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# “Little kings”: community, change and conflict in Icelandic fisheries

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## Abstract

Scholars of political ecology have long been interested in questions of access, equity, and power in environmental management. This paper explores these domains by examining lived experiences and daily realities in Iceland’s fishing communities, 30 years after the implementation of a national privatized Individual Transferrable Quota (ITQ) fisheries management system. Drawing upon ethnographic data collected over 2 years in the rural coastal communities of Northwest Iceland, we address three questions; 1) How the ITQ system relates to other complex social and environmental factors facing coastal communities today. 2) How attempts to alleviate negative impacts of the ITQ system have led to new rifts in communities and 3) how the decision-making power of a few dominant interest groups in national politics leaves small-boat fishermen and rural communities at a disadvantage. In the words of our study participants, the Icelandic fisheries management scheme has created “little kings” in rural communities, where each little king acts in his own best interest, yet has no recourse to collective power and no platform to influence national politics. In this volatile political situation with cross-scale implications, it is difficult for fishermen, their families, and community members to imagine ways in which power over and access to the fisheries resource can be redistributed.

**Keywords:** ITQs, Iceland, Fisheries management, Fishing communities, Power, Political ecology

## Introduction

“Do fishermen try to work together? Ha! No. We are all little kings.”

-Small-boat fisherman, Hvammstangi, 26 March 2012

Small-boat fishermen in rural Icelandic communities recognize the tension between the acknowledged benefit of organizing as a collective voice and the perceived need to compete with each other for individual advantages. The result of this competition between fishermen is often described through the expression “little king” (*smákóngur*). The term carries multiple meanings, ranging from derogatory (e.g., reference to people micromanaging their surroundings) to proud (e.g., reference to oneself as a leader). More specifically, it refers to being the “ruler of his alleged domain” or “a big fish in a small pond”. Therefore, a little king is an individual who thinks he or she is in control, but actually is not, who is forced to act in control, or who is in control of a very small

turf, zealously guarding it and thereby creating various obstacles for others. In fisheries, a little king is an attitude portrayed through the inherently different interests in fisheries created by overlapping identities: community residence, quota-ownership, species fished, gear used, boat size, and so on. As this paper will explore, the discourse of “little kings,” although not specific in Icelandic vernacular to fisheries alone, is a telling illustration of the social relations and processes present in Icelandic fisheries governance.

Seminal work in the 1990s explored feudal metaphors in the discourses surrounding Iceland’s Individual Transferrable Quota (ITQ) fisheries system (Helgason and Pálsson 1997; Pálsson and Helgason 1995). In the ITQ system, the right to fish became a limited and transferrable commodity through the possession of a percentage (or quota) of a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of a particular species. For many fishermen who were not awarded enough quota, the only way to stay active in fishing was to buy or lease quota from others who were given or had accumulated quota, and therefore be under the direct control of another for access to fisheries resources. A new discourse centering on these relationships emerged: fishermen became “tenants” (*leiguliðar*) under the control of “quota kings” (*kvótakóngar*, also called “sea lords,” *sægreifar*). Today, the power imbalance that created quota kings is still present despite many changes in Icelandic fisheries and culture, and another new reality is emerging – the little king. The concept of little kings aides in the understanding of a more complete story of the winners and losers in the Icelandic fisheries system outside of a basic “quota-holders” or “non-quota holders” categorization.

This paper uses a political ecology framework to describe the making and dynamics of little kings and their communities, under what constraints they operate in rural coastal communities, and how national politics and power keep the little kings in place, contained in their kingdoms. The manifestation of unequal power relationships and marginalized voices in natural resource management and the intersection of culture, environment, economics and politics are central topics of focus within political ecology (Greenberg and Park 1994; Robbins 2004; Zimmerer 2006). Exploring the interactions between actors in situations of unequal power helps to clarify and describe the uneven distribution in access to and responsibility for natural resources (Biersack and Greenberg 2006; Robbins 2004). Power is, among other things, the ability to control access to resources, often for economic gain (Jentoft 2007), and examples of the impacts of power imbalances can be found in virtually all aspects of resource management, ranging from the disenfranchisement and exclusion of local people from protected areas, to land appropriation for resource extraction (Robbins 2004). In fisheries, power inequities also often exist between scientists and fishermen, as scientific knowledge is often given greater legitimacy than fishermen’s knowledge (Finlayson 1994; Pálsson 1998). Imbalances in political power can differentially impact those in rural communities who do not have equal access to decision-making processes as those in urban communities (Bavinck 2015; Fabinyi et al. 2015; Verelst 2013). The current trend of neoliberal fisheries resource management (Pinkerton and Davis 2015), such as Iceland’s ITQ system, can lead to the creation of new social conflicts and the further entrenchment of existing inequalities (Benediktsson and Karlsdóttir 2011; Carothers 2010). Increasingly, the goal of rent maximization that serves as one motive for privatization of harvest opportunities is given greater legitimacy, and

therefore power, over other social goals in fisheries management schemes (Breslow 2016; Carothers 2015; Høst 2015; St. Martin 2007).

As this paper will explore, the extent to which the little kings have been created through the ITQ system is not always easily determined - little kings also ascend as an outcome of other complex factors in Icelandic society. Therefore, before discussing the specifics of little kings in post-ITQ fisheries, we first present results exploring characteristics of Icelandic fisheries and coastal communities. First, we describe how changing coastal communities are not only impacted by the ITQ system, but also by rural out-migration, environmental and technological changes, and other factors that are part of the complex local realities of contemporary coastal communities in Iceland. Second, we explore how the attempt to alleviate negative impacts of the ITQ system through the quota-free *strandveiðar* season has in fact lead to new power struggles in Icelandic fisheries. Third, we review rural community members' experiences with political power at the national decision-making level. Finally, we discuss the creation and continuation of the little king phenomenon through mechanisms described in the three results sections. First, the complex changes in Icelandic coastal communities create little kings as family units and entire communities. Second, conflicts between fishermen in the *strandveiðar* season create little kings within communities. Third, power imbalances in the national fisheries governance process create little kings in the governance process. Little kings are different from quota kings in the actual power they hold in fisheries politics. We tell a more complete and nuanced story of the winners and losers in the Icelandic fisheries system, where even the little kings; small-boat quota-owners in rural communities who might be considered by others to be winners - albeit with limited control - are still impacted by the ways that specific policies regarding fisheries access or decision-making processes have been put into motion.

### **Icelandic fisheries**

The rich marine system off Iceland has supported centuries-long human utilization of marine resources, including fishing, whaling, seal hunting, eider down gathering, driftwood collecting, and bird egg gathering (Hastrup 1998; Pálsson 1991; Pálsson and Helgason 1996). Utilization of these resources has included varying degrees of commerciality. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Icelandic farmhands fished cod during the spring spawning season, departing in rowboats directly from the land on which they worked (Kristjánsson 1985). Fish stations developed towards the 19<sup>th</sup> century as seasonal farm workers stayed closer to the best fishing grounds for longer periods during the year. Larger fishery operations accessing Icelandic waters at that time were limited to foreign vessels, mainly from France, Spain, and England (Pálsson 1991). In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Icelanders began to operate their own larger boats with engines. The catch of demersal species doubled from 1905 to 1914, and by 1930, 23% of the Icelandic work force was involved in fishing or processing. When Iceland gained independence from Denmark (in 1944), the development of fisheries became a top priority for the growing nation with access to few other natural resources. The ensuing shift from a small-scale peasant economy to a large export-driven fleet occurred quickly, and since then, fisheries have always been a matter of national interest (van den Hoonard 1992).

