Cite: Said. A. 2017, Are the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines Sufficient to Halt the Fisheries Decline in Malta? In *The Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines Global Implementation* Eds. Jentoft S., Franz, N., Barragan Pallidines, J.M, Chuenpagdee, R., ,Mare Publication Series, Springer. (in press)

Chapter 11
Are the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines Sufficient to Halt the Fisheries Decline in Malta?

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Abstract The fishing sector in Malta has always been one of a small-scale nature with a long history of fishers engaging in traditional small-scale fishing practices. However, this image has undergone a radical shift in the past decade since Malta's accession to the EU in 2004. With the industrialization of the Bluefin tuna fishery and the increase in the number of industrial trawlers, small-scale fishers are facing multi-faceted deprivation to a point where exiting is the only option, a reality evident by the declining number of small-scale fishers engaged in the sector. This case study demonstrates that the problems small-scale fishers are facing are the result of ineffective governance systems which do not cater to the needs of the small-scale fisheries sector and thus the establishment of imminent protective strategies for small-scale fishers are needed. I argue that the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines) should be the starting point for the regeneration of the small-scale fisheries sector in Malta. In line with the scope of the SSF Guidelines, fishers can benefit from enriched stability through the provision of tenure rights and the formation of fisheries local action groups (FLAGs). This way, small-scale fishers, who represent the relics of sustainable fishing in Malta, can become empowered and proactively get involved in designing a long-term vision that restores the image of the small-scale fisheries sector in the neoliberal era.

Keywords: Fisheries Governance ● SSF Guidelines ● Mediterranean ● FLAGs ● Rationalization ● Livelihood Struggles

Introduction

The geographical location of Malta - an island with high accessibility to the sea - has always been a crucial element to human beings' link to fish resources. The small-scale

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fisheries sector, more than any other, represents this link, one that dates back hundreds of years. The legacy of fishing has been sustained for centuries with traditional know-how and fishing vessels being passed from one generation to the next. These fisheries have always been characterized by small family enterprises engaging in traditional low-impact small-scale fishing methods to produce small volumes of high-value products (Dimech et al. 2009).

Altogether small-scale fishers represent around 1% of the working population, and their catches comprise just around 0.2% of the national GDP (Dimech et al. 2009). Due to this insignificant direct contribution to the national economy, the small-scale fisheries sector is less important economically than it is socially and culturally (Dimech et al. 2009). It is important socially and culturally for a number of reasons: these include the supply of local and fresh fish to authentic fish markets and traditional Maltese restaurants; the reproduction of the social fabric that solidifies community networks and stability; and the creation of an emblematic cultural representation of fishing sought by tourists, especially in the main fishing villages of Marsaxlokk (Figure 11.1) and Mġarr (Gozo) (Figure 11.2) where local craftsmanship of vessel-and-gear making is still vibrant.

Figure 11.1: Marsaxlokk fishing village

Figure 11.2 Gozitan fisherman creating basket traps for bogue fishing

The sustainability of small-scale fisheries within fishing ports is questionable, however, since, as this chapter will show, the small-scale fisheries sector has been in constant decline for the past ten years. The disintegration of the small-scale fisheries sector is mostly due to major changes in traditional fishing norms and values which were destroyed with the advent of new supranational regimes of policy and trade and the concomitant modus operandi of the governing system at the national level. This case study borrows important concepts from governance theory to illustrate how Maltese small-scale fisheries have become increasingly vulnerable as a result of socio-political governance processes that favoured the endurance of a small but powerful group of large-scale, predominantly industrial, fishing companies, which managed to strive and prosper at the expense of the small-scale fisheries sector (Said et al. 2016). We show how these developments are diluting the importance of small-scale fisheries to the extent that they have become marginal.

Following an assessment of the main changes and challenges faced by small-scale fisheries, in Section 'The End of the Small-Scale Fishing Sector: A Governance Problem', I argue that the small-scale fisheries sector would benefit from a governance structure that truly represents the realities and needs of the sector through policy frameworks that promote the sustainability of small-scale fishing communities. By drawing on the framework of the SSF Guidelines, I provide recommendations that aim at highlighting trajectories for the renaissance of the Maltese small-scale fisheries sector. The SSF Guidelines, which are the first international instrument dedicated entirely to the 'often-neglected' small-scale fisheries sector (FAO 2015, v), were adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2014 with the aim of providing guidance to promote secure and sustainable small-scale fisheries across the world. The guidelines provide a resourceful roadmap in situations, such as that in Malta, where the small-scale fisheries sector is sinking under the pressure of multi-faceted challenges emanating from policy shocks, processes of elite capture as well as ineffective governance structures.

Being an international tool that applies to various contexts, the SSF Guidelines provide pragmatic routes that can be enacted to support the sustainability of small-scale fisheries through good governance principles based on 'equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, accountability and the rule of law' (FAO, 2015, xi). In this chapter, I suggest that the SSF Guidelines may in fact 'spur new legislation' (Jentoft 2014, 7) that could improve the fisheries' social, economic and ecological pillars, for the benefit of current and future generations. As an example, I discuss the potential advancements that small-scale fisheries can obtain through the establishment of fisheries local action groups (FLAGs), supported by an EU-funded scheme aimed at promoting endogenous community-based management. Ultimately, I argue, however, that although the SSF Guidelines provide promising guidance on the future of small-scale fisheries, their voluntary nature might be the main challenge especially in cases such as Malta, where herculean efforts are needed to overhaul the status quo that favours the large-scale sector.

As a case study, this chapter seeks to explain the main drivers that have entrapped small-scale fisheries in a cycle of vulnerability by providing a detailed description of the state of affairs at the local level as gauged through 15-months of fieldwork between May 2014 and August 2015 within the main fishing villages. The narrative, which details the pressures faced by fishers in the context of dynamic changes that are constantly occurring in the fishing landscape, seeks to provide recommendations based on the SSF Guidelines. Recommendations are given around two main research questions, namely:

1) What are the main challenges faced by the small-scale fisheries sector?
2) How can the implementation of the SSF Guidelines halt the decline of the sector?

