Development Versus Coastal Protection: The Gold Coast Case Study (Australia)

Développement touristique vs protection du littoral : le cas de Gold Coast (Australie)

Karine Dupre and Caryl Bosman

Introduction

1 In recent years the body of literature on the City of Gold Coast, Australia has grown substantially. This growth has been driven, primarily, by the city’s features and urban characteristics (Bosman et al., 2016, Hundloe et al., 2015; Burton, 2012; Longhurst, 1993), the impacts of its tourism activities (Scott et al., 2016; Dredge, 2011) and its governance structures (Dredge & Jamal, 2013; Burton, 2009). Besides, largely because of the city’s beach environment, a lot of literature has focused on coastal ecosystems and on the impact of human activity on both land and sea. Yet as a coastal city characterised by extensive residential canal estates (400 kilometers of canals, ten times more than in Venice), there is limited scholarship investigating local coastal management activities within the dominating and overarching context of tourism development. This paper goes some way to address this gap.

2 Although some attempts to a better coastal policy and management were tried here and there (e.g. the New South Wales State Coastal Protection Act 1979), coastal management in Australia has not been a priority for any government at any level: national/commonwealth, state/territory or local. As an island-country where 85% of the population lives within 50 km of the coast (ABS, 2015), one could easily expect that Australia would be at the forefront of coastal planning, management and protection. However, historically, the Australian Constitution decreed that the planning and
management of crown land was the responsibility of state and territory governments (Wescott, 2008). With no overriding jurisdiction covering the enforcement of planning law in coastal areas, many social, environmental and development conflicts arose. It was not until the late 1990s when some noticeable changes started to occur. For instance, in 1999, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act introduced an important change as it gave the Australian Government significant powers to influence coastal environmental policy and planning (George, 2009). Since then, coastal management in Australia has been undergoing a transformation that reflects broader governance shifts, as well as raising awareness about global issues such as climate change and pollution. Despite this shift in national government approach to coastal management, conflicts still regularly make the headlines regarding the management and development of coastal areas in Australia.

3 The notion of conflict has been well documented since Marx (1959) first wrote about it in 1844 (for example see Kriesberg, 1982; Austin et al., 2011). Clark (1995) explains the intensity of conflicts in coastal management since “its process operates at the interface between land and water, between private and public stakeholders, as well as between private (or quasi-private) property-based operations in shorelands and public (common) property-based activities in the tidelands and coastal waters”. Others emphasise that conflicts frequently emerge as a result of change, and as meanings, values and attachments to places alter (Mitchell, 2011). For instance, Dekker et al., (1992) recognise that conflict often arises due to the differing interests of the ‘new’, pro-development, growth-oriented players or stakeholders and the ‘old’ players or local communities who value the urban environment in its current and historic context, and who seek to preserve these characteristics.

4 As the landscapes of the City of Gold Coast have been subject to continual reinvention, change and transformation (Wise & Breen, 2004; Wise, 2006; Griffin, 2006), patterns of conflict, change and continual re-adjustment have become ingrained in the lived experience of the city and its development.

5 This article shows how the evolution and resolution of development conflicts on the city’s protected coastal strip (the Spit) are symptomatic of the evolution of place values and how, this informs a shift towards better coastal protection.

