

Island to Island: A Transcultural Journey

Yves Henocque

Wherever we live on this ocean planet, we know that we either share a common destiny, requiring new forms of collaboration and partnership, or we have no destiny at all.

In October 1977, while finishing my PhD thesis in marine ecology at the Museum of Natural History in Paris, I received great news—there was a job available (it was great news because even at that time in France, getting a job in my field was not easy) to help run a lobster aquaculture centre on Houat, a tiny island on the French Atlantic coast inhabited by 360 people whose main activity was small-scale fishing including trapping crabs and lobsters.

The aquaculture centre was actually a (clawed) lobster ‘hatchery’ where baby lobsters were hatched and reared before release by local fishermen into the wild to restock the natural lobster population, a well-known practice used with a wide range of molluscs, crustaceans, and fish species along the coasts of Japan.

You can imagine what a fantastic experience for a young urban dweller it was! Soon, I adapted to my new environment to become physically and culturally—no, not a lobster—but one of the islanders though still a ‘foreigner’ in the small island community with such strong kinship links. It was a great apprenticeship that lasted 5 lively and happy years.

They were lively and happy years because I was young but also because I was working with highly motivated and forward-thinking fishermen who had taken time out from valuable fishing to build themselves the whole hatchery facility, which at that time was composed of a phytoplankton clean room, a laboratory, and big concrete tanks to rear the young lobsters.

Before what was already considered the ‘fisheries crisis’, these fishermen were bold and determined in not giving up but were promoting an ambitious project they called the ‘Breton Blue Belt’ where they would cultivate and release various juvenile marine species to restock the sea along the coastal waters of Brittany, practicing a kind of ‘sea ranching’ with a whole train of management initiatives, including protected areas under fishermen’s control. Does this ring a bell?

Indeed, this was quite an exciting vision and I soon realized it was largely inspired from a Japanese experience that some enlightened pioneer aquaculture practitioners brought back after a few months of study trips to the famous ‘saibai gyogyo centres’ or fisheries restocking centres on the Japanese coast.

During my 5 years on Houat, I devoted a month each year to travelling and visiting lobster rearing centres mainly in Canada and the USA, meeting committed and friendly scientists letting me enter their labs to share their vision and enthusiasm in what they were doing. But I knew that for aquaculture and sea ranching there was one unique and experienced country I still had to visit—Japan!

One autumn day in October 1981, I found myself sitting on a local train bringing me from Narita Airport to downtown Tokyo. Two months before, I had received a letter telling me that I had been selected as ‘researcher’ at ‘*Nichi Futsu Kaikan*’, the French-Japanese institution then located in Ochanomizu (since relocated to Ebisu). After 5 years on a tiny island off the East Atlantic coast, I was now setting foot for the first time on another but very big island—part of a great archipelago in the Western Pacific—Japan.

And, no surprise, my research program was about aquaculture and restocking practices including the use of artificial reefs along the Japanese coast. At that time, my scientific host and main counterpart was Professor Jiro Kittaka, a crustacean aquaculture specialist from Kitasato University, School of Fisheries, located in Sanriku, Ofunato, sadly devastated by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing tsunami.