In 1975, after incrementally increasing its fishing jurisdiction for the previous 20 years, the Icelandic government extended its EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) to 200 miles, and asserted a right to exclude foreign fleets from that zone. During that same time, discourses about property ownership in fisheries emerged, centering on increasing national economic efficiency, and in the early 1980s, the Icelandic government first introduced the privatized ITQ system.<sup>1</sup> Quota was bound to fishing vessels based on the boat's average catch over the three previous years. The 1990 Fisheries Management Act created a comprehensive ITQ system that comprised the vast majority of species and fisheries (Arnason 2005). Under the Act, quotas were made freely transferable with minor restrictions on consolidation or transfer between regions (Runolfsson 1999), which allowed for the consolidation that continues into the present. Over time, quota rights migrated away from small boat owners in small communities to larger businesses in urban areas (Pálsson and Helgason 1995), who, in turn, invested their capital from quota into larger and sometimes foreign businesses and banks (Eythórsson 1996). In 1992, the twenty biggest fishing companies held 36% of the total quota. By 2001 their holdings increased to 59% (Haraldsson 2001). Consolidation continues: in 2015, the twenty biggest fishing companies held 70% of the total quota (Icelandic Directorate of Fisheries 2016). The number of vessels and fishing companies continue to decrease, but those that remain continue to grow – the fleet consists of more large boats, businesses accumulate ever more quota, and are increasingly vertically integrated, combining catching and processing activities (Statistics Iceland, 2017).

Many scholars have explored the ways in which the implementation of ITQs has re-made fisheries systems in Iceland, with particular focus on how conflicts emerged in the system or surrounding the system (Eythórsson 1996, 2000; Karlsdóttir 2008; Pálsson and Helgason 1995). ITQs have also affected the economic and social structure of coastal communities as the entitlement to fish became detached from place and became the property of individuals who were free to sell their quota outside the community. As fishing declined, so too did demand for support services and processing, which led to further declines in population and local commercial activity as people moved away to find other income opportunities (Eythórsson 2000; Karlsdóttir 2008; Pálsson and Helgason 1995, Skaptadóttir 2000, 2007). Social relationships have changed in coastal communities as a new type of division between the haves and have-nots has emerged in terms of quota ownership, which leads to further unresolved political animosity among those who own quota and those who do not (Eythórsson 2000; Karlsdóttir 2008; Kokorsch et al. 2015; Pálsson and Helgason 1996). Inequalities between regions have also deepened as economic activity associated with fishing moved from coastal communities to the capital area where the quota kings are based (Benediktsson and Karlsdóttir 2011; Mariat-Roy 2014). The relationship between fishermen and policy makers and scientists has also grown increasingly strained and distrustful (Pálsson 1998). Additionally, for Icelanders, the opportunity to engage in fisheries has largely changed from being a basic human right to being a commercial activity where fisheries are assets that are owned and sold for profit (Einarsson 2011; Pálsson and Helgason 1995). Resistance discourses have emerged centering around altered social relationships, immorality, danger and greed. While legal challenges to Iceland's ITQ system have been unsuccessful in the national court (Einarsson 2011; Eythórsson 2000; Pálsson and Helgason 1995), the UN Human Rights Council ruled that Iceland's ITQ system violated the human right to work.

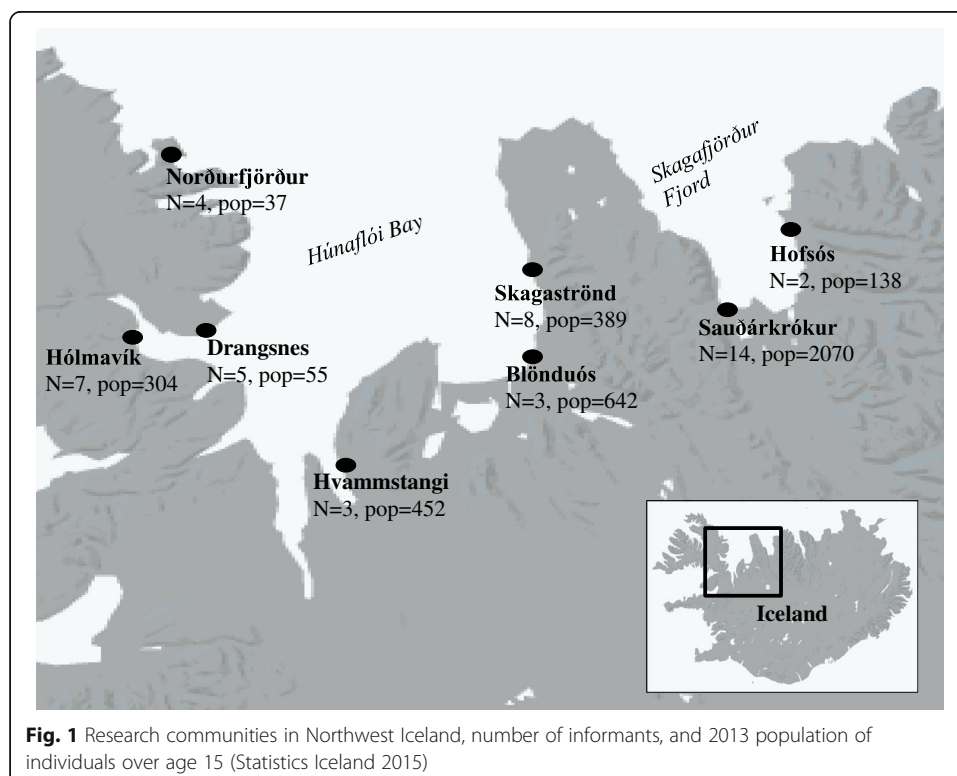
This led to the creation of the quota-free fishery *strandveiðar* season in 2009 that was designed to support community development in regions with declining fisheries access (Chambers and Carothers 2017; Einarsson 2011, 2015a).

### Methods and study area

We conducted ethnographic field research in Northwest Iceland from September 2011 to September 2013 in the eight coastal communities in Húnaflói Bay and Skagafjörður Fjord in Northwest Iceland (Fig. 1; all field research, interviews, and participant observation were conducted by C. Chambers). These eight communities, ranging in population from 72 in Dranganes to 2,600 in Sauðárkrókur, represent a contrasting scope of dependence on and participation in fisheries that provides the variation needed to investigate themes of community, change and power. Over 60 interviews were conducted with 46 individuals to explore their perceptions and experiences in fishing and fishing communities.

We first conducted exploratory interviews with key informants - individuals identified by fellow community members as being particularly knowledgeable about fisheries, fisheries management, and their coastal communities. The 18 key informants included fishers and their families, community leaders, processing plant owners and employees, as well as biologists and other research specialists. Informants were interviewed multiple times over the course of the research. We also utilized extensive participant observation during fishing trips and in small- and large-scale on-shore fish processing to gain first-hand knowledge of Icelandic fisheries and rural communities.

Purposive snowball sampling (Bernard 2006: 192) was used to identify 28 additional individuals for semi-structured interviews. Those individuals were selected to reflect



recognized expertise in different kinds of fisheries, degree of engagement in fisheries, and knowledge of Icelandic fisheries in general. In many cases, we were able to obtain an exhaustive sample by interviewing all individuals of interest in the community. As with key informant interviews, semi-structured interview topics included personal history and participation in fisheries, experience of changes over time, relationship with other fishers in the community, importance of fisheries and fish processing to coastal communities, the next generation and entry level opportunities in fisheries and fish processing, and involvement in and perception of fisheries management.

Field notes and interview transcripts from audio-recorded interviews were first translated by C. Chambers, G. Helgadóttir and E. Harðardóttir, and then inductively coded for emergent themes in Atlas.ti and Microsoft Word (Bernard 2006: 492; Muhr 2004; Strauss and Corbin 1994). While certain broad themes were under direct investigation in this study, this style of inductive analysis allowed us to build stronger and deeper theoretical models based on the relationships between a larger number of themes (Bernard 2006: 492; Ryan and Bernard. 2003; Strauss and Corbin 1994). We found themes by exploring conflict, how individuals solve certain problems, social relationships, and similar domains that related to our research topic (Spradley 1979: 200). Exemplary quotes from interviews and participant observation are presented to give deeper context to the discussion of these themes identified through the coding process.