1. The Gold Coast: context and value of place

6 Like all cities in Australia, the City of Gold Coast was developed with the European colonisation of the country and the successive waves of migration. However, unlike other Australian cities, the City of Gold Coast emerged and grew as a tourist destination that reached a peak in the 1960s and continue to grow rapidly. Today the city welcomes more than 12 million visitors annually (ABS, 2015). The city is renowned for its natural environment, with 57 kilometres of coastal strip with pristine beaches and unique hinterland landscapes featuring several national parks. The City of Gold Coast is also dissected by numerous rivers and creeks that have largely been reconfigured and developed into prime real estate around artificial canals (Figure 1). Although there is only one marina owned by a yacht club (Southport Yacht Club), there are about twenty other privately owned marinas, slipways and boatyards within the jurisdiction of this unique city, which offers the proximity to two major airports, tourism attractions, theme parks and unique hinterland (Tenefrancia, 2016).
The Gold Coast coastline has, not surprisingly, been significantly impacted by the rapid urbanisation (Figure 2); specifically during the post-war period (the glorious Fifties), and continuing into the 1960s and again in the early 1990s. During this time, the Gold Coast transformed from small resort town to become an international tourist city (Dedekorkut-Howes & Bosman, 2015). This transformation, combined with an extraordinary increase in population (8,400 inhabitants in 1947; almost 70,000 in 1991 and over 555,000 in 2017, ABS, 2017) resulted in urban densification of the coastline, which became the hub for a range of services, tourist attractions and housing. There was little or no planning legislation in place to protect the coastline. Planning legislation in the City of Gold Coast has historically favoured development rather than environmental conservation and heritage preservation (Bosman et al., 2016). Besides, with a population that could also triple in size over the holiday season in selected precincts, the city has historically been challenged by finding a balance between financial interests, community cohesion, and identity. With the reputation of the city “as a symbol of excess, extravagance, tackiness, and placelessness” (Weaver and Lawton, 2004) along with the pro-development attitude of the state government and the abundance of entrepreneurial initiatives (Dedekorkut-Howes and Bosman, 2015), it raises many questions about city governance (Dredge and Bosman, 2011; Wise, 2006), and its planning strategies and instruments (Dredge and Jamal, 2013; Griffin, 2006). The image of the City of Gold Coast also poses questions regarding the value of place.
The process of constructing place meanings, values and attachments is the result of a multitude of influences and factors (Dovey, 1999; Creswell, 2004; Massey, 1994; Carter, Dyer and Sharma, 2007; Vanclay, Higgins and Blackshaw, 2008). Place meaning and values emerge out of everyday activities and are produced through and by global and societal influences. Place is also read and understood as a physical site in relation to both built and natural environments, as well as through written, verbal, visual and non-verbal media and marketing. Language, and in particular advertising, is a key constructor of place, especially with regard to tourist places. For tourist areas such as the City of Gold Coast, place is not simply a location — it is a culmination of social processes along with tourist perceptions, or an “intersection of various global flows, not just of money or capital, but of visitors” (Urry, 1995).

Donning the social constructionist goggles allows us to observe the built and natural landscape as a social-spatial framework within which people, from different cultural, social and economic groups, interact and create a shared sense of place (Greider and Garkovich, 1994; Mangun et al., 2009). The feeling of attachment that is produced from knowing a place comes from living that place. Lynda Schnelkoth and Robert Shibley (2000) suggest that “[p]lace making is the way all of us as human beings transform the places in which we find ourselves into places in which we live”. In doing this, however, different people, or different groups of people, often come to value places in different ways to one another (Cheng et al., 2003). Previous research has identified the importance of understanding the way in which people interact with the landscape and how they develop place-based values (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001; Cheng et al., 2003; Yung et al., 2003).

The failure, by planners and urban designers, to take into account local everyday meanings and values can result in the alienation of residential subjects “from each other and from their own place” (Cartier and Lew, 2005). The result is a ‘risky’ place that holds little meaning for local people and fails to capture and hold the interest of tourists. Essentially the place becomes vulnerable as local everyday activity nodes move elsewhere and tourists do not return. Gordon Holden (2011) writes:

“While having a strong ‘sense of place’ may be seen as a lower priority than safe drinking water or sewerage systems for the health of a city it is widely accepted that a holistic approach to city planning includes encouraging a recognisable ‘sense of place’. ‘Sense of place’ strengthening is key objective for contemporary planning strategies in Australia”.

