

# Hastings fishing community: Co-design and collaboration in research



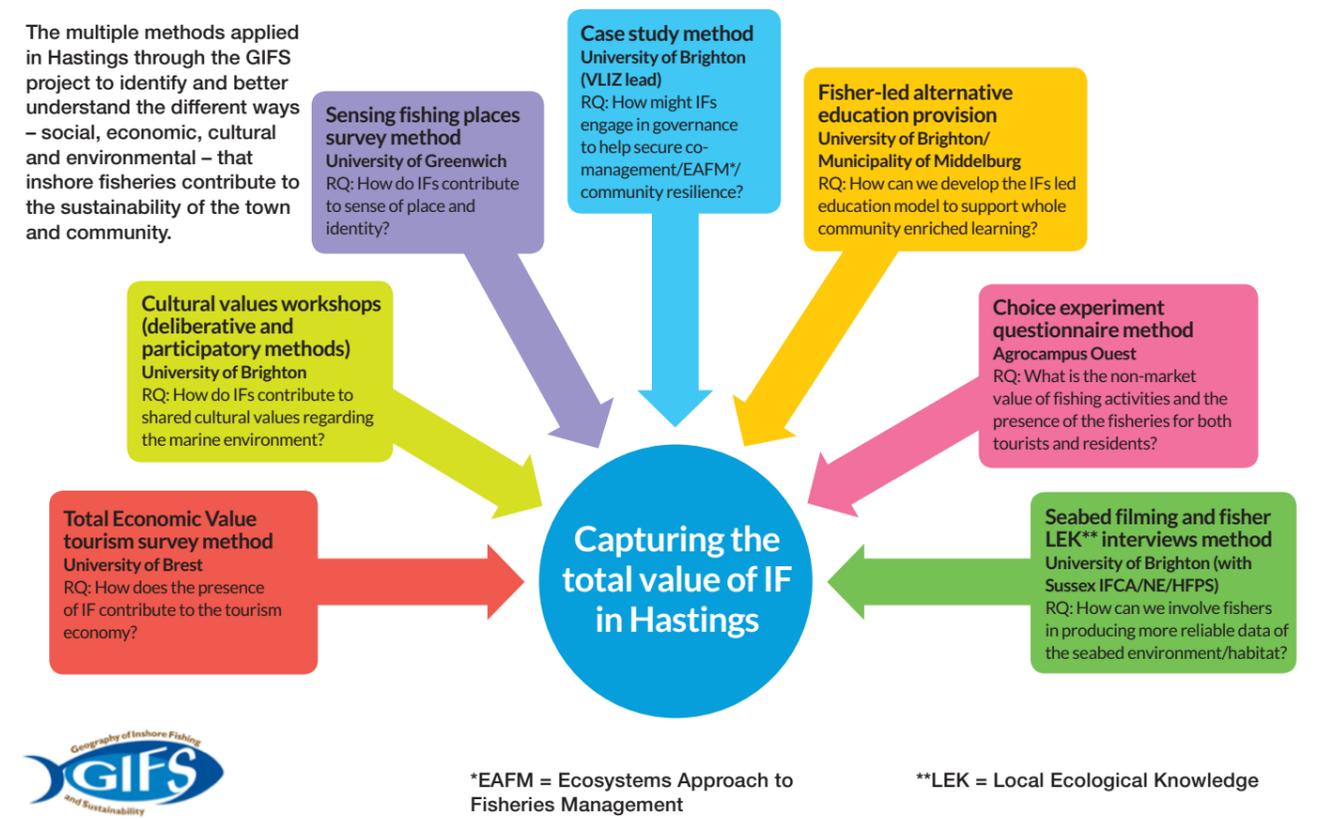
Hastings is home to the largest sustainable beach-launched fleet in the country, but fuel costs, quotas and an ageing population have threatened this historic industry. Efforts to counteract economic decline were rewarded in 2010/11 when the town secured Axis 4 funding to form a Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG), a partnership between fisheries actors and other local private and public stakeholders. Below, Jo Orchard-Webb (research fellow in the School of Environment and Technology) and Esther Brown (economic and social engagement manager for the University of Brighton in Hastings) describe our contribution to the partnership.

The University of Brighton has worked with the Hastings fishing community through the GIFS (Geography of Inshore Fishing and Sustainability) project and as a stakeholder partner in the FLAG to understand the different ways – social, economic, cultural and environmental – in which inshore fisheries benefit the town.

GIFS aims to establish the importance of inshore fishing across the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium and France. The project used a range of methods, including surveys, case studies and interviews, to capture the value of inshore fishing in Hastings.

Community members took a central role in project partner meetings, fieldwork exercises and workshops, and were integral to identifying the focus and scope of research pilot activity. This put them at the heart of the research and ensured the impact and knowledge exchange were far-reaching.

The multiple methods applied in Hastings through the GIFS project to identify and better understand the different ways – social, economic, cultural and environmental – that inshore fisheries contribute to the sustainability of the town and community.



## WORKING TOGETHER

The project has enabled the Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society (HFPS) to build cross-border partnerships and develop a knowledge exchange network with the six GIFS partners as well as a range of actors in other European fishing communities, resulting in the sharing of ideas, resources and solutions to challenges in building sustainable communities.

We collaboratively examined the role of the fishing fleet in enriched whole community learning, which led to the development of educational resources and a curriculum mapping exercise. These resources support the fleet's alternative education provision, which focuses on sharing their knowledge with schoolchildren, chefs and the general public – work that highlights the importance of sustainability and provides a much-needed alternative income stream for local fishermen.

Working with Natural England, Sussex IFCA and the university, the local fleet also helped capture accurate seabed data using underwater cameras suspended from their fishing boats. This approach enabled a more effective and equitable inclusion of fishermen in the science behind the conservation process.

## WIDER IMPACT

A true and equal approach to partnership has helped build capacity within both the university research team and the fishing community regarding the collaborative identification of research needs and the development of context-sensitive research methods. These skills and

1. University of Brighton and Hastings Fleet representatives research scoping visit to Horizon Educatief, Ostend (Source: Johanne Orchard-Webb, 2013)
2. Fisheries-led education: HFPS Net Hut education resources carrier created as part of GIFS (Source: HFPS, 2014)

the partnership experience have encouraged partners to engage in a more inclusive data collection approach that enhances the value of local ecological knowledge. Importantly, stakeholder participation has resulted in shared ownership of the research and project outputs, so the findings are now more accessible for use in local planning.