#### **“Left-over shells”: little kings as communities**

The trend of rural depopulation shows little signs of reversal in Iceland (Bjarnason 2014; Karlsdóttir and Jungsberg 2015). One major cause of this decline is the loss of jobs in the fishing industries that were central to rural coastal communities (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Stefánsdóttir 2010), a trend also observed in many coastal communities around the world (Corbett 2013; Donkersloot and Menzies 2015). As reviewed above, fishing rights in the form of quota were sold away from rural communities to larger, centralized companies, often followed by the closing down or moving of associated processing facilities and support industries. Over time, the market price of quota has increased so that small-scale fishermen are often unable to purchase or rent quota (Chambers and Carothers 2017). Small-scale and part-time fishermen are particularly important for sustaining economies in small communities where there are few other economic opportunities, so when access to fisheries is lost, the individuals emigrate and the community loses crucial social, human, and economic capital, which further exacerbates depopulation trends (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006). Although the link between the ITQ system and rural depopulation can be difficult to separate from other contributing factors, including regional and national cultural trends (Hall et al. 2002), rural community residents in Northwest Iceland assert that the ITQ system was the major cause of migration and related population decline:

When the quota system was introduced, the fishermen got quotas allocated to their vessels. This created a big concern for the nation since some quota owners sold their quota away, leaving middle-aged people that couldn't sell their belongings and became prisoners in their own local communities. Everywhere you could hear the same story. The villages had depopulated, sometimes by more than half. What

happened? The quota had been sold and the inhabitants had been left behind, with nothing to do - and the communities broke down.

-Processing plant employee, Sauðárkrókur, 17 February 2012

The worst thing to ever happen to Iceland, excluding Black Death and the Mist Hardships,<sup>2</sup> was when the quota was introduced, and made open to re-selling. That act has destroyed many communities in the countryside, including [my home town], a blooming village that had steady jobs for decades. There, the municipality sold trawlers and fish factories to [a bigger company] that later closed everything down and moved the quota away. Now [that whole municipality] is only a place to sleep for the people that still haven't left after that. The quota that was *never* supposed to be sold away from any community.

-Small-boat fisherman, *community name omitted*, 5 October 2012

Views expressed by these informants highlight two important and related trends, consolidation and rural disengagement/depopulation. Although the above informant emphatically states his perception that the quota was not supposed to be sold away from rural communities, the consolidation through the sale of quota is in fact an expected characteristic of ITQ implementation (Carothers and Chambers 2012). The results of which are often misleadingly described as an “unintended consequence” or a negative side effect to small communities (Arnason 2005; Matthíasson 2003). In subsequent sections, we review attempts to alleviate the effects of these unintended consequences on rural fishing communities, but first we explore the daily realities experienced by individuals remaining in coastal communities today. Employment in the fisheries industry continues to decline in Iceland as a whole, but even in the study communities of Northwest Iceland, historical and cultural connections to specific fisheries endure. Both large and small fisheries and associated industries like processing, on-shore baiting, and gear repair continue to exist under a multifaceted mixture of political, social, and environmental changes. Below, we use the examples of the communities of Drangsnæs and Skagaströnd to highlight and describe the complexity of changes related to fishing livelihoods experienced in rural communities.

### **Drangsnæs and Skagaströnd**

The calendar hanging in the break room at the fish processing plant in Drangsnæs lists the birthday of each of the 72 village inhabitants, and everyone in Drangsnæs is, in some way, connected to fishing. In this small village with 13 small boats and one large seiner nestled in the harbor (Fig. 2), National Fisherman's Day (*Sjómannadagurinn*) is a bigger celebration than Iceland's Independence Day. One young woman, Erla,<sup>3</sup> had just moved back to town to be closer to family. Although she was busy taking care of a new baby and young toddler, Erla couldn't stay away from the processing plant and accepted family members' offers to babysit as a chance to get in on the action of the springtime lumpfish boom. She also helped her father on the boat and baited longline hooks back on shore. Her husband had never been to sea before, but started fishing with her father. This was his only option for a job in Drangsnæs, one he felt lucky to have and took very seriously. As an outsider, he said, “It's hard to get into fishing unless you are already in a family who fishes, you have to be connected somehow” (4 April 2012).



**Fig. 2** The Drangsnæs harbor. All photos by C. Chambers

As was the case with Erla and her family, the presence of intrapersonal ties to the primary industry (fishing or farming) is a strong predictor of individuals' decision to stay in or move back to a rural community in Iceland (Bjarnason 2014; Nilsson et al. 2012) and elsewhere (Kraack and Jane 2002; Lobley et al. 2010). Of the numerous and complex reasons for migration, the perception of reduced occupational opportunities through decreased quota ownership and fisheries opportunities plays a central role (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Magnusson 2006). These two aspects considered together mean that as fewer individuals are engaged in fisheries, there are, first, fewer ties of younger generations to place-based fisheries that would influence the decision to stay, and second, fewer job opportunities that then influences the decision to leave. Fishing has traditionally been a family activity steeped in connection to history, and many current small-boat fishermen come from a long line of fishing families (Chambers and M. Kokorsch in press). It is a matter of pride for fishermen to know that they will have someone to whom to pass down the fishing business, and particularly the boat itself. Now, the rare luck of having an interested child to whom to pass down a fishing business is an exception rather than the rule. As one middle-aged boat-owner said: "There is a man with a 14-year old son who is going to stay here to fish. Us guys on the boat were talking one day, and one said, 'Oh *lucky*, this guy. His son *wants* to be a fisherman'" (5 April 2012).

An individual's desire, or what for some might be more accurately described as a "need", to leave their home community involves a complex decision matrix, the weighing of opportunities only partly related to fisheries (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006, Bjarnason 2014, Corbett 2013, Donkersloot 2011, Kraack and Jane 2002; Lowe 2015). While quota consolidation leads to decreased access opportunities and family connections, technological changes also reduce the need for labor in the processing and catching industries (Skaptadóttir 2000). General negative attitudes have emerged towards jobs in fisheries particularly for youth and women, who view fisheries as an industry without any upward mobility (Donkersloot 2011; Skaptadóttir and Proppé



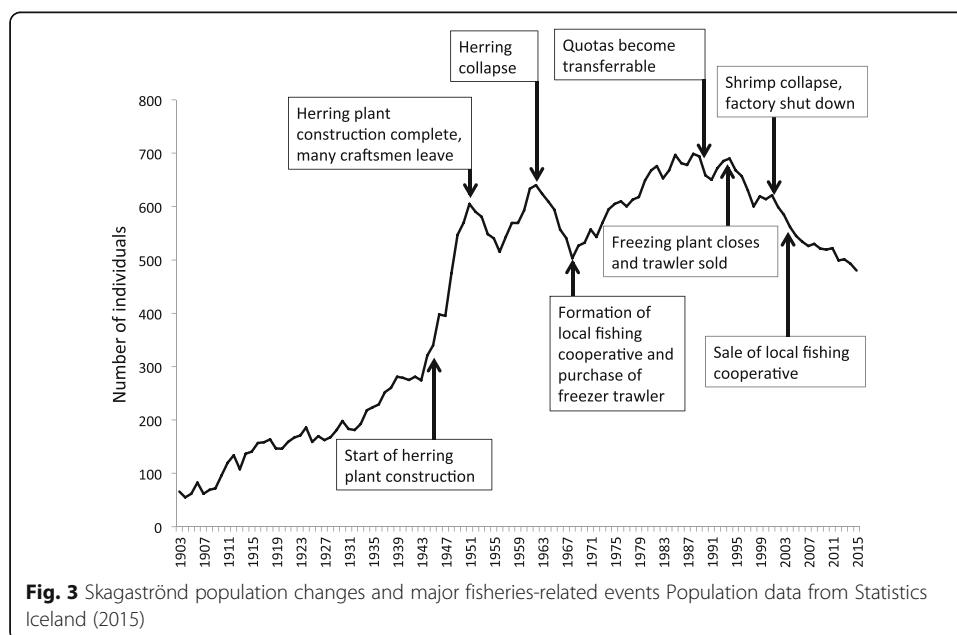
2005; Karlsdóttir 2006, 2008; Power et al. 2014). Furthermore, many participants in our research expressed the common perception that “teenagers have different needs these days.” Personal choice and individual taste for lifestyle and education options are significant predictors of migration independent of geographical identities. Because of the ease of travel and communication, leaving home physically no longer means severing ties completely with friends and family (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006). The educational structure of Iceland also adds to the loss of youth from rural communities (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Karlsdóttir and Jungsberg 2015; Nilsson et al. 2012). After compulsory education is completed at age 16, youth in rural communities have to leave to attend vocational or high schools located in larger communities. This is similar to trends observed elsewhere in rural fishing communities (Corbett 2007; Karlsdóttir and Jungsberg 2015).