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One challenge for planners is to find the balance between fostering new development for a rapidly growing population and preserving the heritage and character of the existing urban realm. For many coastal cities such as the City of Gold Coast, the challenge is compounded, as activities in the coastal zone (land and water) significantly contribute to creating a sense of place. Place values participate to city branding (“come to surf to Kirra”, “whale season!”, etc.). The coastline often becomes synonymous with the identity of the city and a key ingredient to its growth and prosperity, yet it is also a highly contentious place where numerous conflicts are rife.

What is now certain is that the constantly evolving urban landscape on the Gold Coast has come about through a pattern of conflict, change and adjustment to a new ‘norm’. This recurring cycle is initiated by the arrival of new players (stakeholders) into the development arena. New players invariably bring with them new ideas, concepts, beliefs and place values. Conflict then potentially occurs as a result of the difference in place values between the ‘new’ and ‘old’ players/community members. This pattern is immersed within the history of Southport as discussed below and the Gold Coast as a whole (see for example Whelan, 2006). The cycle can be broken up into five, often difficult to define, phases (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Cycle of conflict

The first major conflict in the now City of Gold Coast followed the arrival of European settlement in the region leading up to the mid-1820s. During this time the ‘old’ players were the Aboriginal groups in the area, collectively known as the Yugambeh people, whose place values revolved around the land being sacred, rather than a resource to be exploited. On the other hand, the ‘new’ players, the European settlers, saw the region as one of plentiful resources, and good farming potential. This resulted in the region’s most horrific and infamous development conflict, a conflict that was mirrored in nearly all regions across Australia throughout the 18th and 19th Centuries. Much of the literature on the history of Aboriginal-European conflict in Australia is written with a Euro-centric perspective (Anderson, 1983; Best, 1994). For example, Taylor (1967) assumes the conflict in South East Queensland arose from the Aborigines seeking to control European
resources, to “share in the superabundance of goods and stock that had suddenly descended upon them”. Best (1994) offers a somewhat less Euro-centric, perspective, stating “it could be argued that Aborigines were fighting to save their economic resources, that is, the water-holes, demanding that the land and the people be respected”. No matter which perspective is more accurate, the fact remains that this conflict of interests resulted in Aborigines dying in large numbers, some shot by Native Police, some poisoned by settlers (Moore, 1990). As with most serious development conflicts, this remains unresolved, although it has taken on a very different form, moving from physical altercations into the political realm. Best recognises that the Yugambeh people, the traditional owners of much of South East Queensland, “continue to fight a battle both social and environmental, to ensure that their cultural heritage is respected and not exploited” (Best, 1994).

One place that epitomises the challenges regarding development conflicts and place value in the City of Gold Coast is the Southport Spit. The Spit is located at the northern end of the city (see Figure 1), across the Broadwater from the early (1880s) settlement of Southport, and is the result of the reconfiguration of the sand dune at the mouth of the Nerang River in the late 1800s following a series of storms (see GCCM, 2006). It is today one of the last significant undeveloped public green spaces in the city. The Southport Spit is also an important place within the rapidly changing landscapes of the City of Gold Coast, since it is “land that constitutes the last genuine ocean-side parcel of undeveloped real estate on the Gold Coast” (Condon, 2006) and it has significant social and cultural meanings and attachments for many Gold Coast residents (see SOSA a; Condon, 2003; Lazarow and Tomlinson, 2009). Yet the Spit is also a well-known and targeted place of conflict with pro- and anti-development stakeholders vying for opposing outcomes for the place, and often running parallel debates to the national agenda. This is the focus of the next sections.

