect of *Fish for Life*, and Prof. Maarten Bavinck, Director of the Centre for Maritime Research (MARE), Amsterdam University, who was principal director and coordinator of the various contributors and activities that resulted in this landmark work. Also making important contributions are *Fish for Life's* two other co-editors, Svein Jentoft, Professor of Sociology at the Norwegian College of Fisheries Science, Tromsø, Norway, and Roger Pullin, an aquatic biologist with the Manx Wildlife Trust, and who is currently based in Manila, The Philippines. Moreover, major support for this grand endeavor was supplied by the European Commission through its program for development cooperation (INCODEV).

Heretofore, the most important discourses about the fisheries and policies for managing them have focused on *human concerns* for the direct participants in the fisheries, *marine-ecological concerns* for ensuring sustained harvests, and better fisheries *management*. *Conservationist* and *allocation* and *economic* discourses have also been overarching discourses, while focusing mainly on the *capture* aspects of fisheries. And in recent years fisheries discourses have increasingly emphasized that *aquaculture*, the *post-harvest components*, and non-fishing activities such as *tourism-industry* also need to be brought into fisheries discourses, inasmuch as these all play important roles in the dynamic and complex phenomenon that is “the fisheries.”

What *Fish for Life* so laudably accomplishes is its suggestion of an approach, or “vision,” for treating *all* of the foregoing issues under one broad conceptualization: *all-inclusive interactive governance*. The book therefore integrates *all* the foregoing discourses into a unitary conceptual and dynamic framework, while elaborating in great detail the theoretical foundations and conceptual implementation of interactive

governance. Hence, it is extraordinarily ambitious in terms of what it intends to bring under conceptual and dynamic control, and in this it mostly succeeds, while its companion, *A Guide to Better Practice*, offers suggestions regarding how the interactive and holistic approaches to fisheries management that are advocated in the larger volume can be integrated into fisheries policies and practically applied.

Fish for Life is the theoretically-oriented volume and no doubt will be recognized as a landmark in scholarly treatises on the fisheries, their management, and management policies. The *Guide to Better Practice*, on the other hand, as it states on p. 7 in its first chapter, was mainly written for people who...

...are in the business of managing and administering fisheries and aquaculture... If you are a policy maker, administrator, fisheries or aquaculture scientist, or are associated with a government agency dealing with fisheries, aquaculture or aquatic resources, this book is meant for you.

Indeed, *both* books are for the foregoing sorts of people, although *Fish for Life* will especially appeal to scientists and academics who are interested in fisheries-management theory and policy. In essence the smaller book is a distillation and straight-forward presentation of the broader vision that is presented in the larger one, only without the elaborate and complex theoretical background, and suggests how the approach to governance that is elaborately discussed in the larger volume may be practically applied.

Nevertheless, some may criticize the larger volume for its high level of abstraction, its theoretical emphasis, and its advocacy of lofty ideals that may, practically speaking, be very difficult to attain. But, fortunately, the smaller applications-oriented volume should go a long way toward mollifying any such criticisms.

Collectively the two books can be lauded for their holism regarding fisheries-management issues and theories, with perhaps the only themes in contemporary discourses that some readers may wish to have seen receive more expanded treatment being those regarding humanity's inability to perceive and adapt to global climatic and ecological change, the inherent policy bias in favor of the small-scale sector of the fisheries, and the authors' confidence that supra-national institutions can reform themselves sufficiently to play a decisive role in brokering interactive governance that will alleviate the current crisis in the world's fisheries. These possible deficits notwithstanding, the two volumes still merit close scrutiny and deep consideration by any who are concerned with the world's fisheries and with developing more effective, appropriate, and sustainable means for managing them.

Fish for Life's urging of an all-inclusive and interactive approach to governance will likely be positively received by people who derive their *livelihoods* directly from the fisheries—e.g., small-scale capture fishers and government-employed fisheries officials. The book is also likely to garner praise in *conservationist* and *healthy-ecosystem* circles, as well as among advocates for *consumers* of fisheries products. On the other hand, the book may be poorly regarded among those who mainly regard the fisheries as a form of *business enterprise*, such as large-scale industrialized capture fishers, processors, marketers, and financial institutions that serve the fisheries.

The authors try to sidestep this latter potential difficulty by stating...

The contradictions that emerge between governance principles as they are applied, and the varying political discourses to which actors in their choice of solutions refer,

constitute major challenges. The solution is to focus on processes rather than outcomes. There is no automatic optimal balance between what may seem to be contradictory principles. Political discourses can only arrive at compromises through dialogue and willingness to compromise (p. 315).

Overall the authors seem to assert, almost as a matter of faith, that if all the participants are adequately enlightened as to the larger picture, and fully appreciate every other participant's place in the interactive dynamic, over time they will, through an iterative series of compromises, eventually and mutually come to the "good" governance that is held out as the ideal. Thus, a fundamental assumption of the inherent "goodness" and "rationality" of human nature is implied, one suggesting that in the right conditions humans will subordinate their individual self interest for sake of the collective good. On this view Rousseau may smile down from the cosmos, while Hobbes, stridently dissenting, may roll over in his grave.