Across Húnaflói Bay, a Skagaströnd resident reflects on the importance of fisheries to a place like Drangsnæs and the link to rural decline:

[Drangsnæs residents] are so spiritual and strong... ‘I was born here and I will die here and I must fight.’ They have this mentality of keeping with the fishing, I don’t know how they do it. Maybe it’s because the people who wanted to leave have already left.

-Community leader, Skagaströnd, 18 November 2011

Skagaströnd is a visible example of the complexity of changes in fishing communities, where population trends are often closely tied to the multi-faceted social and environmental aspects of fisheries (Fig. 3). Skagaströnd was founded by Danish merchants in the early 1900s and the population steadily rose with opportunities in herring processing and fishing until the collapse of the fishery in the early 1960s. After that, opportunities slowly rose again, partly because the community invested in a freezer trawler and formed a local cooperative, and partly because of the general increase in cod fishing around Iceland. Skagaströnd’s population reached its peak in the late 1980s (Fig. 3), and has been in steady



decline since quota became transferrable in 1991. Because of the loss of quota held in the community, various fishing industry operations have shut down over time (Fig. 3).

Much like Drangsnæs, Skagaströnd is still known as a strong fishing community, and yet residents and local leaders worry about the trends of rural decline as opportunities in fisheries continue to decrease. The primary symbols of change are what a local Skagaströnd community leader called the “left-over shells of fishing,” repurposed fisheries infrastructure: the fish processing plant has been refurbished as a laboratory for scientists, and the freezing plant is now studio space for an artist residency. The various changes associated with fisheries, however, can be slow, with delayed or unknown effects and are not always easily identifiable in population fluctuations. Many informants noted that although the quota system was a drastic change in fisheries, a suite of other kinds of changes in fisheries has also affected the community. Technological changes in boat capacity and design, machine baiting, and on-board freezing meant tremendous change in this small community. As processing increasingly moved off-shore and to centralized onshore facilities, Skagaströnd lost land-based fish processing jobs, but gained employment through the purchase of a trawler. And perhaps most importantly for many informants, boom and bust cycles of herring and shrimp reside in many individual’s memories as major drivers of change (Fig. 3). As one fisherman said: “If the fish would go this place would go too.” As in Drangsnæs, Skagaströnd as a fishing community cannot be separated from larger drivers of technological, social, and environmental change. In this way, fishing communities exist as little kings, with limited power contrasted against immense responsibility in navigating the future.

#### **“Where there is money there is envy”: little kings in the *strandveiðar* fishery**

Gunnar and his wife Jóhanna have plenty of experience trying to continue their fishing operation in Hólmavík. They are an example of a successful small fishing business. Although Gunnar is an original recipient of quota and grew up in a fishing family, maintaining his fishing operation has not been easy. They employ about 10 people, which is a large operation for a small community in Northwest Iceland. Gunnar and Jóhanna recognize the importance of their business in the community. Creating jobs for locals is something they pride themselves on in their self-described role as little kings. They purchased a new boat so their daughter’s partner could fish and continue to learn new skills and gain experience; they also hire locals to work in the onshore baiting shack, providing an important employment opportunity outside the farming season. Like their counterparts in Skagaströnd, they echo the importance of the ever-fluctuating nature of fisheries. “Like any good fisherman”, Jóhanna says, you “always have to be on your toes and ride the waves of new opportunities.” One of those recent opportunities has come not from a new species to fish or new market for existing species, but in expanded regulatory possibilities opened up through the *strandveiðar* season. Below, we explore the reasoning behind *strandveiðar* and the ways it has created little kings.

*Strandveiðar* is an open-access, or quota-free, fishing opportunity that began in 2009. The season runs from May to August. Participants can use up to four jig machines to fish Monday through Thursday, for up to 14 h a day or a maximum of 650 kg of bottom fish each day. The coastline is split into four areas, each with a monthly total allowable catch (TAC) limit. Once the total catch of the area reaches the TAC, all fishing is shut down in that area until it opens again for the next month (Icelandic Directorate of Fisheries 2016). Boats are typically operated by a single fisherman, who cannot fish in an ITQ fishery at

the same time as fishing in *strandveiðar*. Quota owners who wish to participate in *strandveiðar* must therefore finish fishing their quota for the year before fishing in the *strandveiðar* season. The intentions, and subsequent measures of success of the *strandveiðar* program, are to increase accessibility of fisheries resources to new entrants and thereby increase economic benefits to rural coastal communities and individuals.

Following implementation the general consensus around the country was that the presence of *strandveiðar* boats rejuvenated communities and gave hope for the future (Einarsson 2011; Halldórsson 2010; Mariat-Roy 2014). Major benefits of *strandveiðar* to rural communities include the economic opportunities of increased fish processing, support services, and harbor fees (Halldórsson 2010). There are no residency requirements, only that fish must be caught and landed in the region where the boat is registered. Because of this, a fisherman can live in one place, but fish and land fish in a different community. Our study community of Norðurfjörður is one such place. With only 52 year-round inhabitants in the entire municipal area, the harbor bursts with life during the summer *strandveiðar* months (Fig. 4), and residents, community leaders, local business owners and fish industry employees welcome the increased activity. However, with the general positive consensus of many community members and fishermen around Iceland towards the *strandveiðar* season, there also exist undercurrents of conflict and insider/outsider dynamics between fishermen:

There are too many boats now because of *strandveiðar*. They come here because the fishing is good, but we don't want to share with them - they come from elsewhere and aren't invested in the community. It's better if people stay here year round, not to just take off the top.

-Small-boat fisherman, Hólmavík, 2 August 2012

Competition between fishermen is a common occurrence in fisheries around the world, but the introduction of the *strandveiðar* season has added new complexity to



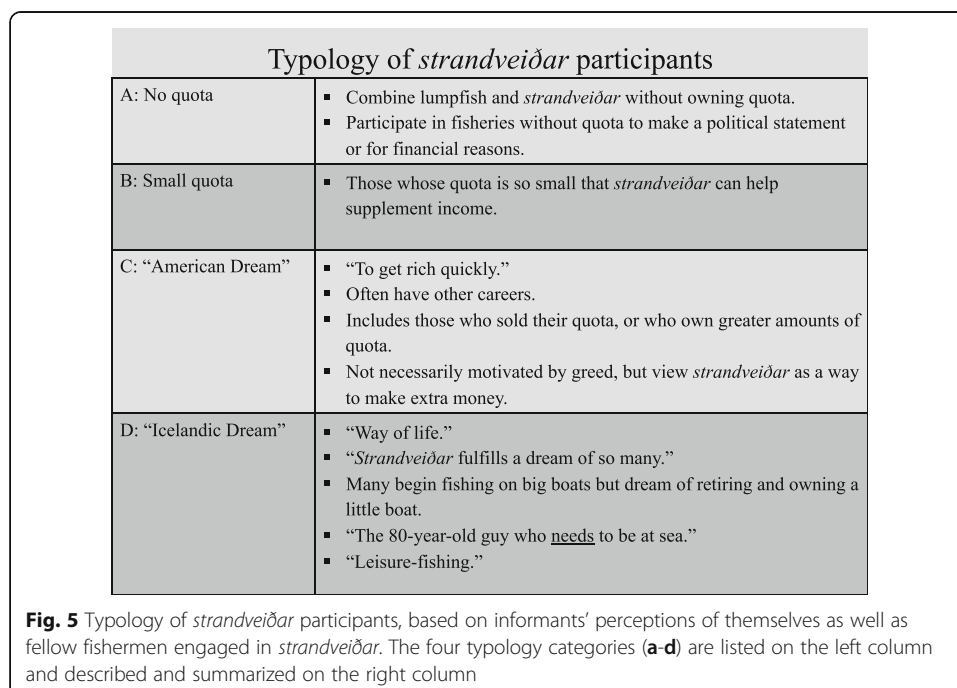
**Fig. 4** The Norðurfjörður harbor, full of *strandveiðar* boats in late summer