2. Local freewheel ride development and the national rise of environmental focus

Despite multiple community values attached to the Southport Spit, it has nonetheless been dogged with development proposals since the early 1960s. This is not surprising within the Australian national context as the federal government have historically left the responsibility of coastal zones to local government authorities to care for, manage and maintain. On the Southport Spit, one of the first to object to development on this prime beachfront dune was the local National Party Member of Parliament at the time, Doug Jennings. Jennings’s last fight to save the Spit was instigated in 1979 when the Queensland National/Liberal State Government, under the Premiership of Sir Jon Bjelke-Petersen (see Wear, 2002; Whitton, 1989), established the Gold Coast Waterways Authority to address tidal inundation and the impacts of storm surges in the Broadwater and the erosion of the Spit. As a result, by the 1980s the Broadwater and the Spit were ‘secured’ by the construction of groins, channel dredging and a sand bypass system. The Waterways Authority were frequently involved in controversy over commercial development rights on public land in the city (Condon, 2006). In one case a prominent Board member obtained 64 hectares on the western side of the Spit for tourism urbanisation (now the theme park Sea World). Other tourism related developments on the Spit were also approved during this time and were subsequently built, renovated and extended: an
exclusive shopping precinct, a commercial fishing wharf (now also accommodates super yacht berths), an exclusive resort complex and an international hotel and apartment complex (Figure 4). Other development proposals that did not get off the ground included an ‘amusement oasis’, a mini city comprising 8000 permanent residents and a golf course (Condon, 2006).

Figure 4. Picture and map of the Spit

Development controversy on the Spit ended temporality in 1992 when a newly elected Labor State Government disbanded the Waterways Authority. However it was not until 1997 that the Labor Government set up the Gold Coast Harbours Authority to take a more local approach to the management of the Broadwater and Spit environs. The 1998 Gold Coast Harbour Study Issues Paper was part of this endeavour to address local issues at the local scale and take into account local place values and interests. Clearly, it was also a reaction to the national government’s latest recommendations, specifically regarding the Resource Assessment Commission Coastal Zone Inquiry (1993) and the release of Australia’s Oceans Policy in 1998, which was recognised as a milestone in marine resource management worldwide. It reflected an optimistic period of policy development (Vince, 2008) that would culminate with the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act in 1999.

The Gold Coast City Council released the Gold Coast Harbour Study Issues Paper for public comment in 1998. The intent of this Paper was to produce an “integrated and coordinated land use and management plan for the Gold Coast ... Broadwater” (Whelan, 2006). The Issue Paper and public consultation associated with it was essentially about the making of places; viable places that were valued by ‘new’ and ‘old’ players alike. The outcome of the community consultation process however produced instead a “strong picture of people’s dissatisfactions” (Whelan, 2006). This was partly because, as Urry (1995) argues, planners, urban designers and developers (‘new’ players) often perceive place meaning in accordance with preconceived notions and predetermined outcomes. These notions and outcomes frequently privilege and inscribe ‘new’ ideas and concepts. Local place meanings and values (of ‘old’ players) are often subjugated and marginalised or erased.
One thing that did emerge from the 1998 Gold Coast Harbour Study was that the Gold Coast City Council agreed that no development (private or commercial) would occur on the remnant of public land at the northern end of the Southport Spit and that the open space character of the area would be retained and enhanced (Gold Coast City Council, 2003).

Notwithstanding, the Gold Coast City Council’s planning regulations, nor the lengths to which previous National Party Government officials had defended the Spit against development, nor the fact that the Government had specifically set up the Gold Coast Harbours Authority as a local approach to the management of the Broadwater and Spit environs, on 15 September 2005 the Queensland Labor Government announced its intention of developing an international cruise ship terminal and related services on this valued and valuable piece of public open space. In December 2005 the Queensland State Government created a Gold Coast Marine Development Project Board to act as the proponent for the Spit development. The Board was set up to advise the Premier and the Coordinator General to undertake tasks as required by the Government. In effect the State Government created its own proponent for the project, a proponent that was also to advise the Government. All decisions taken by the Government were to be, and in fact were, based upon the advice of the Board. To heighten this inbred decision making process, the State Government called for expressions of interest from developers at the same time as it commissioned an EIS for the site (Bligh, 2005). The supposition being that the advice from the Board would be in favour of development. In addition the Government sought direct control over the proposal, feasibility and development of the project. In order to bypass local Government planning restrictions (and we argue the views and input of local communities) the State sought absolute control over the planning and development processes by declaring the project a ‘Significant Development’. This declaration triggered State legislation that called for an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) which meant the Government had direct control over the way the EIS was developed, the criteria by which it was to be assessed and it enabled other legislation to be bypassed if necessary. Importantly, by declaring the project as a ‘Significant Development’ the local planning Authority, The Gold Coast City Council, and significantly local communities (‘old’ players), were positioned as observers with no authority to input into the project other than decreed and regulated by the State Government (‘new’ player). This situation also reflected the wider commonwealth disengagement from state planning concerns and the failure of all levels of government to implement policy (Vince, 2008; Wescott, 2002). This was despite the existing framework that was established under the “National Cooperative Approach to Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)” and the Australia’s Oceans Policy. One of the major contributing factors in this decision-making process was the lack of national approach (TFG, 2002): the Gold Coast Spit clearly demonstrated the conflict embedded in development in coastal zones and, the local-centered approach without the consideration of any wider context in term of coastal management. Yet, things were about to change.

