

The Role of Cultural Context in the Development of Low-Capital Ocean Leisure Activities

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Abstract The ocean beaches of the United States are an economically important resource. As American culture has become increasingly more preoccupied with leisure activities, however, traditional commercial interests along the beach have been replaced by expressive activities. In terms of the number of participants, the vast majority of beach users have performed their leisure activities without the benefit of sophisticated equipment or infrastructure, and without high-capital expenditure; that is, they have been engaged in low-capital beach uses. With particular reference to these low-capital beach uses, this paper examines the role of culture in determining leisure beach activities using the example of the differential development of marine recreational fishing and surfing on the East and West Coasts of the United States. Based on participant observation, legal histories, and popular and academic literature one location on each coast was chosen, and the

development of these two leisure activities compared and contrasted. Variations and changes in cultural contexts at the local and national levels were found to be important factors in explaining the observed differential development of these activities in the two locations.

Introduction

The beaches of the United States are economically important. At first this importance stemmed from their use in commerce such as commercial fishing and the loading and unloading of cargo. As American culture became more leisure-oriented, traditional commercial interests along the beach began increasingly to be displaced by expressive activities such as recreational fishing, boating, swimming, and their supporting industries (Johnson and Metzger, 1983).¹ The nature of this leisure development along the coast has been influenced by cultural and environmental factors. Such phenomena as multiple-use conflict, beach access, and the allocation of resources are affected by local attitudes, beliefs, values, and perceptions—key components of culture.

The vast majority of beach users perform their leisure activities without the benefit of sophisticated equipment, infrastructure, or high-capital expenditure. With particular reference to these low-capital endeavors, this paper examines the role of culture in determining leisure beach uses through a comparative examination of the development of marine recreational fishing and surfing in two communities, one on the East Coast and one on the West Coast of the United States. These two low-capital leisure activities help illustrate how the development of beach-use patterns are significantly influenced by American culture and its regional variants.

The data and information for this paper came from several sources. The authors have participated in roles as surfers, fishermen, researchers, and resource managers on both the West and East Coasts of the United States, and have drawn much of the material from their combined experiences. In addition, we interviewed members of the subject groups in the public and private sectors in both study locations. Finally, the authors sur-

veyed the popular and academic literature on surfing, fishing, and coastal and ocean policy including 20 years' worth of surfing and fishing magazines and other material. The two geographic locations were chosen because of the range of variation in cultural context which they displayed across a comparative base of beach environments and ocean leisure patterns.

The Role of Capital Intensity and Cultural Context in Ocean Leisure Activity

The basic assumption which underlies our analysis is that low-capital leisure uses are different in kind from high-capital leisure uses. They are different in the kind of leisure service they provide, in the categories of users they tend to serve, in the role they play in multiple use conflicts, and in their place in the economic and political arena.

Our operating definition of "low-capital" is a use which, for a single usage, requires less than \$1,000 in permanent equipment or requires a single-use fee of less than \$10. This eliminates from the "low-capital" category any use dependent upon a boat, structure, or extensive experience-enhancing/producing or protective equipment. It allows for the inclusion of surfboards, certain small sail- or motorcraft such as windsurfers, normal beach-use paraphernalia, most fishing gear, and most normal day or overnight use fees.²

We define the "cultural context" of beach use as that set of shared beliefs and attitudes among a given group of people which affect their use of, or behavior toward the use of, the beach in a particular location. For our purposes here, we will deal with two such groups of people: the residents and beach users of Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, and Newport Beach, California. It is our contention that cultural variables such as community attitudes—as expressed in planning and zoning or beach-use regulations—must be viewed in juxtaposition to the beliefs and attitudes of the actual beach users themselves to effectively analyze the patterns of beach use which we observe on our coast. This definition of cultural context includes three components: (1) formal laws and institutions, which are themselves formal manifestations of

cultural principles (Nader, 1965); (2) the behaviors through which laws and regulations are applied in individual cases—that is, the difference between the normative legal statement and the actual behavioral result; and (3) the more general set of beliefs and preferences of those in coastal communities that may not be reflected in formal legal or institutional frameworks.