the way competition is manifested in Icelandic fisheries. As reviewed above, *strandveiðar* is generally considered favorable, and a success, in terms of community development. On the ground, however, as the above quote illustrates, there are echoes of conflict between fishermen regarding the other major purpose of *strandveiðar*: the opening up of access to fisheries resources. On one hand, individuals have the new freedom to fish all over the country, on the other, local fishermen feel the strain of competition on local fishing grounds. In this instance, the former is a little king taking advantage of new opportunities for his fishing “kingdom,” while the latter is a little king defending his newly contested turf.

To more deeply explore the impact of *strandveiðar* on individuals rather than communities as a whole, we used interview data to develop a typology of the popular characterizations of different *strandveiðar* participants (Fig. 5) and perceptions of for “whom” *strandveiðar* “should” be. Below we present this typology with examples from various informants to explore new forms of relationships between fishermen and the act of fishing that have come into existence through the *strandveiðar* season. In this analysis, fishermen’s attitudes are precisely the most important component in this particular case. We understand the fishermen’s discourse to be reflective of community practices so in this instance the typologies are exemplars for underlying social relations.

**A: no quota and B: small quota**

Hafsteinn grew up in the sparsely populated area near Norðurfjörður, but now lives elsewhere and comes back to fish *strandveiðar* in the summer. He learned to fish, hunt seals and gather sea bird eggs with his father and grandfather, but moved to a larger community for school and had not come back permanently. However, he had made a career out of fishing all over the country, and was very proud of that. At 36 years old, he did not own quota, but instead tried to make-do fishing lumpfish in the spring, *strandveiðar* in the summer, and then, he said:



... after that - rent quota, it's all you can do... 300 kronur per kilo [\$1.13 per pound in August 2012]. But it's fun, and I don't know anything else apart from computers. That's what I went to school to learn... but fishing is exciting. It's in my blood like most of us [from this area].

-Norðurfjörður, 7 August 2012

For younger fishermen like Hafsteinn who do not own quota, *strandveiðar* can be an important part of the fishing year (Fig. 5: A: *No quota*). These individuals either do not have the credit history or capital to invest in purchasing quota, do not wish to participate in ITQ fisheries for political reasons, or often have other on-shore sources of income to supplement their fishing activities. “*Small quota*” *strandveiðar* fishermen share many of the same characteristics as “*No quota*” fishermen (Fig. 5: B: *Small quota*). They do own quota, and like those in the “*No quota*” group, *strandveiðar* can significantly help individuals with smaller amounts of quota who switch into the *strandveiðar* season once their quota has been caught for the year. For example, Gunnar and Jóhanna's daughter's partner is supported in the summer months through *strandveiðar*, and under their help and guidance he intends to save money to invest in more quota in the future. Although there are barriers to entry into *strandveiðar* such as the cost of the boat and gear (Chambers & Carothers 2016), these costs are significantly less than the cost of entry into the quota system.

Like many small-boat fishermen, Hafsteinn had a vested cultural, familial and historical interest in fishing, and he stated that “*strandveiðar* is only a few years old, but it is halfway there to give people some freedom.” This idea of having the freedom to pursue one's own culturally-rooted fishing career is related to one of the original goals of *strandveiðar* season: to open up the right to fish. However, this broadened access, while beneficial to many small-boat fishermen and fishing communities, has had certain drawbacks, as the following informant explained:

The *strandveiðar* season was intended to open up the industry to new entrants.

Good idea... It was ruined by letting everyone get access to it. The ones who were in the industry already and the ones that had sold themselves out should not have been granted access to *strandveiðar*. *Those were not new entrants*.

-Small-boat fisherman, Hofsós, 24 May 2012

### C: American dream

Many small-boat fishermen share the perception expressed above: that there are many current *strandveiðar* fishermen who owned quota and then sold it, choosing to engage only in *strandveiðar* – a very different history than that of Hafsteinn, for whom *strandveiðar* opened up an opportunity to return “home,” even if only in the summer. During an interview one informant spoke of a fellow community member who started fishing in the 1970s, and fished full time until he sold all of his boats and quota around 2005. He didn't fish for about 5 years, but then purchased a new boat to fish *strandveiðar* and therefore he “gets to come back in for free.” The informant noted, “It wasn't supposed to be like that – but these old quota guys know *exactly* what they're doing.” The common perception that *strandveiðar* is unjust highlights underlying concerns of fishermen about access to marine resources. *Strandveiðar* is thought to first take fish from long-term quota

owners who try to maintain a fishing business all year, and second, make it now possible for a fisherman to sell quota for profit and then return to continue to fish for free. One informant summed it up like this: “It’s sad in my mind, that the guys who sold the quotas are now fishing again and taking the fish away from others.” *Strandveiðar* therefore creates a new form of conflict among fishermen regarding access to fisheries resources and the right to fish. As one community member noted regarding the differing perceptions of *strandveiðar* and the negativity of some fishermen toward the *strandveiðar* program: “Where there is money there is envy.” While *strandveiðar* in part spurred opportunism and speculation, the varying perceptions existing as to who are, and who should be, the rightful owners of Iceland’s fish stocks run deeper than the new *strandveiðar* system itself. The new rifts created by the *strandveiðar* season are therefore symptomatic of larger questions of private property rights, the commoditization of fishing rights, and access.

Accusations of excess capital accumulation through perceived unfair access in *strandveiðar* are extremely common among fishermen and coastal community members. The third category of *strandveiðar* fisherman, “*American Dream*” fishermen (Fig. 5: C) is therefore based on the popular perception that many *strandveiðar* fishermen are motivated by the financial gain, or the “*American dream*,” of fisheries. For many current small-boat quota owners, *strandveiðar* is seen as an unfair blow to fishing operations that have been difficult to maintain. Current small-boat quota owners are often individuals who have been engaged in fishing for several decades and who were original quota recipients (Chambers and M. Kokorsch in press, Halldórsson 2010). While it can be difficult to track the histories of *strandveiðar* participants as the system and participants settle over time, there is some research to support the idea of the dominance of the “*American Dream*” fisherman over the previously-described “*Small quota*” and “*No quota*” types. A survey conducted with the first season of *strandveiðar* participants found that 40% of respondents owned quota, 64% considered fisheries to be their major profession, and 80% had operated a fishing boat before entering *strandveiðar* (Halldórsson 2010). However, estimates of how much quota was sold by *strandveiðar* fishermen prior to 2009 are unavailable because quota ownership and sales details were not collected. Similar research by Chambers and Carothers (2017) has likewise shown that *strandveiðar* participants have an average of 30 years of fishing experience, suggesting that at least some characteristics of the “*American Dream*” typology fit with information collected on current *strandveiðar* fishermen.

Other than those former full-time fishermen who sold quota to engage only in *strandveiðar*, or quota-owners who wish to make extra money, a second type of “*American dream*” *strandveiðar* fisherman exists. These individuals are what was referred to by many as “the doctors and lawyers from Reykjavík” – people who have income from other professions, but who become involved in *strandveiðar* to make extra money or experience a taste of the fisherman’s life. Although doctors and lawyers could certainly be classified as “new entrants,” those in rural communities often view these individuals in a negative light. As one small-boat owner put it, “*strandveiðar* means that people who didn’t have any idea about what fishing means or is can begin to fish.”

