

Living Off the Sea

The 16th edition of the Pêcheurs du Monde film festival, held in Lorient, France, focused on how fishing is vital for both ocean biodiversity and livelihoods

The Pêcheurs du Monde film festival in Lorient, France, took some 3,000 people on a journey around the oceans of the world on 15-24 March 2024. According to Olivier Broudeur, president of the professional jury, the festival offered the opportunity to focus on the ocean and the people living off it. Participants got to know people who live under very different conditions and they were impressed by their determination in facing challenges.

The festival had a jury of both professionals such as filmmakers, fishers, specialists and scientists, as well as young people, mainly high school students. One prize is awarded by the public and another, called the Chandrika Sharma Award, by the festival team. (On 8 March 2014, Chandrika Sharma, the then executive secretary of ICSF, was on her way to an FAO meeting in Mongolia aboard the Malaysian Airlines flight MH370, which disappeared in the seas. From 2008 to 2014, she had been deeply involved in the process of the formulation of the SSF Guidelines. The Chandrika Sharma Award, which honours a film illustrating the role of women in fisheries, is the Lorient festival's tribute to her.)

In awarding the prize for the feature film *A Letter from Yene*, directed by Manthia Diawara, the professional jury highlighted the film's powerful testimony/manifesto linking local development issues with global challenges. The short film *Squid Fleet*, by Will Miller and Ed Ou, won awards from both juries; it shared a fascination mingled with horror at the spectacle of massive exploitation of fisheries resources with total disregard for human rights and biodiversity.

The two juries gave a special mention to *Haulout* by Russian directors

Evgenia Arbugaeva and Maxim Arbugaev. It portrayed the emotions of a researcher observing the spectacular disappearance of walruses as the sea ice melts. *Against the Tide*, by Indian director Sarvnik Kaur, touched the young jury members with the intensity of the contradictory debate between two friends, both of them fishermen, over the type of fishing to be practised:

The theme of the festival was: the fisher, the sea and the plate. It raised the question of the place of consumers

one that takes only the necessary share of food or one that seeks to maximize profit.

Special mention was made of *Inertie* by Nicolas Gayraud, which shows the disarray of fishermen in the Cotentin region of France, for whom the main threat lies in the globalization of fisheries. Should not we give priority to defending the sea, as suggested in *On the Borders of the Sea* by Sebastien Thiebot and Claire Marchal? The schoolchildren voted in favour by awarding the film their prize.

Fishing communities are worried because they are rarely consulted, reports Quebec director Jean Guenette in his film *Le Silence des morues*; it won the Public Award. Despite the modernization of equipment and practices, fishers' organizations are powerless because politicians do not listen to their voices.

Focus on food politics

At a time when food insecurity is back in the global spotlight, with the

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Razzia sur l'Atlantique poster at Lorient Film Festival 2024. We need to allow fishers to be the stewards of the oceans, as shown in a number of films screened at the festival

situation worsening for the poorest populations, the role of fishers (like that of farmers) is being called into question. It is a true contradiction of our times! The right to fish for a living is being challenged. The film *Aimer la mer a Gaza*, by Sarah Katz and Samia Ayeb, was more than just symbolic; it won the Chandrika Sharma Award. In 2014, a young fisherwoman confronted her male colleagues and the Israeli navy to go fishing. Today, the ports and the boats have been destroyed, as recounted in the very moving video testimony of the young woman. The struggle of the Gazan fishers to

feed their population reveals global concerns: war, pillage, commercial competition, excessive environmental constraints and derogatory campaigns, all impose limits on the role of fishers in contributing to people's food security.

Director Nicolas van Ingen's *Razzia sur l'Atlantique* was awarded a special mention in the schoolchildren's awards. It is a relentless investigation into the plundering of resources off the coast of Africa. European and Chinese agri-food groups are monopolizing fish stocks to produce fishmeal for industrial aquaculture of salmon in Norway or Scotland, or sea bream in Greece or Turkey. They steal food from poor people and provide for the rich. This form of colonial plundering is contributing to the migration of young Africans and the increasing scarcity of fish.