In the pages which follow, we explore the extent to which cultural perceptions and values are shared among beach users and those who are involved with beach use—including those who make public policy at various levels concerning beach use—and the implications of different distributions of such beliefs and values.

Surfing and Fishing as Competitive Beach Uses

There are several characteristics of surfing and fishing as beach activities which are central to our analysis here.

First and foremost, surfing is the only beach activity which quite literally cannot be performed somewhere else. To surf, one requires a physical phenomenon unique to oceans and other certain large bodies of water—waves. All other beach activities—swimming, tanning, vending, boating, picnicking, nature study, and of course recreational fishing—can be performed either at other bodies of water or at more generalized locations.³

A second characteristic which distinguishes surfing from recreational fishing is that surfing is often among the lower social-status beach uses (see Smith, 1978). There are four major reasons for this.

The first is that surfers are often young, non-fully employed, individualistic persons whose behavior is not always within the confines of accepted local norms. Behaviors such as changing clothes on the beach, illegal parking, or gathering scrap wood for beach fires while winter surfing may not yield a position high on the local social ladder.

Second, surfers do not spend much money. A new surfboard can cost from \$100 to \$400, but most surfers do not make such major purchases often. They do not often use hotel facilities, but rather transit from remote locations to surf or sleep in vans or

cars or camp out. They do not often patronize sit-down restaurants or other more lucrative tourist attractions. Recreational fishermen, on the other hand, tend to patronize such establishments more often.

Third, because surfing is an individual sport and one which requires considerable physical conditioning and coordination in addition to thorough familiarity with ocean conditions, it is a rather exclusive beach use limited mostly to younger individuals. Recreational fishing is commonly participated in by people of all ages.

Fourth, because of the unique requirements of surfing (i.e., waves) it is difficult for individuals who have entered the sport in their younger years to remain in the sport after the point in their lives when they acquire responsibilities and obligations such as full-time jobs and families, and the community status attendant on such roles. Such situations may require that they move to a location away from the ocean, or can no longer get to the ocean at preferred, or even acceptable, surfing times. Fishing, as we have pointed out, can be done in a relatively wider range of times and locations.

What makes surfing and marine recreational fishing interesting examples of competitive beach uses is their technological requirements, geographically specific orientation, and relationship to fixed man-made structures along the beach. Surfboards represent an ever present danger to body surfers and surf bathers in the same locale. Loose boards and uncontrolled "kick-outs" (a means of leaving the wave) present physical dangers to others competing for the same wave or beach space resources. Surfing is most often limited by natural and man-made features to certain "surf spots." Piers, jetties, and groins, because they often result in the buildup of sandbars which, in turn, cause wave formations, create particularly optimal conditions for such "surf spots." The obvious implications of this are that users of fixed structures, in particular pier fishermen, and surfers will potentially be in conflict.

In addition to water-based factors contributing to competition, and possibly conflict, there are land-based considerations. Every potential user of the beach either lives locally (within walking

distance), uses mass transit of some type, or drives an automobile. For those who drive, parking and other aspects of beach access become primary considerations. Competition in this particular case is between every potential user of the beach, including local residents. This is not to mention other land-based resources that must be competed for, such as the beach itself, boardwalks, and walls along the beach. Competition in this arena is common to both surfing and fishing, but the differential involvement of those who practice each of these activities in the economic and political spheres results in clear preferences on the part of many policy-makers with respect to beach use.

Surfing in the United States

Surfing is one of the oldest forms of leisure-related beach use. Practiced by the pre-contact peoples of Oceania, in particular Hawaiians, this activity was open to people of all classes (Finney, 1959).

Shortly after the turn of the century, surfing diffused to the mainland United States. It became of particular interest in California because of the long stretches of usable beach, abundance of good waves, temperate weather, and culture—a predisposition on the part of local populations toward beach use. In 1928 the first Pacific Coast Surfing Championships were held at Newport Beach, California and a crowd of 10,000 watched from the beach and cliffs above (Lueras, 1984). By the late 1930s, surfing as well as surf-bathing and recreational fishing were becoming commonplace on California beaches. Such beach activities were encouraged by the commuter railroad lines of the day, such as the Long Beach Line which ran from Los Angeles south to Newport Beach (Johnson and Metzger, 1983).

