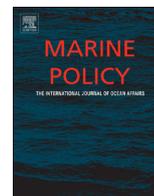




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# Work segmentation in the Norwegian salmon industry: The application of segmented labor market theory to work migrants on the island community of Frøya, Norway



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## ABSTRACT

Work migration is increasing in Norway, particularly in the production sector of the aquaculture industry. This sector is growing rapidly and manual labor needed in the industry is consistently being sought through Eastern European networks and temp-agencies. This article looks at the island community of Frøya, in Sør Trøndelag in Norway, where around 20% of the population is of foreign descent, and where stakeholders in the production line experience a lack of upward mobility due to their lack of Norwegian language skills, and the insecure nature of their employment status. The capacity of the island community to adapt to a 3-fold increase in aquaculture production will depend on this segment of society as well being able to adjust, and on their inclusiveness in society. Based on a stakeholder driven workshop looking at the perceptions of a set of foreign workers in the aquaculture industry, segmented labor market theory was applied to the experience of the workers. The priority issues of the migrant population of Frøya involved in the aquaculture industry was also explained, and their wish for upward mobility and job security, as well as inclusiveness in society elaborated upon. This upward mobility, however, would lead to the bottom segment of the labor market on Frøya – the aquaculture production line – to have to be filled with another lower segment group of workers.

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## 1. Introduction

The aquaculture industry currently represents 60% (US\$ 5.4 billion) of Norwegian seafood exports while farmed salmon represents over 80% (850,000 t) of annual aquaculture production [1]. These production levels are driven by a strong and growing demand for farmed fish. This is a natural result of the decline or stagnation of wild stocks: there is evidence that 24–36% of wild fish stocks have collapsed worldwide and that 68–72% of global fish stocks are overexploited or collapsed [2–5]. In response to this increase in production, the aquaculture industry has created many jobs along the rural areas of the Norwegian coast, in line with the political priorities of the government in Norway of *keeping the lights on in the homes of these areas* [6]. The aquaculture industry has also been critical in the development of spin-off industries and is an important contributor to the supply- and processing industry as well. This is of crucial importance for the life in Norwegian coastal communities, and creates economic growth in both rural districts as well as larger cities.

Filling the new positions in these communities, however, has mainly come in the form of work migration [7]. This is because the aquaculture sector has a *high* demand for manual labor in its production facilities and these facilities are often located in areas that have experienced decades of depopulation [8]. This depopulation in the Norwegian rural areas has a variety of explanations, ranging from higher wages, educational attainment or other life changing aspects [9]. Within the aquaculture industry, and in local communities dominated by the aquaculture industry, growing numbers of workers are being recruited from Eastern European networks and temp-agencies [10]. However, it is not only the aquaculture industry that has a growing number of foreign workers in Norway. In the last quarter of 2012, there were a total of 30,700 employees from Eastern European EU countries, primarily Poland and Lithuania, in Norway. This is a 27% growth from the same quarter the year before [11]. This increase comes as a result of not only the shortage of low wage industry workers in rural areas of Norway, but also growing unemployment in Europe [12] and that Norway is considered an attractive country to work in, as low education jobs pay relatively high wages as compared to other countries [13]. In Lithuania and Poland, the mean monthly wages for manual workers were 431 and 622 Euros respectively in 2010,

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as compared to 3920 Euros in Norway. For skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers, the monthly wage is even lower, at 346 in Lithuania and 472 in Poland [14]. This is compared with the average Norwegian pay of approximately 4763 Euros a month in the aquaculture industry and 3588 Euros for industrial jobs in general in 2010 (Statistics Norway, 2014d). In Lithuania, furthermore, the unemployment rate was 12.5% in 2012 [15], and in Poland it was 10.6% [16]. In addition, several Norwegian companies and enterprises in the construction sector and the service trades openly admit to the cost benefits of hiring immigrants as they have a lower rate of sick leave than Norwegians and represent, according to the company leaders, a lesser risk to hire on short term as they are easier to let go if they are not needed anymore, making them expendable workers [17].

With the projected continued growth of the aquaculture industry [18] this flow of migrant workers is expected to continue into the near future, at least until Norwegians relocate back to these rural communities from urban areas and apply for jobs currently filled by migrant workers. If the projection, ranging from 2.7 to 3 million tonnes seafood by 2025 from aquaculture production, a three-fold increase from 2012, were to be realized, the industry would create 56,000 new jobs in the aquaculture sector that would need to be filled in the same time period [19,20]. The void filled in the employment sector that has been filled by migrant workers from Eastern Europe over the last decades will therefore be expected to widen and filled by new waves of migrant workers. The attractiveness of jobs for Norwegians will likely not increase, however, since they are primarily associated as being meant for low skilled workers, thereby accentuating segmentation in the aquaculture industry where low skilled jobs are filled by migrant workers with low mobility within the sector.

