

## ***The Social Embeddedness of Natural Resource Extraction and Use in Small Fishing Communities***

Lecture at the Stockholm Resilience Centre (SRC) on October 7, 2009

Professor Kenneth Frank opened the recent SRC seminar by introducing his take on an individual's use of natural resources, and how this use is affected by values and beliefs and the social relationships the person is rooted in, or 'embedded' in. The theory, although explorative in nature, is useful to explain individual decision making forces in the way natural resources are utilised in small communities dependent on subsistence fisheries.

The theory has two components: the decision-making component and resource-allocation component. The decision-making component addresses what technology to use to extract resources and how much effort to use based on the context of the local community. The resource-allocation component explains that people make decisions on how to allocate resources based on the expected return in knowledge and resources. These two factors, Dr. Frank suggests, work in a complimentary fashion.

It is also understood that global forces have the capacity to alter our incentives for making certain choices and shift the very root of community belief systems.

Conformity also plays a vital role in the model. Psychologists call it the confirmation bias, meaning that once we assume a certain stance on an issue we will proceed to filter information only to confirm our existing beliefs. In this respect conformity in Dr. Kenneth Frank's theory, assumes that people will conform to the majority in order to fit in and thus benefit from expected returns of knowledge and resources. At times this is done at the cost of long-term environmental sustainability goals. It is worth mentioning that often individuals delay changing behaviour in fear of becoming unpopular, open to sabotage, and ostracized from the community.

For instance, if an individual is 'embedded' in a fishery community, and her job depends on it, and the media is supported by the fishery industry, she may find she filters out information on stock management or fishery problems or on global warming. A fishery is what she is 'embedded' in, providing benefit and security in her life. She also observes that everyone else is doing what she is doing therefore she will not change her behaviour.

Professor Kenneth Frank's theory urges decision makers, community leaders, and fishery managers to take into account the whole scope of the fishery system, which is inclusive of a fishery culture with strong values, norms and traditions. Policy which is put into effect will be successful if these factors are considered and weaved into the system. Education plays an important part in this process.

**Iwona Roman**