The limited number of casual surfers and sportsmen (a category in which most early surfers were placed) of the 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s gave way to distinct surfing subcultures in the late 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s. In the 1960s, in particular, the predominantly Southern California phenomenon—surfing subculture—spread quickly to other parts of the United States and elsewhere in the form of surf movies, surf styles (e.g., clothing, cars, surf

language, surf music, and a variety of other material and symbolic forms (Lueras, 1984)). The geographical extensiveness of this diffusion was evident not only on both the East and West Coasts of the United States, but in Europe, South and Central America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa (Young, 1983).

The early members of this emerging subculture gained a reputation as hedonists. They were often stereotypically characterized as individualistic, antisocial, nonconformist, "drug crazed," or vandalistic. They were also perceived as having irregular work habits that led to irresponsibility and the lack of any worthwhile contributions to the larger society. Early analysts of post World War II popular culture such as Tom Wolfe reinforced this image in the following passage from *The Pump House Gang*, one of his early and most famous works: "I met a group of surfers, the Pump House Gang. They attended the Watts Riots as if they were at the Rose Bowl Game in Pasadena. They came to watch 'the drunk niggers' and were reprimanded by the same for their rowdiness" (quoted in Lueras, 1984, p. 144). Wolfe even went so far to say that with the passing of the sixties with their turbulence and narcissism, surfing would essentially cease to exist (Lueras, 1984, p. 144).

Also in the 1960s, the mass media flung surfing into the national limelight with the likes of Gidget, Annette, and Bobby Darin as its Hollywood representatives and the Beach Boys, Jan and Dean, and Dick Dale as its musical proponents. The surf-oriented movies and music of this time, as well as other surfing media baggage, reinforced surfing and surfers' stereotypic image among the members of the general public. Moreover, the media coverage of this time symbolized surfing's lack of any clear goals or direction as an organized sport. Whereas other nationally known sports such as football, baseball, and sailing were activities with clear rules and standards, were often professionalized and boasted organized constituencies, surfing lacked structure, professionalism, and an organized constituency.⁴ In the mind of the public, surfing represented more of a lifestyle than a sport—and further, a lifestyle which lacked legitimizing "serious" aspects.

It is important to note, however, that from its inception in California in the middle part of the century until the present day, the surfing subculture has had its own symbols, language, clothing styles, and of course its common experiential component: the physical act of surfing itself. Although the particular content of the cultural baggage has changed somewhat over time, the "cultural core" of the subculture has remained remarkably constant. This was true even before the artifacts of the surfing subculture began to be picked up by the larger society through the mass media.⁵

Marine Recreational Fishing in the United States

Marine recreational fishing in the beach areas of the United States has been subject to some of the same cultural influences as surfing, but the manifestation of these influences in fishing as a leisure activity are significantly different.

Recreational fishing as we know it has its roots in modern European history. It is a form of leisure that perhaps more than any other embodies ideals of escape, freedom, relaxation, and personal liberty for a general populace in addition to connotations of subsistence rights, socialization, and the frontier spirit.

Early in this century, however, marine recreational fishing in the United States was limited by its technology. In the 1930s major breakthroughs in the form of nylon fishing line and fiberglass poles led to an increase in the popularity and accessibility of the sport. As petrochemical and exotic metals technology developed, the fishing equipment based on these technologies also became cheaper and more accessible. Further advances in fishing line and rods and reels after World War II led to a further increase in marine recreational fishing participation.

Throughout this period it was generally true that the vast majority of marine fishermen fished either from the beach, piers, or other fixed or relatively fixed structures such as fishing barges along the coast and rented boats, or they went fishing aboard headboats or charter boats. The fifties brought with them the

introduction of the light, trailerable fiberglass boat. This innovation dramatically changed the nature of recreational fishing (Johnson et al., forthcoming). In Newport Beach, for example, the period following the introduction of lighter, movable watercraft was one in which there was a drastic reduction in the number of headboats and a complete disappearance of fishing barges.

