

Informal Markets and Institutional Change in Small-scale Fisheries in Southern Brazil

In: People and the Sea V: 'Living with uncertainty and adapting to change'. Held by the Centre for Maritime Research (MARE), Amsterdam, Netherlands, 9th - 11th July, 2009.

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Abstract: This paper aims at providing empirical material that could shed light on a wider discussion about how poverty can affect livelihoods and governance in small-scale fisheries. The research was carried out between 2006 and 2008, in Southern Brazil (Patos Lagoon estuary) and applied a qualitative approach in a case study design. The findings highlight the complexity of livelihoods by contrasting rural and urban contexts, and show how informal practices can result in elaborate links between local and global markets. Informality made for consistent income generation among poor fisherfolk, and as a result brought about an institution with which fisherfolk gained access to markets and unprecedented representation in the local fisheries management. However, informality was also often based on the exploitation of workers and on unsustainable fishing. This research draws attention to the paradoxical nature of processes in small-scale fisheries and the complex relationship between poverty and natural resource use.

Funding: SACC/IAI/CRN2076