The Canadian film *Where the River Widens* by Zachary Greenleaf reminds us of the fusion among the cultures of the First Nations, between humans and the sea. This was also one of the themes in the film from Madagascar, *Between Land and Sea*. Isn't it time for our productivist, over-consuming societies to reconsider the link with the living creatures of the seas? Marion Jhoaner, president of the young people's jury, stressed this warning when the awards were announced: "Should we give in to the promise of easy money or face, individually and collectively, the ethical issues—both environmental and social—of fishing practices?"

The theme of the festival was: the fisher, the sea and the plate. It raised the question of the place of consumers. Enthusiastic chefs from Lorient invited consumers to taste recipes based on local (and often despised) species. Kitchen workshops provided an opportunity to show how to add value to these fishes and enable fishers to sell all their catch—not just the species considered noble by the usual market—and at prices affordable for both consumers and fishermen. Such value addition is also a way of better safeguarding biodiversity by diversifying the consumption of fish. On this occasion, Chef Nathalie Beauvais, a member of the 2024 jury, presented her latest book of recipes.

The festival also provided an opportunity to recall the long history of fishers and the links between humans and the sea. The films bear witness to the cultural and scientific contribution of the seas to humanity as a whole. Biologist Pierre Mollo, a special guest of the festival, presented excerpts from his documentaries, a testimony of his close relationship with fishers over decades. Sociologist Alain Pichon analysed the image of fishworkers through archival documentaries. These two events were among the festival's highlights.

The festival wouldn't exist without a glimpse into the future of fishing. Since 2023, it has set up an exceptional meeting with young people from the maritime high schools of Brittany in France. The four schools have responded by sending groups of students to the festival. The 'Fishing for the Future Days' session provided an opportunity to listen to the views and questions of future fishers, to debate with professionals, through screenings, and to discover the port's facilities and businesses. The debates showed that the youngsters were very conscious about the social and environmental issues that need to be taken into account.


Forum for exchange

Once again at the festival, the interdependence of local and global dimensions were highlighted by many films. The interaction of land and sea is as obvious as it is vital. People live off the sea, but the sea is threatened by all the pressures and pollution coming from land, as reflected by the crises in the world of fisheries. While many tourism brochures display pictures of whales, dolphins, seals and coral fish in protected areas at all latitudes, where fishers are excluded, and 'Blue Growth' is happening next door through oil or gas fields, the real question is: Will industrial fish farming, based on the plundering of resources in countries of the South, be the only way to feed the people of the North? Is this the end of the sea as a source of food?

These questions force us to examine the values that underpin our lives and our societies. Scientists such as Alain Biseau have shown that today, thanks

to a policy of controlling fish stocks, the majority of species in the North Atlantic are no longer threatened by over-fishing. Julien Mata showed in the film *Pecheur 2.0* that an endangered species such as the bluefin tuna can thrive, thanks to adapted fishing techniques and good management.

That, ultimately, is what this is all about: we urgently need to enable fishers to adapt to climate change so that fishing and biodiversity can coexist and provide the food we need. Regulated fishing and co-operation between fishers and scientists are the key to healthy marine biodiversity.

The elimination of fishers would enshrine the victory of the exploiters of the sea, behind an 'environmental smokescreen', as is the case of land reserves in Africa or America. On the contrary, we need to allow fishers to be the stewards of the oceans, as shown in a number of films screened at the 16th edition of the Lorient film festival. It also turned into a forum for exchange, reflection and creative prospecting to ensure that fishing communities have the right to make a living from the sea while respecting marine life. 

For more

16th Pêcheurs du Monde film festival

<https://pecheursdumonde.org/>

A Fish-eye View

https://www.icsf.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Sam_89_art11_Cinema_A-Fish-eye-View.pdf

Picturing the Coast

https://www.icsf.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Sam_88_art15_Cinema_Jacques_Cherel.pdf