3. Local resistance and the shift to local environmental awareness

To provide effective opposition to the state government and its plans for the Southport Spit a consortium of community groups joined to form the Save Our Spit Alliance (SOSA).
This energetic and dedicated group organised a number of rallies and delegations and petitions over the next two years (Figure 5) and maintained (and continue to maintain) an evocative and resourceful web site. By July 2006 (just ten months into the feasibility studies) the SOSA had collected over 20,000 signatures as part of their petition to the state government to stop development on the Spit (SOSA d).

Figure 5. Rally organised by SOSA

Credits: Bosman C.

The SOSA’s objections to the state government’s development proposal were founded on five key points. These were (SOSA, b):

1. The economic benefits to the community, the City and the state were marginal because SOSA research indicated that cruise liner passengers spent more money on board than they did on shore.

2. The loss of public open space in the face of rapid population and urban growth. This was given support from Methven Sparkes, President of the Nerang Community Association, who said (SOSA b) “On any weekend the Spit is filled with thousands of picnickers, walkers, runners, cyclists, divers and snorkelers, fishers, surfers, dog walkers, and exercise enthusiasts, all of whom value the opportunity to access such a beautiful area so close to the CBD.”

3. Safety issues relating to the use of seaway.

4. The negative impact the development would have on existing tourism operators on the Spit, namely the dive industry, surfing industry, fishing industry, charter boats and kayaking.

5. Environmental impacts, including dredging, erosion, flooding and air and water pollutants from the cruise liners.

The SOSA mounted their campaign based upon these five factors. A few months after a well-attended and enthusiastic protest, and in response to a continued barrage of criticism about the development proposal (see SOSA, a), the then Deputy Premier, Anna Bligh, herself a Gold Coaster by childhood experiences, summed up the situation. She
said: “it would be great if [the Spit] was less environmentally sensitive, if people had less emotional attachment to it – that would make it a lot easier.” (Courier Mail, 2006). We suggest that in this statement the Deputy Premier was casting local place attachment as an obstacle in the development process. The government perceived the Spit to be, and valued the site as, a space of economic opportunity. A member of Parliament at the time in support of the government’s Spit development proposal argued that “The Beattie Government has a duty to provide, amongst other things, economic stability and employment opportunities for the people of this State ...” (Smith, 2006).

Nevertheless, on Friday 03 August 2007 (just over two years from the first public announcement) the Premier Peter Beattie proclaimed that the Cruise Ship Terminal on the Spit would not proceed. The Premier did not directly acknowledge that this decision reflected the views of over 22,000 local residents (SOSA, d). Instead the augment put forward by the government was that the decision not to proceed was based on the cost to taxpayers; an economic, rationale not an environmental, nor a cultural, and certainly not a social or community rationale. It is important to note however, that the decision by the government not to proceed was taken at the height of a state government election campaign. At the time a Gold Coast channel nine TV news program (SOSA, c) conducted a poll with the question: ‘Will the Beattie Government lose your vote over its push for a cruise ship terminal at The Spit?’ and the published result showed that 86.4 percent of respondents said YES...

