

The Value of Place

Development conflicts on the Southport Spit, Gold Coast

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Development conflicts can emerge as a result of different meanings, values and attachments to places. This paper will review the on-going (2005–2013) development conflict on the Southport Spit, one of the last significant undeveloped public green spaces on the Gold Coast. Our aim is to examine how competing place values have been constructed over time, between pro-development State and Local Governments at one level and local residents/users at the local scale. Proponents for development often see opportunities to create new spaces and associated economic development opportunities while locals may have personal, historical and emotional attachments to place. An important contributing factor to the development conflict on the Southport Spit is derived from the evolution of historically significant local leisure and recreation spaces, to spaces that focus (sometimes exclusively) on the production and consumption of tourism experiences and services. In this instance the displacement of local communities and the marginalisation of local interests has meant community values of place are placed at risk. In this paper we adopt a social constructionist view of the landscape to examine how different place values and meanings have been and continue to be generated and embodied in the Southport Spit conflict. In doing so we seek to better understand how place values and meanings are generated, interpreted, voiced, empowered and/or marginalised in development discourses.

Introduction

The landscapes of the Gold Coast City have been subject to continual reinvention, change and transformation (Wise & Breen 2004; Wise 2006; Griffin 2006). Patricia Wise (2006 pp177) writes: “The City of the Gold Coast is largely a product of the second half of the twentieth century, continually remaking itself physically, and refusing to settle as an idea.” Histories of the Gold Coast City suggest it is a hyper neoliberal touristed city characterised by rapidly changing spatial, social, economic and environmental landscapes. Urban growth on the Gold Coast has developed rapidly, largely in response to economic agendas. Because of the rapid growth and neoliberal agendas that have dominated the cities development, the city is often seen “as a symbol of excess, extravagance, tackiness, and placelessness” (Weaver and Lawton 2004 pp286); a city without a ‘real/meaningful’ history or heritage (Griffin 2006).

Development conflicts frequently emerge as a result of change, and as meanings, values and attachments to places alter. This paper will review the on-going (2005–2013) development conflict on the Southport Spit. The Spit (see image 1) is a permanent landform that separates the Southport Broadwater and the Pacific Ocean and it is one of the last significant undeveloped public green spaces (see image 2) on Queensland’s Gold Coast. The past nine years have seen on-going conflicts surrounding a proposal to develop this piece of public land into a private cruise ship terminal and tourist facilities. The idea, initially proposed in 2005 by the State Beattie Labor Government, was strongly opposed by many in surrounding local communities. The proposed development of the Southport Spit instigated a phase in a long chain of development conflicts that have come to characterise the relationship between large scale, government led development projects and community concerns about significant public open space on the Gold Coast. It is the natural environment, more so than the built landscape, that establishes the Gold Coast’s essential value as a place or *Genius Loci* (Norberg-Schulz, 1979; Griffin 2002).

Our aim is to examine how competing place values have been constructed over time, between pro-development State and Local Governments at one level and local residents/users at the local scale. Proponents for development often see opportunities to create new spaces and associated economic development opportunities while locals may have personal, historical and emotional attachments to place. An important contributing factor to the development conflict on the Southport Spit is derived from the evolution of historically significant local leisure and recreation spaces, to spaces that focus (sometimes exclusively) on the production and consumption of tourism experiences and services. In this instance the displacement of local communities and the marginalisation of local interests has meant community values of place are placed at risk. We begin our story with a brief discussion on some of the literature on place value and the role of planners. We then discuss the history of development conflict on the Gold Coast generally and on the Southport Spit more specifically. We adopt a social constructionist view of the landscape to examine how different place values and meanings have been and continue to be generated and embodied in the Southport Spit conflict. In doing so we seek to better understand how place values and meanings are generated, interpreted, voiced, empowered and/or marginalised in development discourses.



Image 1: Aerial photo of the Southport Spit looking north. Sea World is to the bottom left. The Pacific Ocean is to the right and the Nerang River/Southport Broadwater is to the left of the Spit. Source: Image courtesy of Dianne Dredge, 2008.



Image 2: Images depicting the quality of green and open space on the Southport Spit. Apart from (privately owned) tourism development on the southern part of the Southport Spit, the northern end consists of revegetated dunes and public open green spaces. Source: Images courtesy of the authors, 2013.

