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Challenged fishing of the Archipelago Sea

Kirsi Sonck-Rautio, *The Fishers of the Archipelago Sea- Resilience, Sustainability, Knowledge and Agency*. Turun yliopiston julkaisu – Annales Universitatis Turkuensis. Sarja - Ser. B Osa - Tom. 493 | Humaniora | Turku 2019. Ill. Diss. ISBN 978-951-29-7824-3.

Dissertation of Kirsi Sonck-Rautio for the degree of PhD in ethnology at the University of Turku is a compilation thesis based on four peer reviewed research articles of which three were published and one accepted for publishing at the time of the public defence in 23rd of November 2019. One of the articles is co-authored, but in separate statement Sonck-Rautio explains the division of labour and her contribution for this specific research. A summary section gives relatively broad introduction to her theme and proceeds with a bit revised analysis of her materials compared to her original research articles. To a sum up, the thesis forms an original and coherent contribution to political ecology and maritime social sciences with an emphasis on analysing the overall cultural change problematics of fishing livelihood and way of life in the Archipelago Sea of Finland and especially in the fishing community of Rymättylä. Key concepts of the analysis are marine socio-ecological systems, local ecological knowledge and resilience. Thesis emphasise particularly the perspectives of professional coastal small-scale fishers.

Sonck-Rautio's dissertation is important and timely both nationally and internationally. It touches the rapid cultural, economic and environmental changes of rural areas worldwide related to different modes of primary production and rural coastal communities in general. However, similar kind of development and decline processes, causes and effects, but also knowledge related environmental disputes we can find as well from many kinds of other farming and animal husbandry communities in rural contexts. Analysis also provides comparative points of views towards the great land beasts' protection policies and discourses in rural areas worldwide. Similar kind of predation related environmental knowledge dilemma we can find with the disputes related to impacts of predation of grey seals and great cormorants on coastal fishing livelihood. According to these similarities, in her dissertation, Sonck-Rautio links boldly her findings concerning the historical processes and developments of small-scale fisheries of the Archipelago Sea of Finland to a broader, even global, contexts and comparisons, including the impacts of climate change, nature conservation and overall economic developments and urbanisation on the traditional livelihoods and communities.

The objective of research is well formulated as is the logic of her specific research questions. Also links to the specific research articles is written in a clear way and the conclusion sums up nicely the key research results and answers to her research questions. Generally, the summary part and research articles show Kirsi Sonck-Raitio's talents for professional academic career. Anyhow, the development of researcher can be seen in the published research articles. The first one published in 2017 and with a particular focus on the animal agency is the least convincing of the research papers. The concept of agency and especially agency of fishes (e.g. herring, pikeperch) feels like an artificial, and forced, addition to a topic where researchers' own research materials handles much more clearly the problematics of the agency of small-scale fishers. However, in the summary part of dissertation, the concept of agency is used much better and coherent way and especially it is tied to her own research and materials in much more convincing way. Instead, the next two papers, published in 2018, are sturdy professional contributions and brings forth new results and perspectives. The second research article focuses on the cultural sustainability of coastal small-scale fishing communities and the third one brings forth valuable insights to tacit and many times ignored knowledges and roles of women in fishing communities and professional fisheries in general. In addition, the last research article, published finally in December 2019 in the journal of *Ethnologia Fennica* "The endangered coastal fishers in the coast of the Archipelago Sea – The environmental conflict in policy-making", is as well mature research contribution and particularly strongest in a relation to ethnology as a field of science and in a relation to Sonck-Rautio's own ethnographic research materials and it sums up nicely the whole dissertation process.

The dissertation acknowledges the previous research related to her theme and she position well her own research contribution among the relevant national and international marital and fishing related research traditions. However, the fisheries related research and publication forums are often multidisciplinary and cross disciplinary, with even transdisciplinary ambitions, but anyhow at times dominated by natural sciences, and this combination brings some challenges for Sonck-Rautio's dissertation. A lot of utilised concepts have roots in technical and natural sciences that have a tendency to dominate the discourses and when this is combined to compilation thesis process, where every published paper must stand on its own, some problems are evident. Firstly, this results a lot of repetitions between the articles and the summary part. Secondly, research articles have a tendency to "live a life of their own", and finally published papers in certain journal or edited volume may be more connected to the ambitions of editors, aims of the edited volumes, but also emphasises of sudden peer reviewers than the original intentions and needs of certain dissertation research. In the world of "Publish or perish" this easily results an abundance in theoretical concepts

and utilisation of overlapping and even competing definitions, when authors try to get their research published by revising their papers according to instructions received. This easily weakens the coherency of particularly compilation thesis as a whole. Naturally, this is general problem and there should be more academic discussions in which terms compilation theses are suitable especially in humanistic sciences where traditionally holistic understanding and coherency of written outcome have often times been emphasised.

