

3.3 The Gamvik project for youth fishing

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Introduction

Even if the number of people employed in the fisheries and the fish industry has dropped gradually over the last 20-30 years, the municipality of Gamvik and its inhabitants still depend very much on the fish resources and the different economic activities the fisheries generate in the four local communities that make up the municipality. The number of fishing boats and fishermen has been reduced by 40 % in this period, not only in Gamvik, but also in all the other fishing communities along the coast of Finnmark, Norway. Many people have left these communities because of repetitive crises in the fisheries and the fish industry, caused by changes in the global market for fish, but also by sudden, dramatic reduction of the fish resources ('Black sea') in the Barents Sea, at the end of the millennium. The 'Black Sea' problem was caused by natural variation and over-exploitation of the most common and most commercial fish species. As a consequence local fish processing plants, often so-called 'corner stone' industries, had to close, and many workers were laid off. However, bankruptcies in the local fish industries in Gamvik were nothing new. It had been more the rule than the exception over the last 20-30 years.

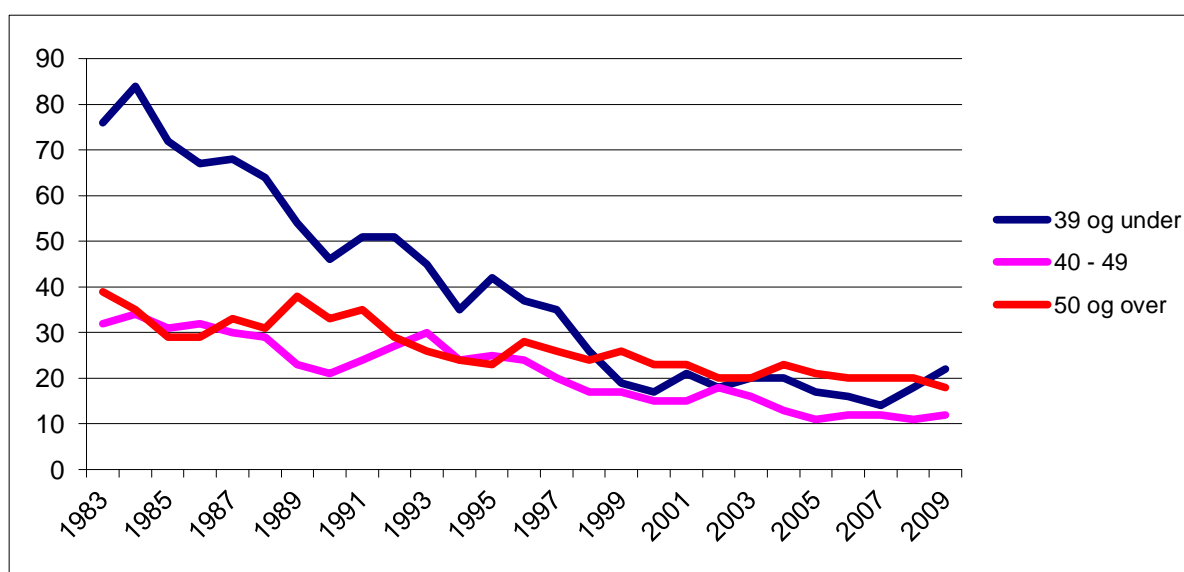
All these ups and downs in the fisheries and the fish industry have had a negative effect on the image and reputation of this important part of the economy and livelihood of the people in these communities. As a direct consequence, both the fisheries and the fish industry have experienced problems with recruitment, especially in relation to local youth. Even in good times, as nowadays, with plenty of fish and high prices in the market, the recruitment problem continues.

The problem is aggravated by the fact that most of the people that leave the fishing professions are under 30 years old. According to national statistics, the number of fishermen under this age



dropped from 6,924 in 1990 to 1,740 in 2008 (The Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries, 2010), in other words a 75% reduction in less than 20 years. Those left are getting older, with an average age of 55+ for the local fishermen in Mehamn, the municipal center of Gamvik.

Figure 1: Number of fishermen in Gamvik between 1983 and 2009, divided in 3 year groups



Aware of the problem, both the Ministry and Directorate of Fisheries and local authorities in the fishing communities mostly affected have since the mid-1990s tried different means to solve the problem of recruiting youth to the fisheries. The project for youth fishing, that we are describing here, is one of them. Between 2010 and 2014, it has been implemented in 49 municipalities along the coast of Norway, including Gamvik.

A flying start

In 1995, just after a new crisis followed by a series of bankruptcies in the fish industry all along the coast of Norway, including a newly built modern fish file plant in Mehamn, the Norwegian Ministry and Directorate of Fisheries implemented several measures to strengthen this important sector of the national economy, including capacity and image building to attract and to train young people for the fishing profession. One of the new youth projects was called “Summer fishing”, and later “Youth Fishing” project. By giving youth who were not registered as



professional fishermen, the possibility to fish and earn good money during their summer vacations, the authorities hoped to increase the recruitment of youngsters to the profession.