Methodology

A mixed-method approach was implemented and encompassed various qualitative data collection techniques including in-depth interviews (n=50), participant observation including fishing trips (n≈100) and opportunistic conversations (n≈150) with various fishers, their families, and other social actors from the community. Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the data collection process, especially during happenstance encounters that elicited rather tacit and sensitive information. The use of gatekeepers was essential for accessing different networks of fishers through purposeful snowballing. Rapport with the fishers was well-established to an extent that they themselves made direct requests to be interviewed towards the end of the first quarter of fieldwork. The primary data was triangulated with other sources including online forums, media articles, local and regional legislations, and formal national statements, including ministerial speeches. Detailed information about the fleet vessel registry and the métier-based (fishing gear) data were kindly provided by the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DFA), within the Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change (MSDEC). Following the compilation of the various datasets, an open-ended comparative technique was implemented to triangulate the data so as to ensure that the findings were consistent, valid, and reliable.

The Fishing Sector in Malta

Fishing, in the Maltese islands, has always formed an important socio-economic component for a number of coastal communities (Camilleri 2002), and along with agriculture in the past it played a central role in rural household economies. With the increase of job opportunities in manufacturing and tertiary industries, dependency on fishing started decreasing. However, up until the beginning of the 2000s, Malta still had a full-fledged fleet consisting of 1,850 commercial fishing vessels. These included 314 full-time fisher vessels which represented family-based entities whose livelihood was predominantly dependent on fishing; 266 market-fisher vessels, which represented part-time fishers who were obligated to register their fish catches at the main fish market; and 1,270 part-time fisher vessels which represented fishers who fish on part-time basis but were not required to declare their landings at the fish market (Grupetta 2002).

This fleet classification system was phased out in 2004 and commercial fishing vessels are now divided into two main segments, namely: full-time and part-time. In general, full-time vessels encompass fishers whose main income is earned from fishing whilst part-time vessels include fishers who engage in commercial fishing for a supplementary income. In terms of catches, part-time vessels produce landings that amount to approximately 10% of what full-time vessels produce by weight and value, and in terms of fishing activity, part-timers conduct fewer and shorter trips than the commercial counterpart (Dimech et al. 2009). At the time of writing, the total number of vessels in the part-time cohort was 601, whilst the full-time counterpart hosts 401 vessels. The vessels differ by type, and some of the most traditional ones have their origins in the early 19th century when the most traditional boats were manually operated by wooden oars. Some traditional names of these vessels are '*kajjiek', 'luzzu'*, '*bimbu', 'firilla',* and *'frejgatina* (NSO 2011).[2] All the vessels today are operated by motorized propellers, and the traditional wooden vessels are gradually giving way to fiber-based vessels.

[2]The difference in the vessels is mainly a structural one as their operational purpose in terms of fishing is relatively similar.

Over time and through technological advancement, the small-scale fleet has become better equipped with navigation systems and fish finding equipment that facilitate the search for good fishing grounds, as well as with motorized winches that make fishing relatively less strenuous. Despite becoming more efficient in terms of fishing activity, small-scale fisheries have retained their small-scale fishing practices. The small-scale fisheries sector has, however, as a segment started co-existing and competing for resources with a number of small trawlers since the 1980s when the government issued a number of trawling permits as a response to greater local demand for fish to feed the local population (Camilleri 2002). After 2004, increased access to larger trawlers as well as the introduction of purse seine licenses has seen the rise of industrial operations within the Maltese fleet. Now small-scale vessels co-exist with large-scale fishing vessels as will be explained in further detail in Section 4. In terms of number of vessels small-scale vessels have always outnumbered their industrial counterpart. In 2015, small-scale vessels accounted for 98% of the commercial sector. Multi-purpose vessels comprise the largest number within the small-scale cohort, followed by the '*kajjiek*' and the '*luzzu*'. In terms of vessel length (LOA), 50% of the vessels are smaller than 6 meters, and overall, 93% of the fleet is composed of vessels which are smaller than 12 meters (Table 11.1). Hence in line with the European Union (EU) definition of small-scale fisheries, 93% of Maltese commercial vessels are small-scale in nature.

Table 11.1 This data, which was supplied by the DFA in 2015, shows that the commercial fleet is majorly composed of vessels smaller than 12 meters, and thus the Maltese fleet is predominantly of a small-scale nature.

Table 11.1: The Maltese Commercial Fleet

Size of Vessel (meters)	<6	6 - <12	12-<18	18 - <24	24 - <40	Total
Total Number of Vessels	504	431	24	33	10	1002
Percentage of Fleet	50.3%	43%	2.4%	3.3%	1%	100%

Source: Data supplied by DFA 2014

The Maltese small-scale fishing fleet is engaged in different types of fishing activities throughout the year which range from offshore to coastal fisheries. Offshore fisheries, which mostly take place within the high seas (outside the 12-mile-territorial-waters), and at times extend as far out as 120 miles from the coast, include fishing for offshore pelagic species such as Bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*), swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*), and dolphinfish/mahi-mahi (*Coryphaena hippurus*) (Gatt et al. 2015). On average, offshore trips last between two to ten days depending on the fishery, the weather, and the catches. Fisheries are seasonal: Bluefin tuna long-line fishing takes place between April and June until the allowable quotas are exhausted as stipulated in the EU Bluefin tuna recovery plan (EC 302/2009); swordfish long-lining is open all year except for the months of March, October and November in line with EU law; and dolphinfish fishing, which is practised through the use of surrounding nets, is permitted from 15th August up until the end of December (EC 1967/2006 Art. 27).

Coastal small-scale demersal fishing is a widely-practised activity that can take place throughout the year since there are no specific seasonal regulations other than for the use of the hand-held seine targeting white bait, which according to national law is

permitted only between 25th June and 15th August (GOM 2013a). Fishing with small-scale fishing gear is very versatile and dynamic since fishers might fish with a trammel net one day and then deploy a bottom long-line the next day. Basically, this multi-gear system which includes the use of trammel nets, gillnets, pots, traps, hand-held seines, bottom and surface long-lines, trolling, and pole lines, is very typical both in Malta and in other Mediterranean countries (Leiva et al. 1998; Tzanatos et al. 2006; Battaglia et al. 2010). Locally, these fishing gears are majorly deployed within the 12 nautical mile zone, although fishing within the 25 nautical mile zone, especially with set bottom long-lines is very common also. Fishing grounds closer to the mainland within the 3 nautical mile circumference are also popular amongst small-scale fishers (Stelzenmüller et al. 2008).