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 touristed places. For touristed areas such as the Gold

Coast City, 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 pp435).

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 Schneekloth and Robert Shibley (2000 pp1) 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 pp183). 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.

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. Dekker et al. (1992) recognise that conflict often arises due to the differing interests of the ‘new’, pro-development, growth-oriented players and the ‘old’ players who value the urban environment in its current and historic context, and who seek to preserve these characteristics. Planners often, unwittingly and unconsciously, play the role of mediators in this conflict, striving to realise the interests of the various groups, ‘new’ and ‘old’. The challenge many planners face is to go beyond the role of the mediator, and ensure that the balance of power between different players does not sway decision makers. We argue that it is imperative to acknowledge the interests and place values of all stakeholders in decisions to develop significant public green spaces like the Southport Spit.

A story of development conflict

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 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 1).

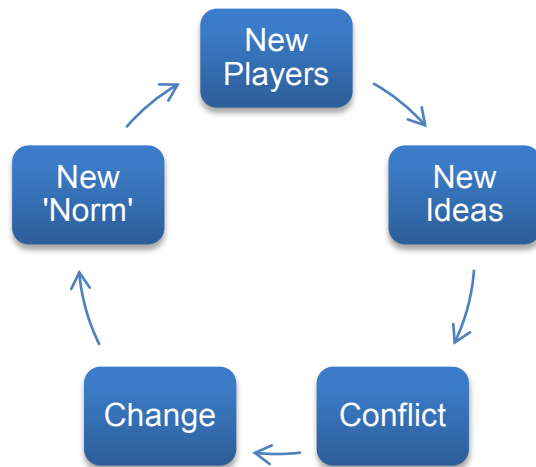


Figure 1: Cycle of conflict that frames a pattern of development and rapid urban growth on the Gold Coast.

A number of significant conflict cycles are evident in the history of Southport, and the wider area of the Gold Coast. The first of which was the conflict that 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” (pp135). 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” (Best 1994 pp87). 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 for both social and environmental, to ensure that their cultural heritage is respected and not exploited” (Best 1994 pp87).

Throughout the late-1940s, 1950s, and 1960s the Gold Coast underwent many significant changes as the region experienced significant post-war population growth. The rapid growth, in Southport specifically (from 8,400 in 1947 to 15,208 in 1964, then 19,579 in 1968), can be attributed to two key things: the growing affordability and ownership of cars and the ‘catch up’ period that followed World War II (Gold Coast City Council 2010). The rapid population growth and the increased

ownership of cars resulted in urban sprawl and the conversion of farmland to housing subdivisions. This resulted in conflicts between farmers, existing landowners and the pro-development government of the time (See Kijas 2008, Wear 2002, Burchill 2005). Between 1961-1991 the largest sector of the population growth pie were between 15-44 years of age with the majority of residents born in Australia. This growth was fed by and fuelled processes of change which were instrumental in making the city we see today. The most recent Australian census data (2011) suggests that the Gold Coast population count in 2011 was 494,496 (GCCC Community Profile). The Gold Coast City Council indicates that the population will increase to 683,568 by 2021 (GCCC Fact Sheet). It is estimated that one third of the Gold Coast population is currently (2013) over 55 and that the over 55 cohort will increase by 68% by 2021. This means many Gold Coast residential areas will have more than double the current number of residents within this cohort. The aging of the population coupled with the predicted growth rates suggest strong real estate markets. Together these factors highlight the urgent need for understanding the social, environmental and economic landscapes on the Gold Coast and in particular the histories informing these landscapes. The cycle of conflict is potentially refuelled as the population profile grows and changes.

Southport Spit Conflict

In the late 1800s the sand dune at the mouth of the Nerang River in Southport was reconfigured by a series of storms and the Southport Spit was formed (see GCCM 2006). The Spit is at the northern end of the Gold Coast City, across the Broadwater from the early (1880s) settlement of Southport. Southport began its life as a holiday destination for well-to-do inland residents. By 1918 the population of the town had grown significantly and the State Government declared the area a municipality. The Southport Spit is an important place within the rapidly changing landscapes of the Gold Coast City. 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).