The project was popular among youth in many coastal communities, but it did not solve the problem of increasing number of 'drop-outs' from the fishing profession and other fish related businesses, nor the problem with recruitment of young men and women. Why? Maybe because the political and organizational framework of the project was too narrow, there were too many legal and practical limitations on the fishing activity itself, funding was insufficient and short term, and the "Summer fishing" project was not always well conceived and sometimes lacked support from the local business community and/or the municipal authorities where it was introduced.

When the Municipality of Gamvik launched their own project for youth fishing in 2010, the situation was completely changed. The legal and practical framework for who could participate and how much you could fish per boat and person, was made more flexible. The local project leader had long experience working with youth, as head of the culture department of the municipal administration. As well, the local authorities supported the project politically and financially. They realized how dependent the community was on the fish resources in the Barents Sea, and the fishermen that brought the fish on shore. This new understanding had taken hold after the last bankruptcy in the main local fish process plant in 2005, and takeover of the multinational fish industry and trawler fleet company Aker Seafood. The physical infrastructure of the harbour, and services to the local and foreign fishermen using the harbour as base for their activities, were also upgraded considerably by the municipality.

They actually started the youth fishing project and process in Gamvik the year before, in 2009, as an experiment to find the best way of organizing the project. After advertising for youth the municipality rented a 35 foot long fishing boat from a local fisherman. In spite of short notice, 8 young men between 16 and 20 years old, signed on. During 1 ½ months in the summer of 2009 (July 7 to August 14) these youth caught a total of 5,700 kilos of fish. The 'pre-project' turned out to be a great success in other ways as well. It had no doubt made the fisheries and fishing profession more known and attractive among local youth. Based on the encouraging results from the pre-project, the municipal council decided to keep up their support, and granted 134,000 NOK for the following year. Between 2009 and 2013, the local project for



image building and recruitment of youth to the fishing profession received a total of 839,000 NOK from different sources, approximately one-third from the municipality of Gamvik.

For the period 2008-2012, the Municipality of Gamvik received in total 15.26 million NOK from the Finnmark County Administration earmarked for local business and community development. To this external funding, the municipality added 3.25 million NOK (approx. 300,000 to the Youth Fishing project) from their own budget.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total 2008-13
Image-building and well-being	221,000	220,000	175,500	460,000	178,000	75,000	1,329,500
Business development	670,000	120,000	432,000	408,000	768,000	295,000	2,693,000
Increase in local fishing fleet	245,000	486,000	675,000	675,000	178,000	600,000	2,859,000
Youth Fishing		100,000	134,000	150,000	295,000	160,000	839,000
Youth Project		100,000	75,000				175,000
Tourism projects	230,000	375,000					605,000
Visit Nordkyn		100,000	177,500	177,500	120,000	120,000	695,000
Administration	668,800		1,475,000	1,190,000	1,433,909	150,000	4,917,709
Slettnes lighthouse (tourism project)		30,000	200,000	400,000			630,000
Maritime Infrastructure		100,000	7,500		50,000	150,000	307,500
	2,034,800	1,631,000	3,351,500	3,460,500	3,022,909	1,550,000	15,050,709

The main objectives

In earlier days, youth in the fishing communities along the coast of Norway were actively involved in fishing and fish processing activities, together with the rest of the local community.

Gargia conferences | 2004 - 2014



It is different today. Because of regulation, modernization, rationalization, and professionalization, but also the reputation of this sector of the local economy, youth have turned away. A combination of difficult access, because of the high cost of fishing boats and quotas, and low status for the fishing profession, there has been a dramatic drop in youth recruitment over the last 20-30 years. The youth have in general preferred other professions when they have made their career choices, very often encouraged by their parents, school teachers, and local authorities in the fishing communities. Even parents working in the fish industry or as fishermen/-women, very often direct their children toward other careers. Because of the crisis in the fish industry and fisheries and the insecurity it caused, they could not see a future for their kids in this sector.

The head of the Culture Department of Gamvik Municipality, a former fisherman, together with some activists among the local fishermen, wanted to do something to change this negative trend. The best way of changing the reputation of the fishing profession and the negative recruitment to the fisheries, was in his opinion through praxis, and not a theoretical approach in school. In the spring 2010, he decided to rent a fishing boat and invite local youth to go fishing during the summer months. In spite of short notice, 13 young men and 1 girl signed on. The ages varied from 12 to 25 years. The initiator knew most of the youth who signed on from earlier cultural projects run by the municipality.