Today marine recreational fishing is a popular activity practiced by millions. In contrast to surfers, we can generally characterize recreational fishermen on both coasts as retired or full-time workers with family incomes greater than \$15,000, a great proportion of whom are over 30 years of age (Hiatt et al., 1983; Johnson et al., forthcoming); in general, they are members of the "establishment."⁶ They do not suffer from a low-status or a strongly negative stereotypic image as do surfers. In addition, although segments of the marine recreational fishing population may share overlapping symbols and meanings with one another, we cannot necessarily view recreational fishermen as forming a single subculture or as participants in a generalizable leisure social world (Devall, 1973). Rather, marine recreational fishermen exhibit high degrees of variability in preferences, spatial distribution, demographics, and socioeconomic characteristics. Leisure social worlds or subcultures may exist among members of the general recreational fishing population, but individuals within these social groupings will tend to be more specialized and not necessarily representative of the vast majority of recreational fishermen (Bryan, 1977; Kauffman and Graefe, 1984).

To the general populace recreational fishermen have a rather amorphous image, with neither strongly positive nor negative loadings. Whereas to many just the mention of surfing or surfers conjures up a variety of stereotypic images, the mention of recreational fishing or fishermen provokes images of vacation, beer commercials, the weekend outdoorsman TV show, or the boat full of leaves in the neighbor's backyard. These fuzzy images are combined with the fact that marine recreational fishermen and those connected with the recreational fishing industry in general have been in more economically and politically powerful

positions than have surfers and the surfing industry. This has had a great influence on the development of their respective roles as leisure activities along the coast.

East-West Differences

We now turn to a brief comparison of the cultural contexts within which surfing and fishing take place in Newport Beach and Atlantic Beach.

Surfing's early continental origins in California contributed to its wider acceptance within the Southern California cultural context. Its early inception there led to its becoming an integral part of what has been described as the California beach "scene" (Douglas et al., 1977; Edgerton, 1979). Surfing, fishing, bathing, and other beach uses developed simultaneously on the West Coast, along with the tremendous expansion of population and infrastructure in Southern California which began in the 1930s and continues today.

In contrast, the East Coast had no surfing activity until the late fifties, and surfing was not practiced to any great extent until the early sixties. The time frame of coastal development was also different than the West Coast: in Atlantic Beach in particular, it is only in the last ten years that population growth and infrastructure development have begun to approach that which has been occurring in Southern California since before World War II.

Prior to surfing's introduction in the East, however, fishing and other beach activities represented an institutionalized set of culturally appropriate beach-use patterns. Whereas surfing and fishing developed concurrently on the West Coast, on the East Coast surfing was most certainly an intrusion on an already established set of culturally appropriate leisure patterns.

The cultural patterns of leisure uses of the beach in each area were influenced by varying concepts of beach and ocean property and use rights. These perceived rights influence the configurations of beach-use patterns. For example, whereas in Newport Beach pier ownership is public, in Atlantic Beach piers are privately owned and owners try to maintain control over the adjacent ocean water. In the case of Atlantic Beach these forms

of private ownership and usufruct create fee situations for fishermen, and spatial and temporal limitations for surfers instituted by city and county governments backed up by state legislation. Newport Beach, on the other hand, generally lacks fees for fishermen (with the exception of California's saltwater fishing license) and spatial constraints on surfers with respect to piers. The only regulations for surfing in Newport Beach are temporal, and are implemented primarily in the name of public safety. In Atlantic Beach, regulations are means of purposive beach and ocean resource allocation as well as public safety.⁷

Piers: Defining Use of the Public Domain

Piers, groins, and jetties are used on both the East and the West Coasts for approximately the same purposes: inlet and channel stabilization, control of beach erosion, loading and unloading of materials and supplies, leisure activities such as fishing and commercial enterprises such as restaurants and retail stores. There are considerable differences, however, in the characteristics of ownership and rights of usufruct which accompany such structures—in particular piers—on each coast. We shall focus here on these differences with respect to piers.

