Phillipson J, Symes D, Salmi P. [Resilience and Adaptation of Fishing Communities](#). *Sociologia Ruralis* 2015, 55(3), 243-244.

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Date deposited:

11/08/2015

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Guest Editorial
Resilience and Adaptation of Fishing Communities

It is almost 20 years since *Sociologia Ruralis* last dedicated its pages to the subject of European fisheries. Then the focus was on the social and cultural sustainability of fisheries and questions over the capacity of fisheries management systems to support sustainable development. Throughout the two intervening decades, involving two cycles of reform of the European Common Fisheries Policy and intensifying sources of environmental, economic and social instability, fishing communities have been seemingly in a perpetual state of uncertainty. Europe's fishing industries have continued to contract in terms of vessels, employment and output though in recent years there have been encouraging signs that efforts to rebuild depleted commercial stocks in the NE Atlantic are bearing fruit. At the same time, and notwithstanding significant restructuring of the fisheries sector, the households, businesses and places that depend on fishing have often displayed remarkable levels of resilience and ability to adapt.

The current collection of papers therefore considers the *Resilience and Adaptation of Fishing Communities*. It draws on a selection of papers, focussed on Northern Europe, from a dedicated fisheries working group held at the XXV ESRS Congress in Florence in 2013. The theme of the Congress was *Rural Resilience and Vulnerability: The Rural as Locus of Solidarity and Conflict in Times of Crisis*.

We were keen for papers in the special issue to address a number of central themes identified during the working group. These include uncovering the social structures and institutions that underpin the adaptive capacities of fishing households and businesses. Certain papers consider the extent to which these capacities may themselves be subject to instability or strain, in response to changes within fisheries policy or from within fishing communities, and how this may be closing down or opening up opportunities. Others explore whether adaptation strategies are themselves neutral processes – how far are they negotiated, to what extent are they uniformly available to all, and what might be their outcomes for different participants within fishing households and communities? Finally the special issue considers the implications of newly emerging adaptation strategies and policy efforts to enhance resilience or, in the words of one of our working group participants, ‘expand the freedoms’ of fishing communities.

As editors, one of the pleasing aspects of the special issue is that half of the papers come from a young generation of authors, which bodes well for the future of fisheries social science in Europe. We extend our sincere thanks to all contributors for their prompt and efficient responses to our editorial requests, the anonymous reviewers for their constructive critiques that have enhanced the papers, and the Editor of *Sociologia Ruralis* Dr Bettina Bock for her professional and diligent oversight of the issue.

Jeremy Phillipson
David Symes
Pekka Salmi