The main objective of the Youth Fishing Project was to recruit and train local youth in the fishing profession. Indirectly the Municipality of Gamvik also wanted to use the project to improve the image of the fishing profession in the community, especially among youth. The high number of participants, together with the positive results in both fish catch and number of youth who finished the training program, secured the success of the project already in that first year. Good publicity for the project in different local, regional and national mass media helped as well.

The training

The first and most important learning task was about security routines and equipment on board the fishing boat. All participants were drilled in handling different emergency situations that could occur on board before they were authorized to go out fishing. The youth also had to learn



how to angle the fishing lines, and kill and prepare the fish for delivery at one of the local fish plants. The procedure was developed in cooperation with the owner of the local fish plant with the highest quality requirements. Security, quality, and hygiene were all important goals in the training program. Navigation at sea was another important learning experience.

Even with the most modern equipment on board, fishing was a tough experience for everyone. The weather in the Barents Sea, on 71 degree north, can be extremely rough even in summer. All the youth, except one, finished the two month training program. This gave them an incredible boost in self-confidence, and quite a lot of money in their pocket. The most active ones easily earned around 20,000 NOK. The possibility to earn good money was no doubt a strong motivation factor for the first participants, and for recruiting new ones the following year.

But it was not easy money, far from that. The youth learned the hard way that the fishing profession is not a normal 8 to 4 job. Sometimes they had to spend up to 24 hours at sea, usually working in 4 or 6 hour shifts. This was no doubt their biggest challenge, especially for the youngest ones. They learned to be precise and responsible in their work. Negligence could have serious consequences for yourself and your co-workers on board the fishing boat. The lessons learned also helped the youth in many other ways as some were drop-outs from school, or had other problems with social adaption.

Both a social and economic focus

According to the initiator and leader, Øyvind Berg, the social aspects of the Youth Fishing project in Gamvik were as important as the economic ones. As head of the Culture Department of the Municipality he had long and varied experience working with youth in the community, including young people with social problems. The summer fishing project actively targeted this group of youngsters. And it was successful in engaging many of them, mainly thanks to the respect and confidence the project leader enjoyed in the group, as well as among local youth in general. He not only motivated and engaged them in the Youth Fishing project, but he also helped them connect better with the community, and to go back to school after the summer season was over. Every year since the project started, the project leader and the project have



motivated some of the participants (2 to 4) to continue their education at high school level, most of them with some kind of maritime specialization.

The self-confidence and discipline they acquired through their short but very successful experience as fishermen not only helped them re-integrate in relation to school and society, but also for almost any kind of work in the fisheries. While most of the youth that took part in the Youth Fishing project in Gamvik between 2009 and 2013 went back to school, some signed on as crew members on bigger fishing boats and/or started to work in the local fish industry on a permanent basis. Two of the participants have bought their own small boats, and have started fishing on their own. Nowhere else where the Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries' Youth Fishing project has been implemented can they show the same good results, both socially and economically, as in the Municipality of Gamvik. From the beginning, the project was 'anchored' in the municipal administration, from 2011 in the Nordkyn Development Agency, a consultant firm owned by the Municipality. This secured stability and continuation in the Youth Fishing project, both in the organization and funding of the project. Of the 49 communities along the coast of Norway that took part in the Youth Fishing project only Gamvik and Lebesby, the neighbour municipality on the Nordkyn peninsula, had chosen this model. All the others placed the Youth Fishing project inside the local fishing community, at the Association of Fishermen in most of the cases. However, this other model had problems with leadership, organization, access to fishing quotas, and fish deliveries. Both Gamvik and Lebesby were on the top of the list of quantity and quality of the fish brought ashore, and most successful in realization of the main goal of the project, recruitment of youth to the fishing profession, fish industry, and other maritime activities and businesses. The success also came as a result of both formal and informal cooperation between the two municipalities and project administrations. The leaders of the Youth Fishing projects in the municipalities of Gamvik and Lebesby, Øyvind Berg and Martin Ellingsen, are friends, and cooperated closely. They also complemented each other, Øyvind as the experienced youth worker and Martin as the young professional fisherman with his own 50 foot modern fishing boat. This cooperation across the municipal borders contributed to the success of the Youth Fishing project in both places.



The Youth Fishing project in Gamvik, discontinued in spite of success?

Good leadership and funding secured the continuation of the Youth Fishing project in Gamvik for four years, from 2010 to 2013. The project evolved smoothly - as if running 'on rails'. The number of youth that participated varied between 14 and 18 during this period. The project gave the youth important and useful practical experiences, skills, and competencies that could be used to get a job in the fishing profession, in the fish industry, or in the service sector. Half of the youth who participated followed the main goal of the project, directly or indirectly, by joining the local fishing fleet or going back to school to specialize in fishing, fish processing, or another maritime field of education.