In Newport Beach, in particular, all piers which extend into ocean waters are publicly owned. There may be leases to private concerns for businesses on the piers, or even to run the entire pier enterprise, but the ownership of the pier itself is public. This, in combination with the fact that ocean waters seaward of the mean high tide line are public domain (throughout the United States), means that on the West Coast the pier and the ocean form a uniform spatial subset of the public domain.

Partially because of this, the pier and its constituents enjoy no preferential rights with respect to the beach or the adjacent sea. In California, surfers often "shoot the pier"—surfing right through the pilings—and regularly surf immediately adjacent to the pier itself to take advantage of the sandbars which build up because of the pilings. There are periodic disputes between a pier fisherman and a surfer or a passing boat, but these disputes are more interpersonal in nature than issues of perceived spatial

rights. The lifeguard services perform minor regulatory activities necessary to ensure the safety and welfare of the public, including mediating the occasional dispute between surfers and pier users. It is legally possible for government entities to promulgate regulations concerning the use of this space, but in Newport Beach such regulations are minimal and directly related to issues of public safety.

In Atlantic Beach, on the other hand, all ocean piers are privately owned. Besides this, they are overwhelmingly used for fishing as opposed to the variety of uses found in California. Competition between pier fishermen—and pier owners—and boats and surfers is intense. And, in North Carolina, legislation and court cases have defined a clear set of legal rights to the use of the beach and adjacent ocean space.

As we pointed out above, the ocean space from 0 to 3 miles out is under control of the state. Whatever rights counties or municipalities have in terms of planning or regulation usually end at the mean low tide line (even though the beach below the mean *high* tide line is in the public domain, the rights of a local government to regulate extends seaward of this to the mean *low* tide line). But in 1967, under pressure from pier owners, Carteret County (in which Atlantic Beach is located) adopted a series of rules concerning surfing which included prohibitions against surfing within 500 feet of a pier and between piers located within a certain distance of one another. This constituted an attempt to regulate an activity which takes place outside of the normal scope of city and county jurisdiction.

As a result of a series of legal challenges (one by a Californian injured by a bottle thrown by a pier owner as the Californian brought his paddleboard close to a pier on a marathon trip from Maine to Florida), and based on a 1973 North Carolina state law, which enabled cities and counties to "adopt ordinances to regulate and control swimming, surfing and littering in the Atlantic Ocean adjacent to . . . the city," the United States District Court in New Bern, North Carolina, upheld the rights of cities and counties in North Carolina to regulate surfing. The Court found, in part, that:

The Court takes judicial notice that fishermen, surfers and swimmers often congregate near fishing piers. The waves tend to break better for swimmers and surfers near the pier. In addition, piers provide refreshment and amusement facilities used by swimmers and surfers. Furthermore, swimmers and surfers tend to share other areas along the beach where the waves break well.

The Court judicially notes that part of the attraction of surfing is the speed the surfer achieves when maneuvering the board across the face of a wave. Given the fact that bathers and surfers tend to congregate in the same area, the speed the surfer reaches coupled with the unpredictability of ocean waves, poses a risk of injury to both surfers and swimmers. Furthermore, it is conceivable that when a surfer stations himself near a pier waiting for a wave or when riding a wave in that direction, he may be struck by an errant fishing lure by an angler standing on a pier.

These facts lead to one inescapable conclusion: the ordinance (restricting surfing) is bottomed on the rational purpose of protecting the people who enjoy the bounty of the Atlantic Ocean (*MacDonald et al. v. Board of Commissioners of Carteret County, 1977*).

In a separate instance, the North Carolina Supreme Court found that, "Although the littoral owner has the right to construct a pier in order to provide access to ocean waters of greater depth, the owner may not lawfully prohibit the use of ocean waters beneath his pier as a means of passage by water craft in a manner that involves no contact with the pier itself, nor may he unnecessarily obstruct the equal rights of the public to use the ocean waters seaward from the strip of land constituting the foreshore" (*Capune v. Robbins, 1968*). This case is important because prior to 1977, and to a large extent still today, pier owners attempted to preserve the maximum amount of control possible over the immediate environs of their piers, almost irrespective of their legal right to do so.