On average, the coastal demersal trips with small-scale fishing gear within the 3, 12 or 25 nautical mile zones take between half-a-day to two days maximum, and the actual geographical location of the fishing is mostly determined by the richness of the fishing grounds. Fishers explain that demersal fisheries depend on the depth of the water and the sea bathymetry, and that there are different fishing grounds that are good for specific fish during different seasons. This type of traditional ecological knowledge about Maltese fisheries exists across small-scale fishers as they have gained it through years of experience; however, no records of such knowledge is available, mainly because no research has actually been carried out on the ethnoichthyology of Maltese small-scale fishers to date.[3] The only data that is collected about traditional fishing activities is in line with the EU Data Collection Framework. As an annual dataset it provides information on the small-scale fisher fleet in terms of usage of gear vis-a-vis the number of days at sea, the total catches made, and the value of the catches. Interestingly, this data shows that small-scale fisheries account for the dominant fishing activity in terms of days at sea (MSDEC 2013c), indicating that they encompass the largest chunk of operations of the Maltese fishing sector, mostly because there are no restrictions on them.

The use of trammel nets, gillnets, pots and traps, bottom long-lines and trolling lines is open to all commercial fishers with no restrictions on fishing effort within these fisheries. In other words, those owning a commercial fishing license (full-time and part-time) can utilize these fishing gears without specific permits. On the other hand, offshore fisheries do not host a large number of fishers since the Bluefin tuna fishery is restricted by a fishing quota and a permit system that recognizes only 63 vessels (Said et al. 2016) whilst the dolphinfish fishery is restricted to 130 vessels (EC 1967/2006 Art. 27). In fact it is not uncommon to find small-scale fishers who only work with coastal fishing gear and do not target offshore fisheries for they do not hold the necessary permits to do so. In contrast, most small-scale fishers who target offshore fisheries with vessels larger than 12 meters, also own a small-scale vessel so as to be able to use coastal small-scale fisheries gear especially in the winter season (Grupetta 2002; Dimech et al. 2009).

In terms of fish marketing, the majority of the catches of the small-scale fisheries sector was, and still is, sold mainly through the central fish marketplace (*pixkerija*) and are destined to the local market through middlemen, although some fishers sell their catches to the consumer themselves. Consumers consist of hotels, restaurants and individuals who buy fish at the famous fish market in Marsaxlokk on Sundays. Some of the catches, especially of large pelagic fish, are also exported. The export of Bluefin tuna and swordfish to foreign lucrative markets has been taking place for around 30 years (Farrugia et al. 2004) and has always been considered as necessary because the small-

[3]This is a field within anthropology that examines the knowledge that humans have about fish, their use and their importance in different societies.

and-fragile local market gets saturated.[4] The fluctuating fish prices in the local and foreign markets, along with other challenges that fishermen are confronted with on an everyday basis during their fishing activity, shape the nature of fishers' livelihoods.

Small-scale fishers pointed out that it is not unusual to not catch a single fish in a day, or to lose gear at sea and incur losses as opposed to make profits. When fishing in the high seas, clashes with foreign vessels have become the norm, and at times these fights have escalated to 'wars', especially during the tuna (Vella 2002) and dolphinfish season (Bilocca 2006). Fishing comes with a lot of challenges but fishers narrated that despite these challenges, they still continued to fish as they consider fishing a way of life. It seems then that fishers are resilient and persist through various cycles of changes. What is less understood, however, is how fishers have experienced changes as a result of Malta becoming part of the EU. Prior to accession to the EU Malta, as an island state, had sole jurisdiction over fisheries.

The Major Drivers of Change

As already mentioned, Maltese fishers have endured various patterns of change throughout their fishing lives, which have strengthened their endogenous ability to respond to ecological variability. In his work on small-scale fisheries in Europe, Symes (2014) explains that fishers are more predisposed to adjust to changes which they understand and can make sense of On the other hand, when changes occur that test their local systems of knowledge and are detached from their realities, these can potentially erode the fishers' resilience (Coulthard 2012; Hadjimichael et al. 2013). Exogenous processes that have been noted to threaten the functional endogenous systems of small-scale fishers include globalization in the form of trade networks (Frank et al. 2007), as well as supranational policy formulations which deregulate patterns of local norms and traditions (Symes et al. 2015).

In the Maltese case, various changes have happened within the fishing sector, the most notable of them since 2004. The period 2004 to 2014 was the first 10 years after EU accession and the period in which the fishing sector was exposed to supranational processes that now shape most fisheries management and market trajectories. These include the ratification of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) with regard to internal policy, fleet restructuring, fisheries management, monitoring and controls, fleet regulations, fishing opportunities; and the integration into the EU Common Market Organization which brought major changes in fish marketing standards, and the import and export policy (European Commission 2003).

I argue that these changes, some of which are listed in Table 11.2, have had different levels of negative impact on small-scale fisheries due to a transformation of traditional patterns of fishing; and in the market case, due to the overhauling of the national legislation that had previously shielded small-scale fishers from adverse economic impacts of fish imports (S.L.425.03 1965). The main impacts dealt with in detail in this chapter include EU fisheries management policies that have been framed around the concept of sustainable exploitation of fisheries through reduced fishing effort

[4]In fact, before Malta joined the EU a 'tuna fish importation restriction order' to control the amount of tuna entering the Maltese market was also in place to curb economic impacts on local fishers (Cap 425.03).

and capacity at the Member State level. As highlighted in Table 11.2, these include the restriction on national fishing capacity, the legislations pertaining to trawling that deal with circumnavigating the 25 nautical mile zone open-access demersal fisheries, and the Bluefin tuna fishery policy that has developed in line with the EU Bluefin tuna recovery plan (EC 302/2009).

Table 11.2 This table represents the various legislative changes in the Maltese fisheries policy since EU accession in 2004.