The quantity of fish, mainly cod, brought into the community through the project increased every year from 2010, up to 20 tons in total in 2013. As mentioned, the fish from the Youth Fishing project in Gamvik had very high quality, and were much preferred in various exclusive markets in Central Europe because of this.

Both Nordkyn Development Corporation, the formal 'owner' of the Youth Fishing project, and the Municipal authorities of Gamvik, that partly funded it, got a lot of positive publicity and good-will on local, regional, and national level because of the impressive economic and social results. The first summer the successful young fishermen often figured in the media, on the front page of regional newspapers, in reporting on radio and even national TV. The good work of the young fisherman and their instructor helped improve the reputation of the fisheries, especially the fishing profession, among the youth, their parents, and the local population in general. It also helped in the formation of a more positive, but at the same time a more realistic and relevant, image of the local community as a predominantly fishing community. The self-confidence and pride of the participants in the Youth Fishing project was contagious, it 'infected' a part of the local population, as well as their representatives in the municipal council.

After the first season of the Youth Fishing project in Gamvik, Øyvind Berg and Stein Arild Olaussen, director of Nordkyn Development, travelled around the county presenting the project to anybody who wanted to listen. They visited Finnmark county administration, the regional branch of Innovation Norway and NHO, the national association of businesses. In Fall



2012, they presented the project at the Gargia conference on: Youth, Entrepreneurship and Rural Development.

Preparation for the Youth Fishing project of 2014 started not long after the summer season of 2013 was over. It was the most successful of all, with the best catch of fish and earnings. After 5 years of experimentation with the 'Gamvik-model', including the pre-project of 2009, the project was well defined and established. A total of 14 local youth had answered the invitation of the project leader. In the beginning of June, as usual, all the practical arrangements with the project's fishing equipment and boat were done. The youth who had been recruited were determined to beat the fishing record of the previous year.

On June 12, only one week before the summer fishing of 2014 was supposed to start, came a counter order from the Municipal authorities of Gamvik. Because of the difficult economic situation of the Municipality they could not afford to run the Youth Fishing project any more. No need to say that the disappointment was great among the youth who had signed on, the project leader, the owner of the fishing boat, and all the people in the community that had supported the project.

There were also some indignation and anger among the stakeholders, because of the last minute decision of the municipal authorities. After all, the Youth Fishing project needed only 100,000 NOK in support from the Municipality to be able to go for another season. Even though it was an insignificant sum of money in the overall Municipal budget, and the budget of Nordkyn Development Corporation, it was critical for the continuation of the project. The Youth Fishing project was not only operating in accordance with the central objective of strengthening the main economic activities in the community, fishing and fish processing, its first intent of recruiting young people to the fishing profession in Gamvik was also showing positive results.

Why then was the Youth Fishing project not continued? There are many different answers to the question. One has to do with the media. When the media after some time lost interest of the project, unfortunately, the same happened to some of the local decision-makers. Without the media 'spot light', it became "out of sight, out of mind".



The problem of 'small money' and 'small projects' in the Municipal administration is another plausible explanation for the discontinuation of the Youth Fishing project. It was administered by Nordkyn Development, but funded by the Municipal authorities. In the budget process between these two public entities, the project could easily fall 'between two chairs', and be sacrificed in favour of other more pressing or important issues. Apart from the project leader, and head of the Department of Culture, the Youth Fishing project did not have an advocate inside the Municipal council or administration who could champion and defend the project all the way through the budget process. This is strange; knowing how much the future of the municipality as well as the local business community depends on the recruitment of youth.

The Municipality of Gamvik had been going through a very tough time with bankruptcies in the main fish processing plant and many related service businesses. There was unemployment, out-migration, political conflict, and a growing budget deficit in the Municipal administration. Because of the severe social and economic situation, the Municipality was put under direct state administration in 2007. But at the same time they got extra funding from the central government to initiate a broadly organized change and development process in the community. Nordkyn Development Corporation was established to lead this process. When the Youth Fishing project started in 2010 the worst part of the social and economic crisis was over, and from there on the general situation in the community was improving. So, this could not have been the reason for the discontinuation of the project in the summer of 2014.

All things that end well are well, they say. The decision of the municipal council was, as mentioned before met with a mixture of disbelief, anger, and protest from participants and supporters of the Youth Fishing project inside and outside of the Municipality of Gamvik. As a consequence of the strong criticism the executive committee of the municipality soon after decided to include the project in the municipal budget again, from the summer of 2015. Through the debate that followed the closure of the Youth Fishing project, the decision-makers



and people in general became more conscious of the value of this kind of projects, not only for the recruitment of local youth to the fishing professions, but also for the reputation of the fisheries and the image of the municipality of Gamvik.

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