Given this context, this article looks to *migration* and *labor market segmentation* theory to find out what drivers are strengthening the segmentation of labor in the aquaculture industry, with foreign workers primarily working in the “blue-collar” segment. The article also explores what hinders the migration of Norwegians back to these rural coastal communities where work is now available, and how it relates to labor market segmentation theory. In the current article, the focus is on the small island community of Frøya, located in the middle of Norway, approximately 2.5 h from Trondheim and where aquaculture is a dominant industry. Here, the effects of aquaculture on society have been clearly visible, particularly with regards to the associated increase in migrant workers to fill the production jobs associated with the industrial production of farmed salmon, leading to this group now comprising 20% of the community population. In this article, the theoretical framework is first presented, followed by an investigation into the background of the aquaculture industry in Norway. This is followed by an introduction to the methodological framework of the article and its application to the group of workers in the fish farming industry in Frøya. Finally, the results from a stakeholder-driven workshop that was carried out with this group of migrant workers is presented. The conclusion refers to the shortcomings of the regulations around mandatory language courses offered (and funded) by the Norwegian government, as they are being restricted to refugees, and not available to voluntary work migrants, thereby effectively leaving this job to the private industry. Other stakeholder workshops relating to the same issue show how the native Norwegians furthermore emphasize a need to attract the return migration of Norwegians to their community as an alternative to an increase in the immigration of foreign workers.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The push-pull theory of migration, Segmented Labor Market theory and Flexible Firms theory are used in this article to look

into how the Norwegian society, and the salmon aquaculture industry specifically, has created a niche of employment for migrant workers for positions Norwegians do not want, and how this is justified. The area of Migration theory is vast and encompasses a wide variety of angles, from internal, external, and displacement to name a few. For the purposes of this work, however, the focus is on push and pull factors of migration, whether it is from rural to urban or from Eastern Europe to rural Norway, with both factors having to operate in order for migration to occur [21,22]. The pull factors relate to the anticipated average higher returns and resources to gain, such as higher wages or improved living conditions, when moving from a rural to urban (or international), which can explain why individuals chooses to migrate in the first place. This has been shown when it comes to both economic and cultural capital, with migration enhancing the individuals' social mobility [9]. Social mobility enables opportunities of upward work mobility for the migrant as they are motivated to migrate for educational or job enhancement [23]. Push factors, however, are also of importance as migration is not always voluntary. These can include factors such as loss of job opportunities on one end to war and persecution at the other.

For the purposes of this study, pull factors are considered, and discussed within the framework of Segmented Labor Market Theory. This theory relates to migration and the *pull factors* of Norwegian employment and salaries coupled with push factors of unemployment in the home country (or with education and higher salaries in urban areas as pulls when facing low employment opportunities in the rural areas). It also divides the labor market, such as that of the salmon industry, into primary and secondary segments [24]. These are identified with the primary segment having higher salaries, opportunities for careers, benefits that are substantial as well as job security. In the secondary segment, the workers earn a lower salary have minimal benefits, often-unpleasant work environments with little room for upward mobility, low work security and high turnover. Additionally, the flow of workers between these two segments of the workplace is limited. The labor market segmentation is a historical process too where political-economic forces have played a vital part in dividing the labor market into submarkets with their own set of conditions and rules. This has happened through four segmentation processes: segmentation into primary and secondary markets, within the primary sector segmentation by race [25] and by gender [26–28]. Focusing on the segmentation into primary and secondary segments, we see that it is based on stability differences. While primary jobs are conditioned by, and develop stable working habits, secondary jobs do not require (and often discourages) stable working habits as wages are low, there is shorter tenure and few possibilities to develop and attain new roles on the job. It has been observed that minority workers, women and youth often fill these secondary jobs [26–28]. Historical analysis furthermore shows how employers consciously fostered segmentation to achieve a division of the labor force. This happened as a result of the homogenization and proletarianization of the work force, which threatened the capitalistic corporations and organizations that started to develop at the start of the twentieth century [27]. Some of the strategies to divide the work force and to hinder unionization included a new system of stratified jobs, especially in the steel manufacturing of the U.S [29]. This then created a hierarchy of jobs, which powered a segmented “internal labor market”, excluding workers who lacked the right qualifications.

It furthermore appears that employers frequently benefit from adopting flexible work practices and employment systems, in for instance adjusting the size of the workforce to fluctuations in demand by using workers who are not regular, full-time employees. Short-term temporary workers are viewed as “disposable” and can be recruited quickly and often cost less than regular, full-time

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