This discussion points out two separate but interrelated issues—the right of a city or county and the right of a private individual to regulate activities on the beach and in the near-ocean. It is our contention that these laws and court rulings in North Carolina, generated by a particular private interest—pier owners—as a reaction to another private interest—surfers—cre-

ated a preferential right to the beach and ocean space and its attendant leisure uses. It is our further contention that it is the differing cultural context of beach use—as defined at the beginning of this paper—in Newport Beach and Atlantic Beach which allowed and defined, the resulting allocation or non-allocation of beach-use rights.

The Competitive Edge in Local-Level Politics

On the West Coast surfing grew up with other beach uses such as fishing, while on the East Coast surfing was a relative latecomer to the beach scene and arrived in environments which were already controlled economically, culturally, and politically by other beach-use constituencies. Notable among these other constituencies in Atlantic Beach were fishermen and the beach fishing infrastructure. These constituencies had their physical space allocation (fishing piers), their established economic systems (supply and tackle stores, marinas, hotels, restaurants), and, most significantly, their local political power base in city and county government. This base enabled the fishing constituency to assert their perceived rights to beach and ocean space.

In Newport Beach, on the other hand, the political and economic power was much more evenly shared. Not only did surfing play a larger role in the local community, but the surfing constituency was much more vocal and integrated into the community.

One of the significant features of continuity in a local power base lies in the generational transfers of public power. By “generational transfer of public power” we mean the tendency for control over the use of public resources to be handed down within kinship, business, and other social structures over time, albeit filtered through the political process (for a discussion of a similar idea, see Weatherford, 1981). In Atlantic Beach those involved with the fishing industry in general have been prominent in the local political establishment; those involved in surfing—after its late arrival—historically have not. Partially because of the different physical requirements of the two activities—surfing generally being practiced before the age of twenty while fishing may, and often does, become a lifelong activity—and partially

because of the different economic structures of the two activities—fishing being more capital-intensive than surfing—members of the surfing subculture have much less of a tendency to assume positions of power in the community. At least this has historically been true in Atlantic Beach.

In Newport Beach—and in Southern California in general—this has not been the case for a number of reasons. First, because the surfing subculture established itself over a generation ago in Southern California, there is a set of individuals in the middle age ranges—from which the new politically powerful often emerge—who because of their business interests, family ties, or retained subcultural identity consider themselves members of the surfing subculture. As Norman B. Chandler, the publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* and himself an ex-surfer, has stated in reference to his own South Orange County (an area including Newport Beach) “surfing clan”: “All are friends of more than 25 years. All have beach-houses next to each other worth up to a million dollars each. . . . they also comprise a successful group of businessmen who are leaders in exporting various components of beach living.” (Lueras, 1984, p. 133).

The fact of this presence of a surfing subcultural identity in local politics became evident when surfing first came under challenge in Newport Beach in the 1960s and 1970s by competitive beach uses, most prominently tourist-oriented sectors of the business community. By that time, in Southern California, surfing associations were well-established and the community networks of surfers (and, significantly, their often well to do parents) were in place. When issues involving surfing came before the City Council in Newport Beach in the early 1970s, the “surfing establishment” was there in forces often much greater than those of their competitors, and certainly far greater than those representing fishermen.

This situation continues to this day. The present Mayor of San Diego, one of the largest coastal cities in Southern California, is a surfer who still attempts to reserve one afternoon a week for surfing. In his first year in office, the first “Mayor’s Distinguished Business Award” went to a man, a resident of San Diego, who had established one of the first, and most highly successful,

surfboard companies in the United States. In almost every beach town from the Mexican border 500 miles north to Monterey Bay—the farthest north that surfing takes place to any significant degree—one can find successful middle-aged members of the surfing subculture, some in surfing-related businesses and others not, who are firmly implanted in the local community. This statement applies as well to fishermen in Atlantic Beach.