Table 11.2: Fisheries Legislative Changes following EU Accession				
Fishing and Marketing	**PRE-EU**	**POST-EU**	**Post-EU National Implementation**	**Implication on Small-Scale Fisheries sector**
Vessel Register	Open-access	Closed	Fleet restructuration through capping system	Concentration of capacity in large-scale vessels
25 NM Fisheries Management Zone (FMZ)	Maltese Territorial Waters since 1971	Territoriality reduced to 12 NM and retained as FMZ	Implementation of FMZ measures on flag vessels	Increased competition by foreign vessels outside 12NMZ.
Demersal Fishery	Open-access for artisanal vessels and restriction on trawlers	Restriction on 12m boats within FMZ & Derogation for Trawlers	Artisanal Vessels larger than 12m relocated to outsize FMZ and trawlers operating within	Discrimination of artisanal vessels vs trawlers operating in 25NMZ.
Bluefin Tuna Fishery	Open-access in an ICCAT national quota	Drastic reduction of national TAC	Implementation of Individual Transferable Quotas	Concentration of quotas amongst large-scale operations mainly fish farms
Swordfish Fishery	No regulation	Swordfish Conservation Policy	Implementation of technical measures and minimum size	Reduced ability to catch swordfish
Trawling Zones	Prohibited fishing within the 3NMZ (since 1990s)	Re-opening of coastal zones for trawling	Increase in the number of trawlers and relocation of the activity	Increased fishing competition and reduced fishing grounds for artisanal segment
Fish Imports Regulation	Restriction on imports of fish	Single market	Ratified local law on restrictions	Increased competition from imported products

These policies were aimed at reducing the overall fishing capacity and effort at the Member State level. The EU, by introducing specific capping in the Maltese fishing industry, ensured that the fisheries did not remain open-access in nature. By placing a cap on total fishing capacity and by reducing the total allowable catch of Bluefin tuna at the national level, the EU has created a situation of regulated scarcity at the Member State level. Regulated scarcity refers to a situation where a resource is scarce due to a regulation, and one in which its distribution is controlled by those in power. In Gezelius' (2002, 64) words, regulated scarcity is 'a political decision which limits the citizens' access to a good'. Thus, in this case, the government, following EU restrictions, became the entity, at the national-level, responsible for determining who gets what in terms of access to fishing quotas and licenses. So whereas the open-access nature of the fleet prior to EU accession enabled fishers to partake freely within the fleet, top-down restrictions imposed by the EU have overhauled this 'flexibility' and empowered the national government to distribute 'scarce' resources as deemed 'proper'. I show that this 'proper' way of distribution was mostly aimed at rationalizing the fleet to make it more competitive in the global market; however, this has triggered a series of derailing consequences in terms of the stability of the small-scale fisheries sector.

One example of this is the Bluefin tuna fishery, which was a profitable niche for small-scale fishers, but which is increasingly becoming the property of industrial fleets as a result of government providing the latter with enabling policies (Said et al. 2016). This has happened primarily through the introduction of a national purse seine tuna license system in 2005. This national policy overhauled a long-standing precautionary policy that had prohibited the licensing of purse seiners for catching large pelagic species and avoiding monopolization of catch at the expense of small-scale fishers fishing with Bluefin tuna long-lines (Vella 2002). Added to this, with the introduction of the EU Bluefin tuna recovery plan (EC 302/2009), which brought drastic reductions to national total allowable catch (TAC), specific clauses within the policy have enabled industrial purse seine fleets and concomitant tuna ranching industries to take over the fishery. Specifically, the introduction of individual transferable quotas (ITQs) , which shifted fishing rights into a set of marketable property rights, enabled a gradual system of accumulation by dispossession which has undermined the continued sustainability of the small-scale fishing fleet engaged in the Bluefin tuna fishery (Said et al. 2016).

Another example that illustrates how supranational policies have been implemented to rationalize the fleet was the restructuration of the Maltese fleet in 2005. This restructuration, as illustrated in national statistics (NSO, 2004, 2005) reduced the small-scale fleet by half and enabled the expansion in the number of larger-scale vessels. The number of trawling vessels between 2002 and 2010 increased by 43% (from 16 to 23 trawlers) (NSO 2010). This increase, in the name of rationalization, means that more trawlers are now able to operate within what has become, after EU accession, 'the 25 nautical mile fisheries management zone (FMZ)'. The main aim of the FMZ was to protect marine resources by limiting fishing effort to a minimum; however, this has worked against, rather than in favor of the artisanal fleet. Fishermen owning vessels larger-than-12-metres engaging in artisanal long-lining and trammel netting were displaced from this zone (Dimech et al. 2009), whilst trawlers, since 2004, have been benefitting from a derogation that allows them to operate within the FMZ. Moreover, a number of trawlers are allowed to trawl within the inshore 3 nautical mile zone. These relaxation of rules for the trawling sector, which were primarily aimed at making the Maltese fleet (or powerful businesses) more competitive in the EU single market, overhauled pre-EU legislations that had restricted the number of trawlers that could operate in the 25 FMZ, and prohibited all forms of trawling within the 3 nautical mile

zone due to the presence of spawning grounds and small-scale fishers in the coastal zone (Camilleri 2002). Hence, with these changes, small-scale fishers have become subjected to heightened competition with industrial fleets targeting demersal fisheries within the coastal waters (Dimech et al. 2009).

Simultaneous to this development in the demersal fisheries, there has been a parallel growth in trammel and gillnetting operations which too are now dominated by fishing companies who engage in relatively higher 'small-scale' fishing effort than the independent small-scale fishers. The latter are able to deploy 12 to 15 trammel nets per day due to human capital and time constraints (i.e. they need to ensure that they get their fish to the market in time) and as a result are in a constant competition with the companies that employ multiple foreign hands "to work around the clock" and deploy between 50 and 80 nets per day (Caruana 2015; Said et al. 2016). The engagement of companies in intensive small-scale fishing is also a sign of the growth of a capitalist fishing sector. Since there are no supranational policies that limit the use of trammel nets, the government has been enabling the expansion of such operations, even though these are being done at the detriment of the independently-owned small-scale fisher sector, and might be causing overexploitation of such fisheries – as argued by fishers (Said et al. 2016).

