

THE DAMS AND THE FISHERS- OCCUPATIONAL CHANGE IN RESOURCE DEPENDENT COMMUNITIES

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Resource dependent occupations, such as fishing, farming, or hunting and gathering, are an important part of the cultural landscape. The construction of a dam leads to changes in the natural resource base, for example by altering species abundance and diversity, changing groundwater levels, and inundating large areas of land. These changes can limit the viability of resource depended occupations in the impacted region. I suggest that when resource access is altered to such a degree that the viability of the occupation is reduced, we can speak of 'occupational displacement'. Occupational displacement can be challenging because work is an important part of most people's lives and holds meaning beyond the earning of wages and the securing of a livelihood.

For my dissertation, I have conducted qualitative case studies of occupationally displaced commercial fishers in Florida and in Brazil. Based on preliminary findings from these studies and evidence in the literature, I suggest that: (1) Fishing holds specific meanings beyond the earning of wages and securing of a livelihood, (2) commercial fishers experience occupational displacement as a turning-point in their lives, and (3) the experience of occupational displacement is disruptive on the individual as well as the community level and is associated with feelings of powerlessness, sense of injustice, sadness, and anger.

Here, I will present preliminary results of the Brazilian case study. In the summer of 2019, my collaborators and I conducted 22 semi-structured interviews with people who commercially fished before the construction of the Lajeado Dam on the Tocantins River in Brazil. While many of the interviewed fishers continue to fish commercially, they describe having to change where and how they fish, as well as the need to diversity their livelihood activities.

PRESENTER BIO: May Lehmsiek is a PhD candidate in Interdisciplinary Ecology and a Water Institute Graduate Fellow at the University of Florida. After having worked as an environmental scientist in Florida for 10 years, she returned to UF to pursue a doctoral degree. She finds humans fascinating.