Between February and September 2007 we carried out 88 intercept surveys on the Spit to determine what place values, meanings and attachments users of the Spit held. The surveys were done at various times of the day and on different days of the week through out 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 has for many local users (people who live, work and recreate in the local vicinity). The majority of survey respondents were employed (non professional) Australian males aged between 25-54, which corresponds with the major activities associated with the Spit: surfing and diving. An analysis of the survey data (using SPSS) 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. The major activities respondents engaged with were 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.

Despite the community values attached to the Southport Spit, it has nonetheless been dogged with development proposals since the early 1960s. 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 (the son of Sir Albert Jennings who was the founder of the national housing construction corporation, A. V. 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 on the Gold Coast (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. 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).

Development controversy on the Spit ended temporally 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.

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 Councils 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 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).

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 Co-ordinator General and 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 advise 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 advise 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.

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 2 years and maintained (and continue to maintain) an evocative and resourceful web site. By July 2006 (just 10 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).

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 the 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 (Courier Mail 2006): “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.” 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).

Notwithstanding, 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 argument put forward by the Government was that the decision not to proceed was based on the cost to tax payers; 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 it's push for a cruise ship terminal at The Spit?’ (emphasis in the original) and the published result showed that 86.4 percent of respondents said YES.

It of interest to note that 50 percent of users surveyed in our intercept surveys 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 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, tax payers (who were also petition signers) changed the course of history, placemaking and tourism futures on the Gold Coast.

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 Gold Coast City Council Mayor Tom Tate. 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). By June 2013 the development project was in doubt, primarily on account of fiscal arrangements. In an effort to save the spit from major development a second rally took place in November 2012 and recent studies indicate that the Spit environs have been “identified as a key environmental asset worth more than \$611 million for the city” (Weston 2013). At the time of writing (October 2013) the Deputy Premier Jeff Seeney announced that the Newman State Government would nominate a developer to build a marine in the vicinity of the Spit. Dr Steve Gratton (Gold Coast Sun 2013) is report as saying “The Broadwater Marine Project has always been a speculative real estate opportunity at the Spit... .”

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 recently elected Mayor Tate at the local government level and the Newman government at the state level. The election of these ‘new’ players, not surprisingly, reinforces 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 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.

Old players	New players
Preserve existing land	Land is more valuable if developed
Respect current place values	Produce for new place values
Land is more valuable as existing	Economic value of the land a priority
Environment is at risk if developed	Environment is a minor concern
Local economy would suffer	Local economy would thrive
Jobs would be lost (diving, etc.)	More jobs
Priorities: environment, society	Priorities: economy, society

The big question remains: will the proposed cruise ship terminal go ahead? Even if it is not successful this time around, an asset of such proportions 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, value a cruise ship terminal; will this be the new norm?

The battle between ‘old’ and ‘new’ players and their placemaking 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 Gold Coast City 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 placemaking practices and local communities succeeded in achieving (for now) a local outcome, valued and upheld by many local people.

Conclusion

In this paper we have examined how competing place values have been constructed between pro-development State and Local Governments at one level and local residents/users at the local scale. Proponents for development often see opportunities to create new spaces and associated economic development opportunities while many locals have personal, historical and emotional attachments to place. An important contributing factor to the development conflict on the Southport Spit is derived from the evolution of historically significant local leisure and recreation spaces, to spaces that focus on the production and consumption of tourism experiences and services. In this instance the displacement of local communities and the marginalisation of local interests has meant community values of place are placed at risk. We examined the Southport Spit development conflict to better understand how place values and meanings are generated, interpreted, voiced, empowered and/or marginalised in development discourses.

The significance of this paper has been to demonstrate the importance of forging a more engaged and critical planning process that reaches across communities of interest, in mediating placemaking processes and practices in tourist cities like the Gold Coast. Discourses on placemaking involve decisions about what communities value. This requires a structured and rigorous approach to learning, understanding and managing the tensions and differences that may exist between players. That is, any attempt to reconcile competing claims on place involve an understanding of the social processes and practices that contribute to place values, meanings and attachments. In the case of the Southport Spit, the Queensland State Government and the Mayor exacerbated development conflict by ignoring existing norms with regard to social meanings and local attachments to place. This was despite a long history of development debate around the site. The Government’s dismissive attitude towards local place values and attachments suggests that the cycle of conflict will continue until such time as local place values are meaningfully incorporated into planning and development discourses.

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