

Summary of doctoral dissertation

Mirosław Kuklik

The traditional culture of coastal fishing communities on the Hel Peninsula considered against the background of the socio-economic changes of the twentieth century

Supervisor: dr hab. Ewa Kocój, professor of the Jagiellonian University (JU)

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For centuries there has been an exceptionally great concentration of people involved in fishing in the area surrounding the Bay of Gdańsk, especially on the shores of its western part, the Bay of Puck. Among the fishing settlements in this region, those situated on the Hel Peninsula are particularly distinctive. This narrow strip of land has hardly any agricultural areas, and so in the past its inhabitants were forced to rely on fishing for their livelihood throughout the year and to live in accordance with the rhythm of repeated ichthyological and biological cycles. As a result of this exclusive dependence on fishing, social and family matters on the peninsula were subordinated to the occupational demands of the fishing settlements. In this way, a fishing culture came into being here which was unique, even for Baltic conditions.

In the past, however, this region was not homogeneous either ethnically or culturally. It was divided into Kashubs, who were Roman Catholic and who identified themselves as Polish in nationality, and Lutherans, who considered themselves to be German. The latter were finally displaced from Hel during the period 1936-1938, and their place was taken by settlers from other regions of Poland.

The main research goal of this dissertation is to trace the processes of change taking place in the fishing communities of the Hel Peninsula during the twentieth century. It assumes that these communities were affected by the many changes, historical and political, that took place in Poland as a whole and in the region itself. These changes influenced both the identity of the fishermen and the socio-economic conditions in which their families lived, in turn affecting the domestic and seasonal customs of the inhabitants of the Hel settlements.

The particular objectives of the dissertation are as follows:

- To determine the nature of the political and environmental changes affecting the fishing communities and their impact on their occupational practices and social customs;
- To describe and reconstruct the traditional tools and methods used by seagoing fishermen from the Hel Peninsula;
- To assemble, define and record, in accordance with current Kashubian spelling conventions, idioms and fishing terms used by the inhabitants of the Hel Peninsula in the twentieth century.

The scale of the work has meant that some elements of the material culture of the population of this area, such as building, clothing, art and food, have consciously been omitted.

This work is ethnological in nature, but due to the complexity of the subject matter, it is also necessarily interdisciplinary, extending to issues from other scientific disciplines, such as history, ichthyology, oceanology and sociology. Its interdisciplinary scope includes, in particular, an ethnographical presentation of the spiritual and material culture of fishing families of the Hel Peninsula. Fishing rituals and customs have been considered within the historical and sociological context, bearing in mind the changes taking place in the natural environment and in various technologies.

The methodology has consisted of analysis of the information and other resources already available, supplementing these with further details obtained directly from interviews and from observation at first hand. Non-standardized, qualitative research methods have also been used, including the analysis of available sources such as historical documents and ethnographical material that has been preserved not only in archives, museums and private collections but also in a variety of scientific and popular publications available in the form of books or magazines. The use of secondary sources has been essential in gathering information for the dissertation. These sources have included interviews, often profound and spontaneous and conducted with only a limited degree of control, which contained both overt and implicit observations. The work has also analyzed the iconographic documentation that has been preserved, together with other visual sources, including film, as well as material found on the internet.

Field research was conducted to the point at which nothing further could be added to fill out the facts obtained earlier. The author gained personal experience of sea fishing, leading to a better understanding of the psychological and physical occupational conditions faced by fishermen .

Owing to the diversity of the topics within the scope of this dissertation, it has been divided into two parts: the first is devoted to the presentation of the natural and social environment of the Hel Peninsula and the second to the basic occupation of its inhabitants, namely fishing.

The first part consists of three chapters that set out, respectively, the geographical and oceanological conditions, the history of research into the people of the Peninsula and its history and customs, domestic and seasonal.

The second part, also in three chapters, describes the organization, fishing techniques and, above all, the tools used by the boat fishermen of the Peninsula. It also presents the factors influencing change in the traditional culture of this community, and in the summing up there is an attempt to address the question of the future of traditional coastal fishing in this region.

The twentieth century saw a turning point in the lives of the fishing people of the Hel Peninsula. Isolated for centuries, their community had to open up and learn to live and work in a world of previously unfamiliar principles and values. At the beginning of the twentieth century every male born here knew that he would become a fisherman. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the traditional fishing teams, or *mashoperias*, that had operated since at least the sixteenth century, had ceased to exist, and most of the inhabitants had begun to make their living from non-fishing professions. The twentieth century had begun with well-established customary laws still in force here, but ended at a time of rapid transformation related to the pre-accession processes by which the Polish economy was to be prepared for joining the structures of the European Union. In addition, the fishermen were confronted with the limitation of strict fishing limitation quotas, hitherto unknown to them, introduced as the result of a marked decline in the stocks of fish species in their fishing grounds. The dissertation traces the gradual disappearance of the *mashoperias* and the development of cutter fisheries, which have gradually predominated over the earlier boat fishing of the region. Issues are also raised concerning the opening up of this isolated community to foreign settlers and holiday-makers, as well as the reactions of fishermen to the political and environmental changes that have affected them during the period analyzed.

In practical terms the boat fishermen were untouched by the economic transformation after 1989, as they had always worked on their own account and tentative attempts to nationalize their activities had had no effect. The political changes affected mainly cutter fishermen working in the state-owned fishing enterprises. For coastal fishermen it was much

more difficult to come to terms with the fact that traditional fisheries could no longer be sustained and to accept strong administrative interference regarding when and where they were to fish.

The Hel Peninsula today is no longer a hermetically closed world. Technical progress, its great popularity as a summer resort and convenient transport connections mean that the Hel Peninsula is no longer a mysterious, inaccessible land. Its young inhabitants maintain extensive contacts with the rest of the Puck Region and the rest of the country. Under the influence of mass media and culture they are gradually forgetting old traditions and the customs of their ancestors. It is no longer seen as attractive or necessary to take up fishing as an occupation. It even seems that the old attachment to a patch of land on the Peninsula has lost its relevance.

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*Leue Kouj
Miroslaw Kulek*