While individuals’ motivations behind engagement in *strandveiðar* may vary, the fishermen who sold their boats and quota before *strandveiðar* was enacted could not have known they would be able to fish again without quota. Many informants suggested these individuals might have sold quota not because of greed but because it was the only financially viable option at the time and because they were worried about the future. Similarly,

those “doctors and lawyers” are making use of opportunities presented to them. As one informant who would be classified as a “lawyer from Reykjavík” noted, “650 k a day is not enough to provoke greed.” For him, *strandveiðar* was certainly a way to make money, but also something he still had to work at and did not feel is easy money; he was simply making use of the options available to him to “try something new.” The accusations of the greed of both quota-sellers and “doctors and lawyers” that are specifically central to the “*American Dream*” typology, while extremely common, appear to more accurately reflect the internal concerns and struggles of fishermen than a characterization of the *strandveiðar* participants themselves. As one small-boat fisherman said:

I believe that strong forces in society want to monopolize all fishing in Iceland. One sign of this is how the regulations of *strandveiðar* make things difficult. Already, some individuals feel that they own the fish in the sea; some quota owners even feel like the introduction of *strandveiðar* is an infringement on their rights.

-Small-boat fisherman, Skagaströnd, 18 July 2012

#### D: Icelandic dream

The fourth category of *strandveiðar* typology, the “*Icelandic Dream*” fisherman, represents a departure from the first three categories of *strandveiðar* participants because the only motivation of this type of fisherman is the pursuit of leisure, or the “*Icelandic dream*” of owning a small boat (Fig. 5). *Strandveiðar* is considered by many fishermen and community members to not be beneficial overall for newcomers due to the restricted amount each boat is allowed to fish and the cost of the boats, as the following small-boat fishermen explained:

Originally, *strandveiðar* was meant to increase new entrants in the sector. I think that has not worked out as it should have. Many have sold out of other systems and could therefore easily fund their entry into *strandveiðar* while newbies have to take huge loans. I think that they, the newbies, should at least be given more part in fishing. They could for example be allowed to fish longer.

-Small-boat fisherman, Norðurfjörður, 7 August 2012

It’s not possible to be in fisheries really so you have to do something else. You have to have money to buy into even *strandveiðar*, and if you have money then why wouldn’t you do something else, like invest in a bank.

-Community leader, Hvammstangi, 1 September 2012

Today *strandveiðar* fishermen fish 30–40 tons in 4 months, this is not enough to create new fishermen. The system we have today should be called leisure fishing, since it is only an extra job.

-Small-boat fisherman, Skagaströnd, 21 August 2012

The idea that *strandveiðar* is in practice not good for newcomers, but at the same time should not be for those who owned quota previously has led many to consider it, as the above informants described, a leisure activity. “*Icelandic Dream*” fishermen have the freedom to be at sea and take part in fishing activities that many still consider an integral part of Icelandic culture and history (Chambers and Carothers 2017). Although

many in the “*No quota*”, “*Small quota*”, and even “*American Dream*” *strandveiðar* participants certainly have strong connections to the lifestyle of fishing, these individuals are seen as at least still partially concerned with the ability of *strandveiðar* to generate income. However, for the “*Icelandic Dream*” fishermen, participating in fisheries as a “way of life,” retirement activity, or because “some men get depressed on land,” means they are distinct from the other participants because for them, *strandveiðar* is not meant to generate an income or support continued engagement in fisheries, but rather serves primarily as a leisure activity. This categorization has a romantic quality often assigned to older fishermen, from both small and large-boat careers. Informants often spoke of “the 80 year old guy who *needs* to be at sea or he will just die.” The average age of *strandveiðar* fishermen is 60 years old, which is similar to the average for all small-boat fishers (Chambers & Carothers 2016). But as the below quote implies, large-boat fisheries such as freezer-trawlers tend to include younger participants who begin work as crew members. One informant put it this way:

I would like *strandveiðar* to be the 60-plus guys who just can’t be away from the sea but who can’t work on the trawlers anymore. I love that idea; they could fish just for a few months in good weather.

-Community leader, Skagatrönd, 16 November 2011

### **“Greed, gangs and politics”: little kings in fisheries governance**

The former government that associated themselves with a left-democratic policy did not have the courage to change the fishing policy. I was hoping that due to the poor condition of the economy they would increase the quota, take the income from that and then rent the quota out at a fair price and divide it in a fair way, but that didn’t happen. The new government will not change anything. The financial support brought to their parties is too high and weighs a lot when it comes to their election campaign. Do we live in a banana republic after all? Really. So I say, like this guy famously said a few years ago: God bless Iceland!

-Small-boat fisherman, Sauðákrókur, 20 April 2013

On 6 October 2008, in speaking of the banking collapse to a nation in shock, Prime Minister Geir H. Haarde closed with the words, “God bless Iceland” (Benediktsson and Karlsdóttir 2011, Icelandic Prime Minister’s Office 2008; Durrenberger and Pálsson 2015). The statement, as Durrenberger and Pálsson (2015) note, uncommon in Iceland for its reference to God, became a tag for loss, meltdown, and surrendering to a higher power in uncertain times. The informant quoted above used the phrase to link the despair and loss of the economic meltdown with similar feelings toward national fisheries policies in his reference to Iceland as a banana republic with a powerful political elite and an export-based, single resource industry. Beyond the local dynamics of conflict between fishermen as discussed in the above section, there exists a larger-scale struggle between the governed and the governing body.

As we have reviewed above, fishermen in rural coastal communities operate under a complex mixture of social, political, environmental, technical and historical dynamics. Evolving fisheries regulations, such as *strandveiðar*, bring new power



relationships and conflict. Regarding fisheries at the national level, however, fishermen in rural coastal communities tend to be in general agreement with each other. They share concerns about corruption in the political system, unfair decision-making processes, and the focus on policies that ignore the needs of small-boat fisheries or rural communities. When asked what the guiding principles behind Icelandic fisheries governance were, one informant simply responded: “greed, gangs and politics,” and another: “The monopoly in the industry from year to year has created a powerful, small power-gang that take everything. These men have the government in their pocket.” The extent to which politics and power are engrained in Icelandic fisheries is often contested, although in everyday public discourse and even most academic analyses, it is accepted as common knowledge (Benediktsson and Karlsdóttir 2011; Eythórsson 2000, Kokorsch et al. 2015; Matthiasson 2003). Below, we explore the imbalance of power in fisheries governance through the eyes of individuals living in rural communities.

Icelandic fisheries are governed under the Ministry of Industry and Innovation, under which the Marine Research Institute gives biological advice, and the Directorate of Fisheries oversees administration, compliance and licensing (see Chambers and Carothers 2016 for an overview of the governance structure and Kokorsch et al. 2015 for a detailed description of stakeholders). Although the Marine Research Institute is tasked with giving official TAC recommendations to the Ministry, this advice is sometimes not followed and TAC is set higher than the recommendations (Woods et al. 2015). This is possible because although there is no official venue for stakeholder input, lobbying by certain interest groups appears to influence the decisions made by the Minister. The most powerful lobby group is Fisheries Iceland (SFS: *Samtök fyrirtækja í sjávarútvegi*), which was formed in 2014 as a combination of the Federation of Icelandic Fishing Vessel Owners (LÍÚ: *Landssambands íslenskra útgerðarmanna*) and the Federation of Icelandic Fish Processing Plants, along with several other industry partners. Other unions include the Federation of Captains and Mates (*Farmanna og fiskimannasamband Íslands*), the Icelandic Union of Marine Engineers and Meal Technicians (*Félag vélstóra og málmteknimanna*), and the Federation of Seamen (*Sjómannasamband Íslands*). LS (*Landssamband smábátæigenda*), the National Association of Small Boat Owners, has considerably less power and influence, but is nonetheless the only outlet for the concerns of small-boat fishermen. The following informants described this unequal power structure:

It has been tailor made for LÍÚ [now SFS] through the years. The banks provided loans for certain people to buy quota, the ordinary person can't have access. Now they are forgiving the debts of these people. The big fishing companies pay into the election funds for some parties and then they want to get rewarded after the elections. The big fishing companies have total control in the media and they own them and run them. The Marine Research Institute is partial towards the big fisheries and the guard dogs of the quota system are in the universities where young people are indoctrinated to believe that the quota system is the best in the world. The technical training school is run by LÍÚ [now SFS], there you learn about the quota system. It is not good to have the biggies against you.