In *Fish for Life* humanity is admonished to discover its mutually shared values, leave no stakeholders out of the governance process, and enhance interaction and mutual feedback for collective learning. What I think some readers will find problematic about this, Cultural Anthropologists among them, is the implicit-seeming assumption that all humans share certain fundamental or universal values and desires. The rich corpus of ethnography and anthropological theory simply shows otherwise.

Nevertheless, few will be able to disagree with the authors concluding statement that, "unless new approaches are pursued there will be widespread failure to realize the benefits from and achieve sustainability of a large proportion of the world's fisheries" (p. 374).

Similarly, the authors should find little argument where they state...

Meta-level principles and concepts that are not supported by institutional arrangements and problem-solving processes are only an intellectual exercise. Unless informed by real institutional issues and practical problems, the meta-level may be irrelevant to the lower levels (p. 356).

Fish for Life thus positions itself in the advocacy of broad humanistic concerns such as food security, social justice, employment, social cohesion, and other quality of life issues. But some skeptics may point out that these are not the fundamental instituting and implementing concerns for many of the participants in the fisheries these days. Therefore, these may argue, these humanistic concerns may never be accepted as the guiding lights for future fisheries management by certain actors, stakeholders, and other contemporary participants in the fisheries.

Indeed, what the authors say are the highest-level meta-principles that should guide governance some skeptics may say are mostly reflections of the ideals of academics, scholars, scientists, and people working in high-level international organizations. These skeptics may therefore assert that the foregoing humanistic ideals may not be widely shared by many people who work in various components of the fisheries. Moreover, and problematically, persons not sharing or accepting these ideals and values may never say so in formal discourse, but instead may just continue with business as usual, thereby continuing to contribute to the fisheries problems that the book's authors think can be remedied, or at least ameliorated, by the interactive approaches to governance that they describe and advocate.

At the beginning of Chapter 12, “Current Principles,” the authors propose that the meta-principles should be “ecosystem health,” “social justice,” “livelihood and employment,” and “food security and safety” (p. 245). But some critics may point out that these meta-principles are precisely those that are stressed by various high-level international organizations in their post-war-to-recent conventions, treaties, summits, commissions, and protocols. Are there no other voices asserting their *own* particular meta-principles who should also be considered, these may ask? Again, the criticism may be that the authors of *Fish for Life* seem to assume that all of humanity wants the same fundamental things, and furthermore that these high-level international organizations have already adequately summarized and articulated them. Some may also dismiss the meta-principles as “motherhood” concepts and discount them in that way—“good governance,” for example, “legitimacy,” “inclusiveness,” and “sustainability.”

Where the main arguments will likely come, therefore, will not be over the *desirability* of the foregoing principles, but rather on *how to realize them* and by *what means*. Thus some critics may stress that the foregoing meta-principles are *unattainable ideals* that, practically speaking, can never be fully realized. Some may also assail them as omnibus ideals, which are capable of being appropriated by different people to mean very different and sometimes even quite opposite things—the ideal of “sustainability,” for example.

Even so, what alternative principles might better light the path to the meta-goal whose desirability almost nobody can dispute: *the need to better manage the world's fisheries*? At the very least these two books provide new hope when little else has worked to stem the worsening crisis now being seen in so many of the world's important fisheries. Indeed, the situation in so many fisheries is now so dire that it demands new approaches and the re-assertion of lofty ideals, lest we otherwise become mired down in the complexity of it all, losing ourselves in a murky forest and giving up because we see no way out.

In sum, and to the good, I think most critics will have to concede that *Fish for Life* offers an innovative, over-arching, and all-inclusive approach for addressing the world's fisheries crisis. Of necessity that approach must be elaborate, detailed, complex, arduous, iterative, and will require tailoring to specific situations. And in that latter regard, the *Guide to Better Practice* offers appropriate and useful guidelines.

Yet, *Fish for Life's* assumption that the world's fisheries crisis is mainly a failure of governance, and as such can be remedied by collective human effort, may be viewed skeptically by still others who point out that perceiving, anticipating, and adapting to global change may exceed current human capabilities. Indeed, this view, which has only recently entered fisheries-management discourses, stresses that many contemporary fisheries problems are caused by, or at least exacerbated by, global climatic and marine-ecological variability and change—which humanity is not only unable to control, but often unable to adequately perceive as well.

On that view even if international cooperation could eventually be achieved to address the anthropogenic aspects of fisheries' problems, some now think that humanity can do little to stem the non-anthropogenic changes that have always been ongoing. These may therefore say that the governance approach that is proposed in *Fish for Life* will likewise be inadequate for dealing with these phenomena—and mainly because of the degree of uncertainty surrounding them. And here again this skepticism may be lent support by

growing fatalism in some fisheries-management circles that has been prompted by the failed attempts to stem the world's mounting fisheries crisis.

Global change is mentioned in *Fish for Life* in Chapter 3, "Aquatic Ecologies" (pp. 63–64), and is discussed in that chapter as an ecological issue without regard for its political and economic impacts. Thus, the authors write, "It has now been conclusively demonstrated that anthropogenic pressure on marine ecosystems through fishing has severely degraded the world's marine ecosystems" (p. 71).