Thus we find that the configuration of beach-use patterns in the two locations is defined not only by formal regulations, but also by broad cultural practices, informal application (or disregard) of formal regulations, and the match between personal background, cultural and leisure style, and political power.

These configurations are summarized in Table 1. In Newport Beach, where surfing and fishing developed concurrently, surfing is more highly integrated into the local cultural milieu than is fishing. The ownership of beach facilities such as piers is public, and the constraints on access to the beach and ocean space are minimal. A saltwater recreational fishing license is required, but surfers have only periodically been subject to licensing requirements for their surfboards and minimal time restrictions. Neither fishing nor surfing is important economically to the community, but individuals with surfing backgrounds as a salient feature of their cultural identity have equal or greater access to the political process than do fishermen.

In Atlantic Beach, fishing developed as a principal beach use long before surfing. But even more important, the local cultural context within which beach use occurs has been less influenced by the youth-oriented beach culture that has defined leisure activities in Southern California. In addition, beach facilities such as piers are privately owned, and there is far less public infrastructure and public beach access in general than in Newport Beach. Fishing is much more economically important than is surfing. The regulations on surfing are much more extensive and stringent than those on fishing, which are essentially nonexistent. There is no saltwater recreational fishing license in North Carolina, but surfers in Atlantic Beach are required to surf more than 500 feet from piers, observe other space restrictions, wear leashes on their surfboards, and in some cases observe time

restrictions. Finally, the access to the political process for fishermen is high in North Carolina, while the access for surfers is low (i.e., they are largely ignored in local politics).

Conclusions and Implications

So what are we to make of these differences in culture, economy, politics, and even law which distinguish the relationship between surfing and fishing as competitive low-capital beach uses in Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, and Newport Beach, California?

Table 1
Dimensions of Contrast Between Atlantic Beach and Newport Beach

	West Coast (Newport Beach)	East Coast (Atlantic Beach)
Integration with local culture		
fishing	Low to moderate	High
surfing	Moderate to high	Low to moderate
Beach facility ownership	Predominantly public	Predominantly private
Development of fishing and surfing	Concurrent	Sequential (fishing first)
Constraints on access		
fishing	License	Pier fee
surfing	Mostly temporal	Temporal, Spatial, and required equipment
Importance to local economy		
fishing	Low	High
surfing	Low	Low
Access to political process		
fishing	Low to moderate	High
surfing	Moderate to high	Low
Public access to beach	Moderate to high	Low

The most general conclusion is that the role of those who practice the activity, or who depend on its commercial adjuncts, in the local community significantly determines the allocation of beach use in coastal communities. This allocation is sometimes formal, as in the North Carolina state and local laws governing surfing and fishing, and sometimes informal, as in the case of the pier owners who attempt to create their own "space" for themselves and their customers through setting up signs or even, as in the case noted above, physical aggression.⁸

A major corollary of this point is that "beach access," broadly defined as the ability of any given member of the general public to enjoy the use of beach and near-shore environments, is significantly determined not only by formal legal mandates such as the federal Coastal Zone Management Act which requires that states and local communities provide for such access in their coastal use plans, but often by the patterns of perception and behavior—in short, the cultural context—in the local communities themselves which, almost as a given, vary from community to community as they do from Atlantic Beach to Newport Beach. It is the examination of these local cultural contexts and processes, rather than the formal legal mandates, that often yields the most complete picture and most comprehensive understanding of dilemmas of public access.