In order to determine what place values, meanings and attachments users of the Spit held, we carried out 88 intercept surveys on the Spit between February and September 2007. The surveys were done at various times of the day and on different days of the week throughout the survey period. While we acknowledge that survey data is problematic (Hay, 2000; Law, 2006) nonetheless the data collected offers some important insights into the meanings and value the Spit had for many local users. The majority of survey respondents were employed (non-professional) Australian males aged between 25-54, which corresponds with the major activities of surfing and diving. An analysis of the survey data indicated that 73 percent of the respondents had been visiting the Spit for three or more years, with 28 percent of respondents visiting the Spit for over 16 years. Not surprisingly most respondents indicated that they spent over three hours at the Spit at any one time. This corresponds to the activities of surfing, diving, fishing and dog walking; the four primary everyday activities that take place on the Spit. It is important to note that the Spit is one of three (and it is the primary) off-leash dog exercise beach. Given the population figures of the City and the number of dog owners, these beaches are highly valued by the users thereof. Importantly, the survey data indicated that the Spit environs were perceived as a ‘safe’ and valuable community asset. Memories and frequency of visits contributed to the high value attributed to these two indicators.

It is of interest to note that 50 percent of users surveyed were not aware of the development proposals for the Spit and only 15 percent were or had been involved in community action against the proposed development that threatened the Spit environs. This suggests that the people who signed and attended the Save Our Spit rally were not necessarily the ones who visited the Spit on an everyday, regular basis. Those that did use the Spit regularly, as the surveys testify, perhaps took the Spit for granted or felt disempowered. One thing that did emerge from the data was that all respondents who indicated that they were unaware of the development proposals also indicated that they were against development on the Spit, but not necessarily opposed to the upgrade of
facilities. Indirectly, taxpayers (who were also petition signers) changed the course of history, place-making and tourism futures on the Gold Coast. Interestingly, the Gold Coast circumstances also paralleled the emergence of an environmental prerogative in the interpretation and implementation of the Commonwealth Oceans Policy (Vince, 2008). This trajectory did not, at the time, succeed in obtaining jurisdictional powers that would require State/Commonwealth cooperation in resolving complex, place-based conflicts. It did however mark a change in decision-making processes, as did the (temporary) securing of the Spit as a free, undeveloped; public open space.

4. And life goes on...

The Southport Spit continues to ride a wave of development abuse. On the 11 February 2010 the local Federal Member of Parliament send out an email survey asking his constituents if they wanted “a cruise ship terminal on the Spit, the Broadwater or neither?” This email followed in the footsteps of a previous announcement by the state government, in mid-2008, of their (renewed) intention of developing a cruise ship terminal in the vicinity of the Southport Spit. In addition, other smaller private and commercial development proposals continue to be lodged for this section of prime public undeveloped, somewhat raw, open space. The most significant of these was yet another cruise ship terminal proposal in mid-2012; this time emanating from the City of Gold Coast Council Mayor, Tom Tate (Figure 6). Mayor Tate, backed by the newly elected Newman Liberal National Party State Government put out a call for expressions of interest to develop a range of tourist infrastructure including a casino, hotels and cruise ship terminal on the Spit (See SOSA, a).