The aforementioned situation that characterizes the trammel net fishery, the trawling industry, and the Bluefin tuna fishery policy all demonstrate that the government has been pushing the fishing fleet towards increased rationalization so that decision-making has become narrowly founded on neoliberal modernization within the ambit of supranational policy compliance (Said et al. 2016). Neoliberalism, which has favored the expansion of capitalist operations through aggregation and ownership schemes, is creating a series of obstacles for the small-scale fishing community. For example, most small-scale fishers, who do not hold sufficient social, economic and political power, have been facing different forms of marginalization with regard to the allocation of fishing rights, access to fishing grounds, and other forms of restricted growth (e.g. vessel enlargement) (Said et al. 2016a, in review). In fact, only a few fishers have advanced within the sector. My fieldwork showed that these individuals were either more financially equipped or politically connected than most others in the fleet, and as a result have been able to benefit from different opportunities such as licenses, permits and quotas. With these distributive injustices, the majority of small-scale fishers have been unable to compete on a level playing field with the burgeoning capitalist class, which is now dominating the different fisheries that were once communally shared by the small-scale fisheries sector.

As a result, small-scale fisheries are threatened. One can observe that since EU accession there has been a gradual ongoing phasing out of small-scale fishers who have become less able to adapt to neoliberalism. Since 2004, the number of commercial vessels has decreased by 45%. There has also been a parallel decrease in the number of fishers. Moreover, the fishing community is not being rejuvenated as was the case in the past, since different exogenous forces have been pushing fishers out and simultaneously restricting the entrance of new fishers. This is leading to a situation where the fishing fleet will dissipate in numbers, especially if the present pattern of intra-generational deficit in the fleet persists, as indicated in Figure 11.3. Overall, the age cohorts of the full-time Maltese fishers who own a vessel illustrate that there is not an equivalent inter-generational increase to cater for the socio-economic renewal of the fleet and this is leading to the greying of the sector.

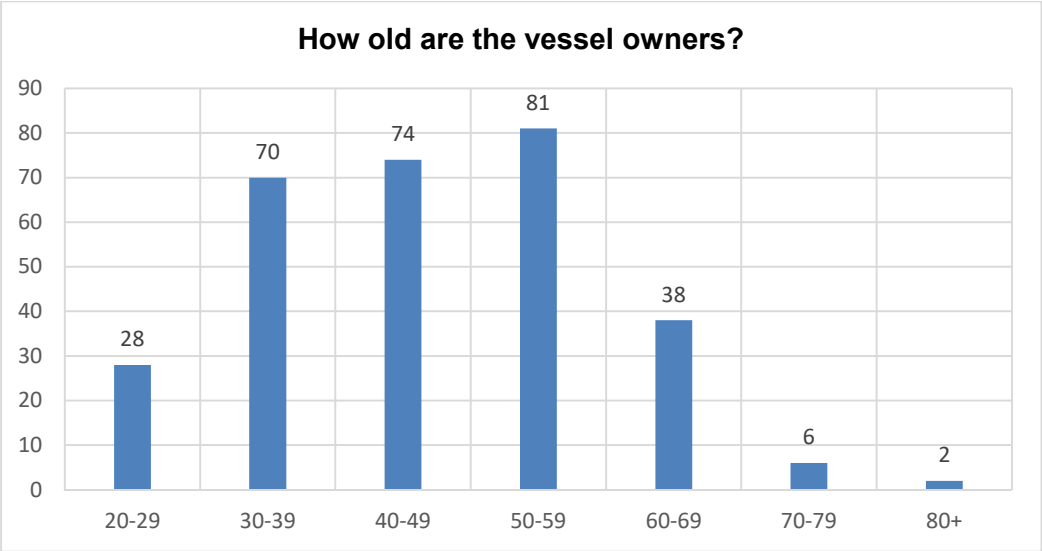

Figure11.3: The ages of the full-time fishers who own a vessel

The number of owners within the youngest age cohort (20-29), as shown in Figure 11.3, is less than half of what it was in earlier generations. This is the outcome of two main drivers. First, in the past, it was the norm that sons inherited the boat from their fathers, and this legacy kept the sector somewhat sustainable. In contrast, nowadays families are discouraging their sons/daughters from taking over the business as they do not see fishing as a desirable livelihood any longer due to the uncertainties that it holds. Second, newcomers find it difficult to enter fishing as vessel permits have become scarce due to the closure of the fleet, and any available fishing licenses/rights are mostly bought by and affordable to corporate fishing companies which are expanding their operations through the ownership of multiple small-scale and large-scale vessels (Said et al. 2016).

With these changes, family-based enterprises have been on the decline, and while a few still remain they are mainly supported by foreign labor which has been on the rise over the past eight years. Foreign employees have been gradually replacing family members and local deckhands who in the past were employed for most of the peak fishing seasons including that of the Bluefin tuna, swordfish and dolphinfish. The change of the vessel crew dimension has also changed the mode of production from a share-based system to one which is now mostly based on wage labor. The profits used to be shared amongst the crew according to a share-based ranking system, whereas now the foreign deckhands are on a payroll and paid wages. In the case of large companies who own multiple small-scale fishing vessels, the employment of three to four foreigners as deckhands has been part of their capitalist cyclical performance of expansion. On the other hand, independent small-scale fishers who employ one to two foreigners explained that foreign wage labor is their last resort to remain a fully-operational 'family-based' entity. Moreover, some independently-owned fishers who own a full-time fishing vessel but do not afford to pay foreigners, also have a part-time job on land since, as a fisherman explained, "fishing alone is not enough to feed the family these days", and they are aware that their situation cannot improve within the current policies.

These cases have shown how different policies have favored the most powerful interest groups, perhaps because they are likely to be more influential in steering national policy trajectories in their favour. However, we have noticed how these processes,

especially those related to questions of distribution, have been justified on lines of rationalization, i.e. the allocation of resources and opportunities to the most efficient cohorts within a system (Davis 2015). In this regard, I argue that although most of these changes have their origin in EU supranational policies of sustainable resource use, the way they have been implemented at the national level within the ambit of conservation, efficiency and rationalization, has been underpinned by an implicit motive of accommodating specific interests of powerful/politically-connected groups that foster capitalist growth at the expense of small-scale entrepreneurship. The governance of the small-scale sector, therefore, has inevitably become enmeshed in a system of interplaying forces that favour the large-scale operators, and thus it became difficult for the small-scale sector to have their say.