The third conclusion is that popular culture, especially when magnified through the lens of the mass media, can create a powerful, biased context within which the local cultural forces must operate. Ironically, the mass media of the sixties and seventies that portrayed surfing in all of its nonserious modes has now begun to stress the serious side of surfing. The media have, over the years, covered surfing's professionalization. Today weekend television sports programs provide coverage of surfing competitions in combination with other great American sports such as boxing, race car driving, and track and field. American sports heroes, such as Bruce Jenner who delivers surfing commentary for major television networks, bring the viewer the action. Sponsors such as Smirnoff promote the surfing events and money is provided to the winner. All of these factors lead to surfing's increasing goal orientation, organization, and professionalization. These characteristics of sports presentation are well under-

stood in popular culture and have aided in surfing's wider acceptance.⁹

The changing influences of popular culture will become increasingly important for locations such as Atlantic Beach even though the number of structural connections between surfing, fishing, and the local community may at the moment be small. Potentials for change can be seen in Atlantic Beach in the proliferation of surfing-style clothing shops (which sell few, if any, surfboards) and in the larger arena in the emergence of East Coast-wide surfing associations. Although these activities have their local constituents, they are arguably "spill-overs" from the larger phenomenon of mass-marketed beach leisure images. This leads one to the prediction that beach uses will become more homogenized as mass media and mass culture pervade local communities more and more. This appears to be borne out in Atlantic Beach, where the legal distance a surfer must maintain from a fishing pier has recently been reduced, and where there is a generally accepted move by the community to consider the idea of an artificial "surfing reef," similar to the artificial fishing reefs now in place in many locations in the United States.

Finally, it is our observation that these matters of cultural context and beach use are most relevant for that category of uses and users which we have labeled as "low-capital." With high-capital uses, the cultural context can often be overridden by sheer economic power. It is in the case of the more vulnerable, low-capital uses, however—which constitute most of the user interaction with our beaches in the United States—where the cultural forces most often define the local policy climate for allocation of beach resources. In their respective incarnations in Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, and Newport Beach, California, surfing and recreational fishing as competitive beach uses provide striking examples of the power of cultural context in the structure and form of such low-capital ocean leisure uses.

Notes

1. We use "expressive" as a general term referring to the domain of leisure pursuits.

2. For the purposes of our analysis here, we will treat such cost

limitations exclusive of public or private infrastructural costs which may be necessary for the leisure use. So, for example, we assume that the infrastructural cost of a public fishing pier, although necessary to some forms of beach leisure activity, is distributed through tax burdens or nominal use fees over a large enough number of individuals so as to make the cost to any given user very small. Thus, the use of such items falls within our definition of "low-capital." Similarly, with a private fishing pier or launching ramp, as long as the use fee is within our guidelines we assume the total cost of the infrastructure to be similarly distributed over a large number of individuals. Such facilities which require private memberships, however, do not generally fall under our definition of "low-capital" uses.

3. The exception to this statement, of course, is the somewhat tautological proposition that anything people go to a beach to do is unique to the beach because they have chosen to go to the beach to do it. We exclude this proposition in this analysis in order to focus on more narrowly defined cases of competitive beach use. We define a "competitive beach use" as a use which is typically in competition with other uses for beach space; in this sense "competitive beach uses" often result in multiple-use conflicts. There is some merit to the argument that the esthetic quality of the ocean environment is indeed often a significant variable in perception and behavior involving beach use, but it is one which is theoretically applicable to all beach uses uniformly and, therefore, may be taken as given here.

4. Pearson (1979) in his theoretical discussion describes a similar notion which he terms the "athletization" of a sport.

5. The identification of surfing as a subculture is similar to the notion of leisure social worlds discussed by Devall (1973). Leisure social worlds parallel "leisure" subcultures in that the nonwork activity in which one is involved, such as surfing, will influence the full range of social activities and life interests.

6. We use "establishment" here as a contrast to subculture. In general, marine recreational fishermen are conceptually representative of the mainstream of American society.

7. In Southern California there is only one pier that maintains spatial restrictions of only 100 ft. On the other hand, within a comparable stretch of coast from Virginia through North Carolina there are a large number of piers with such restrictions (some with restrictions in excess of 400 ft.).

8. One informant told of a more recent conflict between surfers and recreational fishermen on the same pier involved in the legal case in this

section. In this particular case, however, a fisherman was assaulted by a surfer who had been injured by the fisherman's hook.

9. Participation rates for marine recreational fishing have increased over the years—4.5 million in 1955 to over 17 million today (NMFS, 1980). This has also led to increased media exposure for recreational fishing. This increased exposure, however, has been relatively less dramatic.

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