In an effort to save the Spit from major development a second rally took place in November 2012 and studies indicated that the Spit environs have been “identified as a key environmental asset worth more than $611 million for the city” (Weston 2013). By June 2013 the development project was in doubt, primarily on account of fiscal arrangements. Yet by early 2014, the Newman State Government nominated the ASF China Consortium developer to build a cruise ship terminal in the vicinity of the Spit. Despite the fact that the project was eventually abandoned one year later at the favor of the new state election, ASF is still in the starting blocks to deliver mostly a casino under the official form of an integrated resort development. The most recent intent (December 2016), as part of the integrated resort development proposal (with the support of the state government) is for the development of five high-rise towers on the Spit. This type of development and land use contravenes the newly legislated Gold Coast planning instrument, The City Plan (2015), which prohibits residential land use and has a building high restriction of three floors. These restrictions were put in place to ensure the existing character and amenity of the Spit, as a place communities valued, was preserved and maintained. For seven decades now, local communities have fought to keep The Spit for low rise, low impact, marine based and tourist activities. They have rallied, formed community groups, undertaken voluntary tree planting and encouraged councils and governments to see the place as the Gold Coast’s Central Park. The conflict between new and old values, interests and land uses of the different players in this game have not abated, nor is resolution any closer.
Figure 6. Artistic impression of the Cruise Ship Terminal

The ‘old’ players in this development conflict include those that value the Spit for its historic/existing/inherent/familiar characteristics and qualities: desirable, usable, accessible, equitable, free, public open space. These ‘old’ players include local communities and local organisations (SOSA and GECKO). The current ‘new’ players on the block are the City’s Mayor, Tom Tate at the local government level with the support of the state government, and the international ASF China Consortium as the developer. These ‘new’ players, not surprisingly, reinforce the cycle of development conflict on the Gold Coast. The intent of the ‘new’ players is to disrupt the existing ‘norms’ as understood by the ‘old’ players. This ‘norm’ has been established over time and is embedded in the value of, and the attachment people have to, the place. The tensions and differences between the two groups of players seem irreconcilable (see table 1).

Table 1. Tensions and differences in the cycle of conflict on the Southport Spit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old players</th>
<th>New players</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preserve existing land</td>
<td>Land is more valuable if developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect current place values</td>
<td>Produce for new place values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land is more valuable as existing</td>
<td>Economic value of the land a priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment is at risk if developed</td>
<td>Environment is a minor concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local economy would suffer</td>
<td>Local economy would thrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs would be lost (diving, etc.)</td>
<td>More jobs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

The big question remains: will the proposed casino and/or towers go ahead? Even if it is not successful this time around, the Spit is an asset of significance value (however that is measured) and as such it is unlikely to be ignored by the development industry on the Gold Coast. New players and new ideas are likely to result in proposals for the development of the Spit environs time and time again in the future. And if the Spit is developed will this be just another link in a long chain of development conflict cycles, none ever completely resolved? Will we, one day, develop place-attachment for a cruise ship terminal or casino on the Spit? Will this be the new norm, accepted and valued by local communities, the ‘old’ players?

The battle between ‘old’ and ‘new’ players and their place-making practices is ongoing. This does not mean that one is more important, nor necessarily excludes, nor has to be dominant over the other. Since the 1950s the histories of the City of Gold Coast have shown little responsibility for the past and scant obligation to future generations. As such the production, sale and consumption of goods and services providing pleasure has become so deftly woven into the economic landscape of the City that it is not easy to isolate them in policy or practice. This condition has raised concerns and excited resistance around “democratic participation in the local politics of place, contestations over ecological space, and decisions about land use” (Stratford 2009), concerns that are central to the Southport Spit. In the case of the Southport Spit local place-making practices and local communities succeeded in achieving (for now) a local outcome, valued and upheld by many local people.

If we analyze the history of the development of the Spit in relation to the conflicts cycle mentioned in the introduction, it appears that this site remains a major object of desire for any new players on the Gold Coast. The old players continue to advocate for more transparent governance and to protect the quality of life that has become intrinsic to a valued, renowned and iconic Gold Coast lifestyle (Bosman, 2016) and identity (Potts et al, 2013). This lifestyle and identity have been produced from and are synonymous with place features and characteristics of the Spit: undeveloped, ‘natural’ beachside, free open and accessible public space. To this end, it is interesting to note the emergence of arguments in the spit conflict, which are now giving more weight to coastal conservation which only tentatively existed ten years ago. Although one could argue that these circumstances might reflect as well the maturity of the national Australian Oceans Policy and a good diffusion among the public (hence increased awareness), Vince et al., (2015) have demonstrated that the policy did not lived up its promise as the major instrument driving oceans management in Australia, and that sector based management remains the main modus operandi. At last, the cycle of conflicts seems, currently, to have stalled with the repetitive impetus of new players (develop the Spit!), opposed by the steady resistance of the old players (save our Spit!). This holding pattern is perhaps the new norms. In part, by recognizing the importance of the coastline and its natural features, the debate has shifted slightly from a focus on economic to one that acknowledges some
of the critical environmental issues related to coastal development and the local, national and global importance of coastal conservation.