The End of the Small-Scale Fishing Sector: A Governance Problem

The realities of the Maltese small-scale fishing sector demonstrate that although fishers are subject to challenges emanating from policies that favored capitalist growth at the expense of their own existence, they are unable to challenge these policies since governance structures are controlled by capitalist enterprises. In the SSF Guidelines, this problem of unequal power relations has been highlighted as a shared phenomenon amongst many small-scale fishing communities who are unable to secure their rights mainly due to the lack of effective governance structures. Malta's case shows how fishers, who pre-2004 benefitted from relatively transparent governance systems that responded to the requirements of small-scale fisheries, are now victims of a governance structure that is not aligned to meeting the needs of the sector.

One of the major roots of the problem is the way fisheries co-operatives, which are the local governing institutions that ought to "work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members" (CAP442 2001), have not been fulfilling their roles. Instead, co-operative representatives have used their legally-enshrined socio-political powers to make selfish decisions that have adversely affected the majority of small-scale fishers. As indicated in the study by Said et al. (2016), 'the politically-connected representatives within the Fisheries Co-operative allegedly used their legitimate power to benefit from the investment opportunities of tuna ranching' without the knowledge of small-scale fishers. The latter indicated that 'they were unaware of the decisions that were being agreed on their behalf behind closed doors and perceive the institutional process to be high-handed and lacking transparency.'

Having the 'ministers' ear', these representatives engage in various processes of elite capture such as opportunistic pursuits of licenses, permits, and financial aid. By investing in capitalist corporations, they have progressively shifted their operations from small-scale to capitalist frameworks, and thus have been unable to continue representing the real needs of small-scale fishers. Despite being rather insensitive to the realities of the small-scale fisheries sector, these individuals were still perceived by fishers as the 'bridge' to ministers. In other words, if fishers wished to speak to the Minister responsible for fisheries affairs, to obtain 'favours', their chance of doing so improved if cooperative leaders helped. As a result, the same leaders are continuously elected to power by small-scale fishers.

Another problem related to governance is the functioning of the national government which seems to be rather detached from fishers. Decisions are mainly taken in consultation with the co-operatives who are considered to be the spokespersons of fishers, and with large-scale operators (including foreign companies) who have invested

in industrialized fisheries. In other words, the sector is now ruled by a system of plutocracy, wherein the power to take decisions and steer national trajectories lies in the hands of the wealthy. This could partly explain why the agenda of successive national governments in power since EU accession has not addressed the resilience of the sector. Catering for the survival of small-scale fisheries does not seem to have been a priority of governments. Rather, the neo-liberal urge to rationalize the sector so as to promote the interests of a few powerful agents in order to increase the foreign exchange earnings of Malta has been the main aim of successive governments. (Galea 2011; Said et al. 2016).

Indeed, it transpires how the government has hidden behind science and pilot scientific studies to, for example, legitimize the purse seiner segment within the fleet, in the process masking the fact that it is supporting the interests of powerful actors (Said et al. 2016). In doing so, it has simultaneously disempowered and disintegrated local communities from their livelihoods (Said et al. 2016). Rationalization of fisheries management is used to magnify the prospects of rapid-uptake entrepreneurs at the expense of 'less efficient' small-scale fishers (Gibbs 2009) who are unable to challenge the overarching structures that disempower them. Unlike the powerful few within the fishing sector, most small-scale fishers are unable to influence nationally-enacted policy trajectories, and hence have become subject to multiple stresses which have made them less resilient.

Against this backdrop, it is safe to assume that leading powers within the aforementioned national authorities are aggravating the powerlessness of small-scale fishers to maintain the hegemony of dominant groups within the sector. Through this process, small-scale fishers remain detached from the forces that are shaping their fishing landscape and livelihoods. Although participatory governance systems exist – such as political meetings at national clubs - they seem to be more tokenistic than inclusive. This is because most of these meetings, which are predominantly and purposely organized by the politicians close to the national elections, only serve as an avenue within which the politicians can fish for votes by promising fishermen a better future. History has shown how politicians also commit to do the impossible, and after the election, they state that such commitments cannot be fulfilled as they are, for example, not in line with the EU laws (Muscat 2015).

So, in other words, the government's pledge to protect and safeguard the sustainability of small-scale fisheries is largely rhetorical. Phrases such as 'safeguarding of small-scale fisheries' (Schembri 2010), and fisheries management plans for the 'sustainability of fishing fleets' (MSDEC 2013a, 2013b) often do not translate into practice. Sustainability as a concept has become more of a dogma to justify the distribution of resources to the 'efficient' segments of the sector and legitimize the political and elite capture of opportunities, rather than a vision to truly implement sustainable pathways for small-scale fisheries. A ray of hope for small-scale fisheries surfaced in 2013 when the Labour party, through its electoral manifesto, promised a future of 'equality for all', and was consequently elected to power. Most fishers were optimistic for a better future. However, their hope faded away and in 2015 fishers publicly contended that the Labour government 'broke pre-electoral promises' with regard to policies aimed at the wider distribution of fishing opportunities (Muscat 2015). The future does not look bright given the fact that the government has also not fulfilled another promise regarding the establishment of better consultative platforms for fishers, a promise it said it would enact before 2018 in the form of a Fisheries Consultative Council (Barry 2013).

To date there has been no news about the formation of the Fisheries Consultative Council while an Agriculture Consultative Council has been formed and is operating in

line with electoral pledges. By the look of things, it is likely the Fisheries Consultative Council will not be established and the pledge will not be fulfilled within the current political legislature which ends in 2018. Nonetheless, even if the Council is established and the fishers get to have their say within the new framework, the prospects of a redistribution of resources with a fair share for small-scale fishers seems near to impossible. This is because the neoliberal framework has established patterns of ownership, and it transpired that the government has a limited say over transactions that are now in the "invisible" hands of the market. Thus, the establishment of the Consultative Council, and its embeddedness in the current governance framework, is likely to be an extension of the failing systems that are already in place.