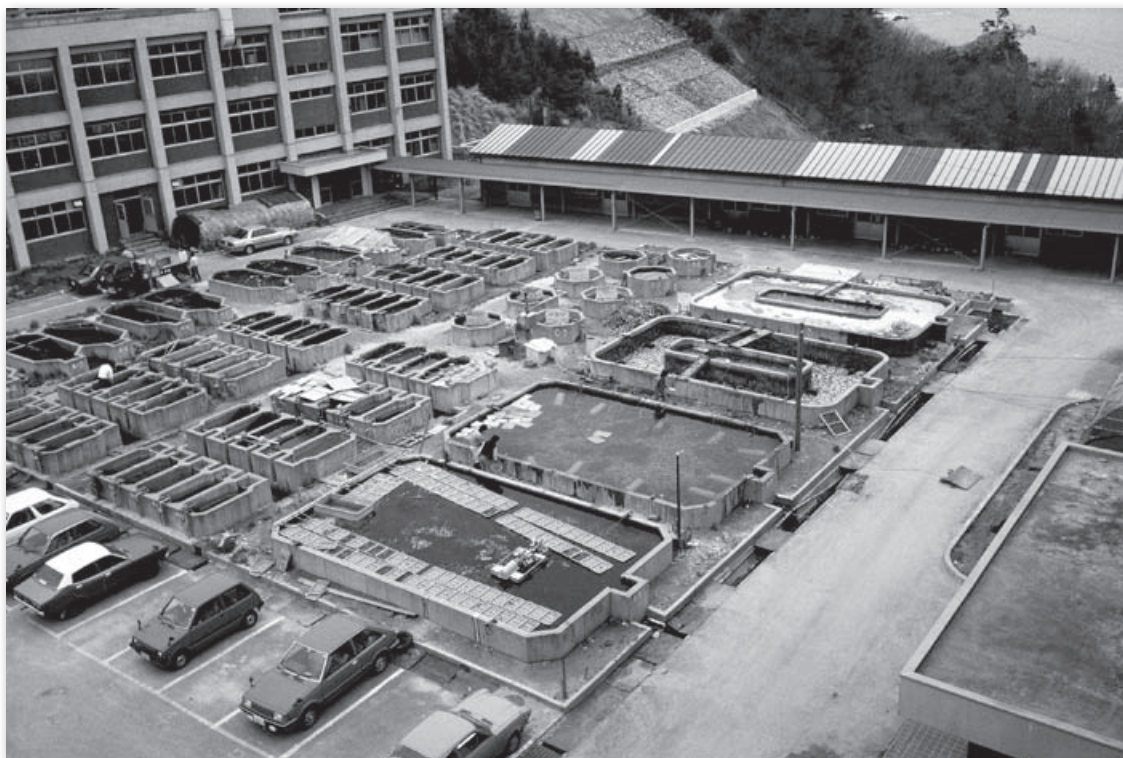
After a 6-month intensive Japanese language course at Takadanobaba school in Tokyo (I was then the only westerner in the school... and it was such a culture shock that it seemed unreal), I felt ready to head to the Sanriku coast, a beautiful but rather remote area where I was not just the only westerner but also the only foreigner. Therefore, speaking Japanese (but don’t ask me about speaking the Iwate dialect) was compulsory if I wanted to communicate with the students.

Lodged in a small apartment in the professors’ building, I led quite a healthy life, jogging in the woods (where the



Houat Island hatchery facility

(Author)



Kitasato University Iwate Ofunato lobster rearing tanks

(Author)

delicious *shiitake* mushroom is cultivated) and along the spectacular Sanriku coast, which is much like the Atlantic coast of Brittany. I also drove my car (a nice second-hand blue Nissan 'Sunny') since I needed it to get not only from my lodgings to the university campus but also to get back to Tokyo and enjoy the urban life in Ochanomizu from time

to time. I think it was then (1982?) that the new Tohoku Shinkansen came into service, making my back and forth trips much shorter.

After connecting to the local train for Ichinoseki, I remember seeing some people, much afraid of the unknown foreigner, shifting away to a safer seat. Others, usually

younger, would come and sit beside me to get a chance to speak in English. That was how I had so many nice encounters in the middle of the countryside on a local train.

I forgot to say that although the country and the place were entirely new to me, something was very familiar—my other friends, the European and American lobsters reared on the campus in huge numbers as mature adults and juveniles by Prof. Kittaka and his team of students. Their bold plan was to make some experimental releases of juvenile European and American lobsters (clawed lobster species are absent from the Pacific) into the nearly tropical waters of Koshikijima, Kagoshima Prefecture. This gave me the chance to go down there and dive to release juvenile lobsters and monitor their behaviour in the wild. It was certainly OK but I can guess their fate in such a new and hence hostile environment for which they were quite unprepared and ill-fitted.

After a full year in Ofunato, my plan was to visit and work in several prefectural restocking centres, which I did for several months in the Hiroshima, Mie and Nagasaki centres dealing mainly with rearing and restocking of shrimps and blue crabs.

Before I knew it, the end of 1984 had already arrived and after a fantastic 3-year stay, I had to return to France. I knew I was leaving but I did not realize that it was the beginning of a long and intimate relationship with Japan, its people and culture.

Almost 30 years later, that relationship has of course evolved through multiple and repeated short and longer stays in Japan but also in regard to my career that took me from aquaculture to marine policy and integrated management practices.

And if I ask myself what has been the thread of that evolution, it is certainly the focus on users like fishermen and then on policymakers from local and central governing bodies. I progressively realized that if the role of scientists is to gather knowledge, the needed changes in regard to sustainable development of the coast and the ocean will happen only if users and policymakers adopt more appropriate management practices and policies.

With that perspective becoming more acute and obvious, I changed my core interest from science to society, not as opposites, but giving primacy to the latter. And of course, that also deeply changed my perception of the environment both in my own country and in such a different a culture like Japan. Here, the aim is not to compare but to learn from each other because, either in the Pacific or the Atlantic, local initiatives never stop unfolding and I like to remember the words (back in 1930) of the great ethnologist, Margaret Mead, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has”.