-Small-boat fisherman, Skagaströnd, 24 July 2012

Iceland is supposed to have democracy, there is no democracy in this country, and you are not even allowed to be an Icelander and fish freely as a small-boat fisherman. You get arrogance from the authorities, where people are demonstrating their power and working like some secret service. Small-boat owners are especially bullied, and it's like everything is done to make sure that nothing is being taken away from the quota owners, who are in fact not the owners. The nation has been lied to, that we have the best quota system in the world, it is complete nonsense and it is only customized for the few chosen ones that think they own the country and the fish. Very few places have as much injustice as Iceland.

-Small-boat fisherman, Hólmavík, 5 June 2013

And as the following informant stated, the quota system could be compared to the emperor's new clothes, or a situation in which no one believes the benefits of the quota system, but assumes that everyone else does believe:

The quota system is built on the same logic as the tale of the emperor's new clothes by H.C. Andersen. It was LÍÚ [now SFS], along with politicians that forced the Marine Research Institute to take action, and they still do. Often the LÍÚ [now SFS] gang behaves as they are their own state inside this country.

-Small-boat fisherman, Hólmavík, 2 June 2013

Controlling groups with powerful rhetoric focused on larger fisheries therefore result in a situation where the opinions of small-scale or rural fishermen and the differing motivations for engagement in fisheries become obsolete in the streamlined decision-making process. Policies that favor larger fisheries are based on the end-goal of export to a global market focused on economic efficiency, rather than local consumption and production that may focus on other social or environmental values (Smith and Chambers 2015). Many fishermen in rural communities witness the incompatibility between the national goals of the quota system and the goals of rural development, as highlighted in the following comment:

Here all workers in the fish factory and the trawlers were fired and no one said a word. People were lied to and told that another ship would be bought while the matter was being put to rest. Lies! The company bought a 30 metric ton boat, no locals hired, and a small factory in [the capital area] was bought and all the fish are transported there on trucks for processing. Why? Well because the owners that inherited the company do not want to live in a crappy town like [here], and the rest of the quota is rented out, around 3000–4000 metric tons, so that these people can update their four wheel drives. This system is terrorism.

-Community member, *Community name omitted*, 12 February 2012

Another example of this incompatibility is the perceived strict regulations on small-boat fisheries. As discussed in previous research (Chambers and Carothers 2017), small-boat fisheries that are so crucial to rural communities are often treated with the same assumptions and regulations as large-scale fisheries. Small-scale fishermen recognize that their operations do, however, vary from large-scale fisheries:

It's harder to become a fisherman in Iceland than anyone can imagine – and having all your family depending on you when you go fishing under already extremely restricted regulations, that's tough shit to deal with.

-Small-boat fisherman, Hofsós, 22 September 2011

Every Icelander has this dream to buy a small fishing boat and to go fishing but the government tries to erase that dream by refusing to really open fisheries. They think open access would be bad for buyers.

-Small-boat fisherman, Norðurfjörður, 4 August 2012

Worrying about open access with small boats is like worrying that the women walking with the baby carriage will ruin the sidewalk.

-Small-boat fisherman, Drangsnæs, 29 May 2012

The above comments refer to open access with traditional effort-based fishing controls as an alternative to ITQ management, and previous research has shown that the majority of small-scale fishermen in Iceland prefer non-ITQ alternatives for managing their fisheries (Chambers and Carothers 2017). The inability to voice these opinions to decision-makers, or participate in discussions that might bring beneficial changes to small-scale fisheries, is expressed in the common phrase “to go south” (*að fara suður*), highlighting the tension between national politics and local realities. “To go south” is used when someone from the rural countryside physically travels to the capital area of Reykjavík for supplies, medical care, to visit family and so on. It can also be used when someone moves away from a small community for employment or education opportunities and symbolizes rural decline. In our research, informants commonly referred to their inability “to go south” in terms of participating in fisheries politics – demonstrating the relationship of rural fishermen to the central institutions in Reykjavík. One ethnographic study in a rural Icelandic fishing village in the early 1970s noted the common usage of this phrase in fisheries politics, and the characteristics of the usage of the term still apply today (van den Hoodnard 1992). Both literally and figuratively, it is difficult for rural community members “to go south” and the phrase suggests an uneven power arrangement, where the periphery must always “travel” to the center. The 1970s ethnographic fieldwork was written before the large-scale adoption of the quota system, and in that way we can see that the figurative distance between Iceland's center and periphery existed at least to some degree before the development of the ITQ system. Over time, however, this distance appears to have widened, and while small-scale fishermen and those in rural communities continue to express their views, there is an increasing pessimism about the ability to make a positive change for the future of small-scale fisheries and rural coastal communities in Iceland:

I am part of the group of people that thinks the original distribution was a mistake and it was probably the biggest theft of the Icelandic history. On the other hand, I made peace with it a decade ago, that probably it was too late to turn back and that the nation had to accept what had happened. But the ones who dare to point out the flaws in the quota-system have been judged beforehand and accused of wanting to do irresponsible fishing or have even been called communists – probably by people that do not even know what the term communist means. Criticism can be good and

it can be used to do good things better. Unfortunately some people see criticism as inherently bad and that it's an attack on the individual or the system he stands for.

-Large-boat fisherman, Sauðárkrókur, 24 March 2013

I was raised by people who have been fishing and working in fisheries and related occupations. I have done most jobs on the sea from childhood – I have been at sea for more or less 50 years. I have a lot to say about the quota system and I could give a long lecture about it, but I am now too old to be engaged in this bullshit. What I find worse is where my nation is at, to let these strong pressure groups run everything here. It's sinister to think about. I have nine grandchildren and it's impossible that any of them will make a living as fishermen.

-Small-boat fisherman, Sauðárkrókur, 23 March 2013

The future... it totally depends on politics... nobody can know. LÍÚ [now SFS] is all about politics, and the small boats and communities are not always happy [with SFS's political stances]. The trawlers have such big political influence and one minister after another gets cold feet.

-Community leader, Hvammstangi, 27 November 2011

## Discussion

Regarding fisheries management, a key informant said, “The thing is, you see, there are too few trees in the forest.” At first it seemed as though the “trees” were fish, and that he was expressing an environmental concern about decreasing numbers of fish, or perhaps explaining how in the quota system he could not catch as many fish. However, this seemingly out of place terrestrial metaphor in fact relates to the most important land-based aspect of fisheries: the people. The “trees” are fishermen, and in the informant's perception, there are not enough trees to make a proper forest – a proper contingent of fishermen with a cohesive voice. The “forest” of fisheries instead is a barren and sparse place, with no new trees, no diversity of trees, only a few tall ones remaining few and far between. Although many older fishermen spoke of competition and lack of coordination between fishermen as an integral part of fisheries, they noted that there is an increasing need to form a collective voice to protect certain ways of life and fishing operations. The very nature of the forest has changed, and what remains is a collection of *little kings*.