Along with the disempowerment and oppression that small-scale fishers are facing at the local and national level, they are also detached from regional bodies that are meant to be the voice of fishers for the Mediterranean region as a whole. Most of the interviewed small-scale fishers are unaware of the existence of the Regional Advisory Council for the Mediterranean (MEDRAC) and have never been able to partake in these forums. Rather, the Maltese representatives within MEDRAC are co-operative representatives whose interests are, as argued above, more in line with large-scale fleets. Furthermore, unlike most small-scale fishers from other Mediterranean countries (within the EU), such as Spain, Greece, and France, Maltese small-scale fishers to date are not partners to the Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) organization.[5] They are thus not in a position to benefit from the recognition that this body gives in providing 'a clear and coherent voice at EU level for the previously mainly silent majority of European fishermen, who are smaller scale and who use low impact fishing gears and methods, but have historically lacked dedicated and effective representation in Brussels and at Member State level.'[6] This illustrates that Maltese small-scale fishers are being isolated from multi-scalar governance structures, making their prospects of changing their situation of powerlessness bleak.

This section has illustrated how small-scale fishers in Malta have remained underrepresented and their problems camouflaged by the actual policies of successive governments. Actual policies have revolved around the neoliberal growth of the sector with the aim of making the fleet more efficient (and the wealthy wealthier). Rhetoric, on the other hand, has kept small-scale fishers hopeful of a secure and stable future through political promises (especially close to national elections). The actual and rhetorical appear to be at loggerheads with each other and reconciling them appears near to impossible, since it is the ideology of neoliberal growth that suffocates the adaptive capacity of the small-scale fisheries sector. The small-scale fisheries sector has become overly alienated and oppressed by the governing structures that restrict small-scale fishers' agency to the extent that they are unable to change their pathways. The recently-formulated SSF Guidelines seem to provide hope for a new dawn; however, their voluntary nature might make them rhetorical rather than real.

SSF Guidelines as a New Dawn for the Small-Scale Fisheries Sector?

As illustrated in the preceding sections, it can be concluded that the fisheries governance framework in Malta has consistently disempowered small-scale fishers who in turn have been unable to challenge existing systems, which have reiteratively failed them. As a tool

[5]There are ongoing discussions on the potential membership of the Maltese small-scale fishing sector.
[6]http://lifeplatform.eu/

that serves for the protection and sustainability of fishing communities, the SSF Guidelines can potentially be the new dawn for the development of good governance based on principles of transparency, equity, and inclusivity. The SSF Guidelines provide straightforward recommendations for the implementation of 'governance of tenure in small-scale fisheries and resource management', such as legitimate tenure in the allocation of fishing rights (5.4) and in the recognition of territorial fishing grounds (5.7) that ought to enable small-scale fishers to practice fishing and maintain livelihoods, rather than be arbitrarily evicted from their fishing grounds to make space for new marine users/sectors (5.9). Furthermore, the SSF Guidelines give a direction to how the state may work towards empowering small-scale fishers to engage in the restoration, conservation, and protection of coastal ecosystems, which form the basis of fishers' livelihoods (5.5). Moreover, the SSF Guidelines provide guidance on how the sector could be given the necessary support so that small-scale fishers can participate in decision-making through participatory management systems (5.15) that enable them to be represented within various multi-scalar decision-making bodies (5.17).

To survive, small-scale fishers should be given the opportunity to benefit from transparent and effective governance which enables inclusivity that can improve the future of small-scale fisheries management and the resilience of small-scale fishers. Rather than remaining alienated from policy-frameworks which have jeopardized their livelihoods throughout the past decade, small-scale fishers should become empowered, as the SSF Guidelines attempt to do, so they can shape management frameworks that impact upon their traditional legacy of fishing. The possibility of reverting to the pre-2004 scenario is near to impossible, as globalizing forces have had significant influence in giving a new shape to the sector. Hence, the hope for the small-scale fisheries sector lies in the possibility of bridging the divide between small-scale fishing and the globalized future through feasible management strategies that enable the sector to flourish.

The establishment of a national Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG), which as a social structure, is embedded within the principle of community-based governance could potentially be a step in this direction. The FLAG is a relatively recent development recognized through the EU CFP and funded through Axis 4 of EU funds (the European Fisheries Fund [EFF2007-2013]) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund [EMFF 2014-2020]) to encourage 'sustainable development and the improvement of the quality of life in areas with activities in the fisheries sector"[7] so as to promote "a balanced and inclusive territorial development of fisheries and aquaculture areas.'[8] The establishment of FLAGs across Europe is the potential ground where seeds of resilience needed by small-scale fishing communities may take root (Symes 2014). Since 2007, in 80% of European Member States, a number of FLAGs have been established (Budzich-Tabor 2014). Malta remains an exception since EU funding for 2007-2013 has been more focused on other pillars of the sector such as reduction of fishing capacity through permanent demolition of fishing vessels and other modernization and infrastructural investments related to fishing ports, landing sites and the central fish market (GOM 2013b); and in the plans for EU funding for 2014-2020 FLAGs have not been recognized, even though, as I have explained, they are much needed for small-scale fishers.

As a concept, FLAGs merge well with the substance of the SSF Guidelines, and in the Maltese context its implementation ought to be considered as the 'new solution to address local needs' (Budzich-Tabor 2014). Through it, fishers would be able to work collectively to seek opportunities and prospects that support small-scale fisheries and the

[7](Council Regulation 1198/2006, Article 4(f)).
[8](Council Regulation 508/2014, Article 5(c)).

local community. Fishers can, for example, pool in their indigenous, practical, and ecological knowledge to support grass-root development of robust and localised frameworks along with NGOs and other local entities. FLAGs can be used to provide the platform for partnership projects at both regional and national levels, and can empower fishers to participate within fisheries management, including in the implementation of marine protected areas and NATURA 2000 sites which are presently being implemented by the government (MEPA 2010). Fishers can then potentially explicate their needs through the development of marine and fisheries conservation strategies, and become stewards of the marine environment on which their livelihoods depend (Said 2016b, in review).

