



CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY IN MARINE TOURISM DIVERSIFICATION

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Coastal and marine tourism are one of the largest economic contributors to the Blue Economy and have been identified as a viable diversification strategy for commercial fishers to improve their livelihoods. However, uptake is low and there are concerns about implications for their identity and dignity. Through the lens of psychosocial identity, this research explores the lived experiences of fishers who transition into tourism work. Considering psychological, physical, and relational dimensions, findings show that marine tourism diversification can create opportunities for constructing physically and mentally healthier identities and increased self-respect and highlight the importance of community recognition and support. Further, while participants largely enjoy customer interactions and embrace their new roles, navigating these and making sense of their transitions can also be a source of conflict and involves ongoing 'identity work'. We argue that marine diversification involves a dynamic interplay between deconstruction and reconstruction of fishing identities, in which people weave their past into the present to create coherent live narratives.

This research challenges binary understandings of identity as either producer- or service-oriented or purely economically driven. Therefore, to enable and support successful work transitions, tourism and fishing funders, managers, and policymakers must collaborate and move beyond the predominantly economic narratives of marine tourism diversification by considering wider psychological, physical, and relational aspects.

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