The little kings in Icelandic fisheries today operate in increasingly difficult to navigate social and political circumstances. As featured in Drangsnæs, youth migration and connection to community are largely affected by fisheries management policies, but are compounded by broader trends in education opportunities, lifestyle tastes, and technical changes in the fishing industry that reduce the need for labor. Personal choices and preferences are bound by very real limitations on occupation and education opportunities, creating little kings through this individual decision-making process regarding migration. It is becoming increasingly unlikely that informants' grandchildren would even want to make a living in fisheries as personal identity and pride come from other, less geographically or lifestyle-based sources (Bjarnason 2009). Similarly, as highlighted in Skagaströnd, fisheries systems and fishing communities are inherently entwined in complex drivers of change such as fluctuations in marine resources and advancements

in technology. In this instance, a whole community like Skagaströnd could be considered a little king, with some agency to enact positive change, but always subject to larger complex environmental, economic, and social changes in fisheries.

Little kings are created through, and caught up in, the complexity of relationships of the haves and have-nots in Icelandic fisheries. The overarching political structure in fisheries management and governance acts as a compounder that affects the intensity, direction and speed of changes in a system already in constant flux, creating new classes of haves and have-nots. Little kings engaged in fishing today are an entrenched social group where everyone wants to be their own boss, but at the same time is restricted, with limited control to respond to larger drivers of change. Small-scale fishermen and coastal community members expend time and resources defending their own niches, which leaves little time or resources for engaging in national political discourses. Furthermore, the lack of power to engage in decision-making processes, or to “go south,” in turn creates an ever-changing substructure of haves and have-nots within small-scale fisheries and rural communities. While quota kings in urban centers are the most easily identified category of haves, subtler concepts exist. For example, Gunnar and Jóhanna’s quota ownership and general success may categorize them as haves, but at the same time, as small-boat fishermen, they are also under constant stress – grateful for new opportunities such as *strandveiðar* that offer some hope in the increasing precariousness of small-scale fisheries. A non-quota owner like Hafsteinn would be considered by most a have-not, although some quota-owners in small communities would feel wronged by his participation in *strandveiðar*. The fishermen and community leaders whose rural communities stand to greatly benefit from new opportunities like *strandveiðar* paradoxically do not have meaningful power in fisheries decision-making processes.

Although many small-boat fishermen and rural community residents would agree on its economic benefits to coastal villages, *strandveiðar* does not appear to significantly change the status quo of Icelandic fisheries with regards to access, ownership, and equity. Conflicts exist over ideas of proper “type” of *strandveiðar* participant and the *definitions* are often at odds with each other and raise more questions that current fishermen and coastal community members are struggling to answer. Is Hafsteinn’s engagement in *strandveiðar* a more proper or acceptable use of quota-free fishing than that of a doctor, lawyer, or former quota owner? Can *strandveiðar* help sustain Iceland’s rural fishing communities? Is *strandveiðar* for newcomers or retirees? Is *strandveiðar* intended to support an already existing fishing business or a side income in addition to another career? Is the purpose of *strandveiðar* to sustain fishing for leisure, or fishing for livelihood, or fishing for profit?

Two themes are central to understanding the current manifestation of conflict in Icelandic fisheries: differing philosophies regarding access to fisheries and the ability of the governance process to address equity in opportunity and outcome. Because fisheries have been a market economy, it is not market production and export that are the underlying cause of tension regarding fisheries, but the portability of fishing rights and their consolidation in the hands of a select few (Helgason and Pálsson 1997). Prior to the 1960s, marine governance in Iceland revolved around the exclusion of foreign fishing vessels, whereas domestic vessels were given open access to all major fisheries under various effort controls (Guðmundsson et al. 2004). While there is evidence that

the idea of ownership in fisheries is becoming engrained in Iceland, at the heart of the issue is the distinction between private and collective property (Chambers and Carothers 2016). While most of the literature on natural resource management in Iceland centers on fisheries, the evolution of the private property structures of Icelandic fisheries management is similar to the development of management of land, water, and geothermal resources. This reflects a larger trend in Icelandic governmental policy (Benediktsson and Karlsdóttir 2011; Benediktsson 2014; Icelandic Ministry of Industries and Innovation 2006). While these resources were once held under common property arrangements, each is increasingly shifting to variations of private property schemes in the neoliberal era, although important principles such as “freedom to roam” (*almannaréttur*) still allow for a public right of passage on uncultivated land (Nature Conservation Act 1999).

The concentration of money, access rights, and power in the hands of a few individuals through private property is at odds with the Nordic welfare model that guided much of Icelandic policy making in the past. A model where citizens were provided opportunities for productive employment that benefits their private lives, but are also taxed for the public good (Holm et al. 2015). Therefore, these shifting governmental ideologies result in an on-going tension in Icelandic society over who should access, control and own natural resources. At the base of much of this tension is a discord in the concept of equity in access to resources. The Icelandic Fisheries Management Act says the fish are the right of all Icelanders (small-boat fishermen, as well as doctors and lawyers in *strandveiðar* and big businesses) (Althingi Icelandic Parliament 2006; Einarsson 2015b). In practice, however, neoliberal policies such as ITQ systems often ignore issues of equity (Pinkerton 2015), meaning that certain groups tend to gain greater control based on their positions of power. A growing number of fishermen in rural communities are therefore asking whether it is possible to imagine a more equitable fisheries management scheme and governance arrangement. One where big businesses would not be on an equal playing field with small communities, where stronger policies would exist to support the equitable right to fish for individuals in rural communities historically dependent on fisheries, and where power-sharing would be a primary foundation in the fisheries decision-making processes.

## Conclusion

Little kings exist as entire communities reacting to environmental, technological and social changes, as family units trying to maintain their cultural and historical connection to fishing, and as individual fishermen making the best of economic opportunities to make a living. These little kings have no collective power or platform to meaningfully influence national politics and no concerted effort of resistance has emerged among fishermen as the in-fights between fishermen dominate, although research like this study shows that there are common threads for small-boat fishermen and rural communities around which to unite. Residents in rural communities are distanced from decision-making processes ongoing in the capital area, and yet their world has been widened by politics and power over the years. National politics are dominated by a small number of powerful individuals with vested interest in the economic efficiency of the ITQ system. Although disagreement is not uncommon in natural resources management, Icelandic fisheries are at least in part an example of conflict stemming

from unequal power relations in the ITQ system. Volatile political situations with large power imbalances like the current Icelandic fisheries governance system make it hard to enact new rules and to imagine ways that power can be redistributed.

A common topic of discussion in Iceland in many social and political circles – ranging from everyday citizens, to community leaders, to national politicians and planners – centers on the extent to which government policies should support rural communities, and how society is changing to favor urban areas. The various impacts of the sale of quota on small-scale fishermen, processors and rural communities were anything but unexpected. Although subsequent implementations of ITQ systems in other countries have attempted to include safeguards for small-scale fisheries and rural communities, early phases of Iceland's national ITQ system had very few policies aimed at protecting those more likely to suffer negative and unequal consequences from the ITQ system (Chambers and M. Kokorsch in press). This research has shown the ways that attempts to counteract negative impacts of the quota system with policy making can in fact created new struggles. Shifting categories of a single stakeholder group labeled “fishermen” alongside of differing ideas of what a fisherman is and who Icelandic fisheries should benefit continue to stall consensus. Many large fishing and processing operations favor a national fisheries system that gives the largest overall benefit to Iceland as a nation, and do not support the ideology behind programs that give special allowances for smaller communities and fishing operations. This continuing clash in Icelandic fisheries is therefore rooted in not only the rules of the management system itself, but larger questions of governance design, stakeholder power, and national constitutional rights as equity issues in access to fish continue to be left unresolved.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Herring fisheries had been under a quota system since 1975, and capelin since 1980.

<sup>2</sup>The “Mist Hardships” (*Móðuharðindin*) were resultant from the eruption of the volcano Laki and the lingering poisonous gas cloud from 1783-1785, when a quarter of the population died due to crop failure, livestock death, and flouride poisoning.

<sup>3</sup>All names of informants have been changed, and in some places the community identity has been omitted to protect anonymity.

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## Authors' contributions

CC conducted fieldwork and analyzed data. All authors contributed to the writing of the manuscript and research design. All authors read, edited, and approved the final manuscript.

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