What did I learn or rather what did WE learn through all these years? In an increasingly crowded and interconnected global society we know that it is the ability to integrate what we know and what we do that is most critical and this is a personal as well as a collective endeavour. This integration must occur at many scales and across many previously compartmentalized bodies of knowledge and practices. First, it is about integrating and applying our knowledge and experience of how ecosystems function and respond to human actions. Ecosystems must be redefined as living systems that include our species as one component of many.

Here, cultural backgrounds may be totally different as between the Western and Asian worlds; once, I heard a monk say something that I think captures our profound differences about the perception of nature. He said, “in the Shinto faith, nature is to gods and man what god is to nature and man in Western religions”. I think he was saying that although human societies may currently be the dominant force on this planet, this does not place us above or otherwise insulate us from the fundamental laws and processes that govern all life.

I also learned that another priority lies in constructing and maintaining nested systems of governance that unite planning and decision-making at the scale of a community (what we call ‘co-management’ in Europe or *sato-yama* derived from the concept of *sato-umi* in Japan) with planning and decision-making at the scale of our planet. If we have recognized that biodiversity is a crucially important feature of our planet, we have yet to learn that cultural diversity may be equally important, if not necessary, to the long-term health of a planet that is friendly to our species. We are realizing that we are in a very fast-changing world and that, while keeping our respective roots and cultures to maintain a sense of self, we must adapt and develop some common new paradigms and forms of governance adapted to our respective and specific cultural contexts.

Indeed, we have learned that the values that underpin governance, and more specifically coastal governance, values such as participation, transparency, accountability, do build constituencies and social networks like has been the case in the fisheries sector in Japan thanks to the very unique system of fishing rights and the role of local cooperatives in managing them. But it has also become clear that isolated small-scale efforts are not enough to make the significant change that is needed today. The problem lies in the forces at work within the larger systems, with a huge diversity of activities hence perceptions and vested interests, that are underpinned by other sets of values and rules. Recognition that enabling conditions must be constructed simultaneously at several layers in the governance system has its initial expression in ‘co-management’ and the ‘two-track’ (top-down and bottom-up) approach. Both



Author with colleagues and Sato-umi promoters in Ago Bay (Mie Prefecture)

(Author)

recognize that small-scale initiatives must involve and be supported at higher levels in the governance hierarchy. Either in Europe or in Japan, the trend is now to plan and manage not only at the local level but also at the regional and 'regional seas' level, each local initiative becoming part of a whole strategy, i.e. an integrated maritime policy.

Looking beyond the coasts and regional seas, we are now discovering (or re-discovering) the oceans, which are actually a whole that covers more than 70% of our blue planet. We have learned that if we want to be serious we must develop and realistically implement a trans-systems vision that goes from the watershed to the open ocean, from what we now call integrated water resources management to integrated coastal and ocean management. We now have maritime or ocean policies to serve such an ambition but the devil is in the implementation details. In recent years, this is what I have been looking at in close collaboration with Japanese colleagues and friends like those from the Ocean Policy Research Foundation where I was a visiting fellow.

From aquaculture to sea ranching development to coastal and ocean management, what is the common thread I have followed for the last 30 years? I think it is very much about people living on the coast and living from the sea. Knowledge has no interest to them if it is not usable to their own benefit as long as it is not to the detriment of others, through—as economists like to say—'internalisation of externalities'. And Japan, its environment, its culture, its cosmology, is part of that evolution, feeding the understanding that most problems must be approached with multiple objectives, considering: (i) the value of a

scientific approach where treated management interventions are not so much about solutions to be implemented but rather experiments to learn from, (ii) the communication and mediation between stakeholder groups, (iii) the need to manage position and influence within one's own organisation, (iv) the need to take into account the larger political context in which strategies unfold.

Definitely, this has been a great long journey from island to island and it is a good feeling to see the boat still afloat and connecting islands while searching for new destinations. ■



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Dr Yves Henocque is Maritime Strategy Senior Advisor at IFREMER, the French Research Institute for the Exploitation of the Sea. He started his academic career as a marine ecologist and later turned his focus to ocean policies. He has been contributing to the creation and implementation of maritime strategies and action plans in the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean, Thailand and Japan. In particular, he has continued his work in Japan for 30 years, visiting a number of coastal communities. He has published numerous books and articles on integrated coastal and ocean management.