This tension and resulted variation in published papers we can find also from Kirsi Sonck-Rautio's research articles, but on the other hand, she successfully limits a lot her conceptual apparatus in her summary part, even though, with a tendency to lean more on definitions in other sciences than the definitions originating in ethnology and related other humanistic sciences, such as cultural anthropology. However, again, it must be emphasised that this comment is related to a general problem in human sciences, not just the dissertation at hand. We have struggled with similar kind of tensions in my home university with every compilation theses that I have been supervising myself. Main point is that there should be more discussion in which terms compilation thesis are suitable in humanistic sciences and how to evaluate them compared to traditional monographs. In many countries compilation thesis is rather rarely applied in humanistic sciences and for reason. For example, in compilation thesis ethnographic contents and details are very limited, but this kind of backgrounds are often essential for reader to follow the analysis of certain specific temporal, spatial and cultural complex. In addition, in compilation thesis there is very limited space to give examples of original materials, such as interviews and field notes, and here suffers especially the voice of research subjects and the reader have rather poor possibilities for reflexive reading, but more so, reader must trust just on interpretations of the author. With the dissertation at hand, reader must trace examples of ethnographic materials mostly from attached research papers.

Anyhow, the major weaknesses in the dissertation of Sonck-Rautio can be tracked back to these general problems of compilation theses in human sciences and publishing in multidisciplinary journals that together easily results an abundance in theoretical concepts and overlapping, and at times, confusing definitions that vary between published research papers in varying publication forums. Even though Sonck-Rautio did great work in clearing her conceptual backgrounds for her summary part, there is still some overlapping for example in the definitions of adaptation, adaptation capacity, socio-ecological system and concepts of resilience and sustainability. Profound question is as well, why author finally ended up emphasising definitions of previous concept in other sciences than, for example, in ethnology? Revealing is that even the definition of culture

emphasise the recent definitions in other sciences, even though the applied definition reminds the reader of the function emphasising definition of culture that was brought forward by the scholars that represented the “Stewardian” school of cultural ecology of mid-20th century in ethnology, anthropology and geography?

From methodological point of view, Sonck-Rautio’s dissertation is mature piece of research and gathered research material is very convincing comprised of interviews, field visits and notes, participatory observations in local communities, but also in public policy related meetings, and additional following of traditional and social media discussions. Sad point is that in compilation thesis there is very limited space for representing interesting ethnographic field materials, but from attached research papers reader gets much better understanding of specific ethnographic histories and processes of studied areas. Naturally, problem for reader is that revealing photos and interview quotation are scattered to different articles, but at least characterising visualisations, interlocutors’ voices and definitions in her own words can be found with some effort.

Sonck-Rautio presents her main results systematically and emphasise particularly policy relevant findings, which strengthen the impression that Sonck-Rautio is especially concerned that her research could and should have an impact and potentially benefit the studied communities, which is brave and encouraging aim. Her results emphasise especially the importance of local environmental knowledge and its essential role in developing of the fisheries management. Instead, ethical considerations and reflexive assessing of her own research is modest, but on the other hand, probably limited again, by the compilation thesis format, which don’t give much options because of the limited space available. Salient point is that Sonck-Raitio’s main results are discussed more towards applied forums and fisheries management than participates in academic discussions for example in ethnology and other humanistic research. This strengthen the impression that now she is more aiming at professional research career in applied sciences and environmental management than in academia, which is respectable choice and great option to consider for young scholar.

To conclude Sonck-Rautio’s dissertation is critical, original and ambitious, and after all of criticism presented here, it is a coherent piece of research, which weaknesses can be traced back to the general problems in compilation thesis format and publishing in highly varying multidisciplinary forums. This research setting probably created pressures to discuss with multiple fields of science and at times, apply also definitions that origins in other sciences even own “home” discipline of origin could have offered as good alternatives. As a humanist myself, I would have expected a bit

more reflexive and transparent thinking of researchers own position and treatment of the whole research process, even though, I admit that already summary part is much longer (65 pages) than the instructions of University of Turku does recommend (40 pages). Anyhow, it would have been interesting for reader to understand better the reasons that led to certain choices, concepts and definitions, and why did selected ones fit better than, for example, more traditional ones in humanistic sciences? Also, some sort of feedback discussion toward humanistic sciences would have increased the value of the dissertation in regenerating humanistic traditions and comparing those towards processes in other fields of science. Now results and discussion is aimed more at having an impact on applied sciences and forums of environmental management. For example, dissertation results include an interesting and novel message to bring forward to gender studies because it touches also women's tacit and many times ignored roles in fishing communities, a finding that resonates with multiple previous studies related traditional livelihoods and rural communities worldwide. In general, I can recommend Sonck-Rautio's dissertation for readings for everyone interested in traditional livelihoods, human-environment relations and environmental policies related to everyday practices.

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