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**ABSTRACTS**

The Gold Coast in Australia is one of these coastal places, which developed through taking advantage of its environmental assets, such as direct access to the sea, a white sandy shoreline, an extensive and naturally protected broadwater and several large accessible rivers. While many other coastal cities relied on port facilities to develop commercial and naval activities, the City of Gold Coast emerged and grew as a tourism destination. Largely because of this phenomenon, the pattern of settlement and subsequent development of the city differs from most traditional Australian settlement and development patterns. Today, the Gold Coast is one of the most famous tourist cities in Australia and it accommodates more than ten million visitors annually. In the wider Australian context, 85% of the population lives within 50 km of the beach, evidencing popular lifestyle cultural preferences of many Australians. Given this preoccupation with the coast, one may expect that Australia would be at the forefront of coastal tourism developments and coastal protection. There is, however, no overriding jurisdiction covering planning law enforcement in maritime areas and, this situation has led to many social and environmental conflicts. The City of Gold Coast is a case in point and no more so than currently (2017) with proposals to build a cruise terminal or/and a casino, and high rise residential towers on its protected coastal strip (the Spit).

This paper demonstrates how the evolution and resolution of development conflicts on the Spit (Gold Coast) are symptomatic of the evolution of place values and the national coastal management and how, this informs a shift towards coastal protection.

La ville côtière de Gold Coast, en Australie, s’est développée grâce à un environnement naturel exceptionnel, qui comprend un accès direct à la mer, un littoral de sable blanc, une large baie naturellement protégée et plusieurs rivières. Si la plupart des autres villes du littoral australien se sont appuyées sur leur port pour développer leurs activités commerciales et navales, la ville de Gold Coast est, depuis ses débuts, une ville touristique. De ce fait, son mode et ses formes de
développement se différencient de ceux que l’on rencontre traditionnellement dans les autres villes. Aujourd’hui la ville de Gold Coast est l’une des principales destinations touristiques australiennes et accueille plus de dix millions de visiteurs par an.
En Australie, 85% de la population habite dans un rayon de 50km de la plage, avec les préférences de style de vie qui y sont associées. Vu cette attraction pour le littoral, on pourrait présumer que l’Australie soit à l’avant-garde des développements touristiques et de la protection de son littoral. Cependant, du point de vue national, comme, historiquement, il n’y a eu qu’une faible juridiction concernant l’aménagement et la protection des zones maritimes et du littoral, de nombreux conflits sociaux et environnementaux ont vu le jour. La ville de Gold Coast concentre malheureusement nombre de ces conflits ; le dernier en date concernant le projet de construction d’un terminal de bateaux de croisière et/ou d’un casino avec quelques tours résidentielles sur une langue de terre protégée (le Spit).
L’objectif de cet article est de montrer comment l’évolution et la résolution des conflits sur le Spit de Gold Coast, tous liés à des projets de développements touristiques, reflètent non seulement l’évolution de la valeur d’un lieu et l’approche nationale du développement du littoral, mais aussi le changement vers une meilleure protection du littoral.

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Mots-clés: développement touristique du littoral, conflit, valeur du lieu, Gold Coast
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AUTHORS

KARINE DUPRE
Griffith University, Associate Professor, k.dupre@griffith.edu.au

CARYL BOSMAN
Griffith University, Associate Professor, c.bosman@griffith.edu.au