Furthermore, through FLAGs, small-scale fishers would be able to seek new ventures for diversification and alternative livelihoods that would boost the local economy and entice new entrants through job creation, such as for example, tourism-related activities. Fishing tourism has proved to be a very popular diversification strategy for coastal communities across the Mediterranean, including in Italy and Spain [2]. Malta, as a tourist hub with an annual influx of tourists that exceeds 1.5 million (MTA 2015), could exploit this lucrative economic niche. The eco-cultural product of colourful wooden boats and fish-gear mending is already a highly sought trademark that entices thousands of tourists annually to experience the craftsmanship and folklore that lies in fishing villages; however, at present, fishermen do not earn any additional income from the tourism industry. Thus, the establishment of a fishing-tourism market wherein fishers can take tourists onboard their vessels, show them the actual fishing activity and enable them to engage in the activity itself could be a valuable FLAG target since fishers can earn extra cash by tapping on the already-existing tourist visitation rates.

By using the FLAG framework, fishers can potentially invest in initial training to upgrade their capacity and become better equipped to undertake fishing-tourism ventures. Learning how to speak English and equipping their vessels with safety kits for tourist passengers would be very necessary, for example. In its full-fledged form, fishing tourism would reduce small-scale fishers' sole dependence on fish catches, maintain their link with the sea and fishing, and most importantly heighten their resilience within the fishing sector. Ultimately, through FLAGs, fishers can overturn the current image of the small-scale fisheries sector and convert a sector in terminal decline into a highly vibrant niche so as to regain the community's sense of social, economic and cultural identity. The question remains, however, are 'voluntary' guidelines sufficient to see these opportunities materialize?

Voluntary Guidelines Might Not Work

The previous section demonstrated that there are possibilities and avenues for change and that the SSF Guidelines provide tangible targets that can be implemented to halt the decline of small-scale fisheries in Malta. However, the realities that currently shape the Maltese governance system trigger major questions of whether these opportunities can be actually mobilized and targets achieved. This is because the priorities of the governance system have been majorly embedded in the ideology of economic efficiency, and since the low-capital based nature of the small-scale fisheries sector is implicitly considered an obstacle to its rationalization, there have been no defined pathways aimed at making it resilient. In this regard, even though the SSF Guidelines provide the foundations for the development of new opportunities, the danger exists that securing the livelihoods of the sector remains at the level of rhetoric. To date, the Maltese authorities have not responded

to these Guidelines and their implementation are not part of the Maltese Fisheries Strategy for upcoming years, probably because they are not of a binding nature, unlike the array of EU obligations that determine the political and administrative lines of action at the national level. Unless a governance overhaul takes place, therefore, it is unlikely that one will ever witness the country taking the path of 'walking the talk' of the Guidelines (Jentoft 2014).

Furthermore, the provisions for the empowerment of small-scale fisheries that lie with the Guidelines are not served well by the current governance system that is orchestrated by the powerful few who determine most paths of decision-making at the national level. Hence, the possibility of a top-down overhauling of the current governance system in a way that fits the SSF Guidelines is illusionary, to say the least. Rather, the ideal way forward is to dismantle current politically-biased governance structures that are suffocating the regeneration of the small-scale fleet, and make way for a framework that truly supports the small-scale fisheries sector. It seems that the only hope for marginalized fishers to benefit from the SSF Guidelines is through a bottom-up approach in which communities join forces and work to establish an association that represents the needs of the small-scale fisheries sector.

A representative body, that breaks away from current co-operative structures could result in more representativeness and counter the inequalities that have fragmented the sector over the past many years (Said et al. 2016). This neo-endogenous formation requires the mobilization of small-scale fisher agency. To get it started, fishers might benefit from the assistance of non-governmental organizations such as 'Friends of the Earth'[9] and 'Fish For Tomorrow'[10], which are two national bodies that both call for the protection of sustainable fishing livelihoods. At the regional level, fishers can benefit from the support of organizations such as the 'Low Impact Fishers of Europe' organization and the 'Too Big To Ignore'[11] since these bodies both have significant power vis-a-vis small-scale fisher concerns. With such support, fishers can become empowered, realize their potential, and gradually re-establish themselves within the fishing sector.

Conclusion

This case study has highlighted how, in the past ten years, the governing systems of Maltese fisheries have pushed the small-scale fisheries sector into a globalized scenario without providing sufficient ways for it to adapt to the new context. By promoting a neoliberal agenda of rationalization and focusing on efficiency-based distribution, the governing systems have implicitly renounced small-scale fishers' rights to important fisheries such as Bluefin tuna. Simultaneously, benign pathways have been created for those who had the ability to invest in industrial fishing. The industrialization of fisheries has adversely affected the resilience of small-scale fishers who are subject to constant struggles to retain their livelihoods as fishers. Many small-scale fishers have left the fleet altogether.

Evidently, the small-scale fisheries sector in Malta is in troubled waters. It is foreseen given the current circumstances that it will not be long before the small-scale fishing community will totally dissolve. A threat to the small-scale fisheries sector has both direct employment implications for fishers and their families and indirect

[9]http://www.foemalta.org/about.html
[10]http://fish4tomorrow.com/
[11]http://toobigtoignore.net/

repercussions for other socio-economic systems that are dependent on the small-scale fisheries sector, such as the local market economy and tourism. Adverse consequences are also there for the social fabric of the sector, namely a breakdown in social cohesion, community networks, and social stability. There are thus various reasons why the small-scale fisheries sector in Malta should be supported rather than neglected. It is time that a commitment is given and effort pooled to overturn the trajectories that are perpetuating the demise of the small-scale fisheries sector. The starting point for this could be the SSF Guidelines for these provide the right direction upon which the rebuilding of the small-scale fisheries can take shape.

In line with the SSF Guidelines, this case study highlights the need for incentives that raise human capital and empower small-scale fishers in decision-making processes in ways that promise a better and more resilient future for fishing communities. Recognition and investment in existing local communities through the concept of community-led local development should create the right platform for inclusive fisheries management, something that is not possible through existing co-operative structures. The challenge remains, however, to actually operationalize the SSF Guidelines as this is not yet foreseen in the Maltese context. Hence, real efforts need to be invested in doing so. This would be the way forward as it would acknowledge the significance, heterogeneity, and socio-cultural richness of the small-scale fisheries sector and allow it to rejuvenate.

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List of Tables

Table 11.1 This data, which was supplied by the DFA in 2015, shows that the commercial fleet is majorly composed of vessels smaller than 12 meters, and thus the Maltese fleet is predominantly of a small-scale nature.
Table 11.2 This table represents the various legislative changes in the Maltese fisheries policy since EU accession in 2004.

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