But this acknowledges only part of the problem, because anthropogenic pressure is not the only culprit. Rather, it has been recently acknowledged that many fisheries ecosystems are being degraded by a combination of anthropogenic *and* non-anthropogenic factors, with the latter being climatic and ocean-ecological variability and change that is compelled by natural factors lying outside humanity's influence—and often outside its perception as well. These latter sorts of changes take place on varying temporal scales, ranging from very short to very lengthy, and some of them are only capable of being accurately perceived long after they have occurred.

In a completely different vein, a quite different criticism of *Fish for Life* may arise from among those who question its according priority in fisheries policies to the small-scale sector. In Chapter 4, "Fish Capture," for example, the authors state...

...one of the hard choices in governance of fish capture is how to divide up the stagnant or dwindling pool of living wild resources in the sea. The implication of the chapter and these final governance reflections is one that favours the small-scale sector. As has been argued for a long time, small-scale fisheries mostly support the larger group of fishers, yet industrial fisheries take the larger share of the world's resources in a much more energy-intensive fashion...Slowing or diverting this industrialization is the most pressing challenge of the governance of fish capture (pp. 90–91).

Now here is a statement that many will regard as controversial! Many economists, for example, will assail it by underscoring the greater efficiency of large-scale industrialized fisheries and their extraction of greater economic rent from fisheries resources. In essence they will argue against according the small-scale sector priority in fisheries policies by alleging that the larger-scale industrialized sector provides the greatest economic good, or benefit, to the greatest number of people.

Nevertheless, according priority to the small-scale fisheries sector is urged in various places in *Fish for Life*—for example, on p. 253, where the authors cite from the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries [1], which states...

Recognizing the important contributions of artisanal and small-scale fisheries to employment, income and food security, states should appropriately protect the rights of fishers and fish-workers, particularly those engaged in subsistence, small-scale and artisanal fisheries.

Indeed, I championed that idea myself in my book, *Crisis in the World's Fisheries* [2]. But some may assail the suggestion that priority be given to the small-scale fisheries sector, pointing out that its diversity, number of participants, and geographical dispersion, all make it more difficult to incorporate into interactive governance. And still others may point to the greater degree of waste from spoilage that is seen in the small- versus large-industrial fisheries sectors, or to the increasing technological sophistication of many

small-scale fishers and their increasing impact on fishing mortality, emphasizing they should get no different treatment than their larger-scale counterparts. And some may insist that workers in large-scale industrialized fisheries are no less human than their smaller-scale counterparts, no less dependent on fisheries for their livelihoods, and on that view merit no less priority.

Elsewhere, *Fish for Life* is laudable for its discussion of “the fish chain,” which is conceptualized as linked components comprising marine ecosystems, the capture and aquaculture sectors, and the post-harvest sectors. But some may argue that this conceptualization, even while an attempt at a broader approach to conceptualizing the fisheries than any seen heretofore, is still too narrow. Thus, these may point out that marine ecosystems are linked with other ecosystems—e.g., climatic, river and riparian, and geophysical—while the human participants in the chain are linked with the rest of humanity. Moreover, while consumers are acknowledged as important parts of the fish chain (in the post-harvest component), the book little considers these in its discussions about various actors or stakeholders in the fisheries, even though it is ultimately consumers’ demand for fisheries products, and their willingness to exchange value for them, that is the driving dynamic in the chain.

Problematical as well for some potential readers of *Fish for Life* will be its position that an important cause of the global capture-fisheries crisis is “fishing overcapacity.” Thus, the authors’ statement that, “There are simply too many vessels and too many fishing people” (p. 11), is not likely to be conceded, much less warmly received, by vessel owners, fishers, and their ancillaries. Indeed, while these participants may concede that such statements have some merit, they will likely want to shift the blame away from overcapacity and lay it instead on mis-management by fisheries officials, ecological conditions, or excesses committed by their competitors or other interest groups. Moreover, some may point to the contradiction that seems inherent in urging interactive governance on the one hand while urging a reduction of capacity on the other, since the latter will often require reducing the number of participants who will be included in the interactive-governance process as it progresses.

Ultimately, it is no shortcoming of these two books that they cannot be all things to all people, make all people happy, and solve all the complex problems that are currently besetting so many of the world’s fisheries. Thus, the main achievement of *Fish for Life* and its companion volume, *Guide to Better Practice*, is to provide new intellectual leadership for how to go about addressing today’s serious fisheries problems. Indeed, if profound philosophical questions are raised this is so much for the better, because addressing the world’s fisheries crisis nowadays demands nothing less.

Overall, it would seem better to set our sights high and then fall short, rather than be overwhelmed by the difficulties of these problems from the onset—much as mariners look to distant stars to help them reach earth-bound harbors. And that is precisely what the authors and the other contributors to these two books have achieved.

References

- [1] FAO. Code of conduct for responsible fisheries. Article 6.18. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization; 1995 (cited on p. 253 in *Fish for Life*).
- [2] McGoodwin JR. Crisis in the world’s fisheries: people, problems, and policies. Stanford: Stanford University Press; 1990.

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