



5 (2022)

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Percorsi di geografie letterarie, percettive,  
educative e dello sviluppo locale

*Edited by*

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# From sea to shore: reuniting the divide by yachting

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7358/gn-2022-001-fort>

## ABSTRACT

The argument of separation between humans and nature has nurtured a rich narrative of theorizations striving to find application in the field of development and spatial change. This paper aims to chart a progressive separation of humans from the sea by adopting a grounded theory approach. In selected seaside towns, urban regeneration and tourism rejuvenation have contributed to crystalizing the separation of humans from the sea therefore calling for the need to revert the point of view over the conception of these measures by ‘reuniting with the sea’. It is therefore concluded that yachting tourism has potentially a strategic role to play in this shift, but further investigation is needed in order to reconsider it within alternative approaches to development through tourism.

*Keywords:* humans and nature; sea to shore; yachting; coastal resort regeneration; tourism rejuvenation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between humans and nature has been sided by a long history of anthropic interventions on space. The ensuing debate is one that has never ceased to be tarnished by an array of competing philosophical precepts, fed by quantifiable initiatives and condoned consequences. Within it, the long-standing and conceptually compelling argument of ‘separation’ holds a position of controversy. Even the most publicly accessible advocates of the symbiotic relationship between

humans and nature hold views on this argument that are both telling and worthy of note as they stem, often, from singular experiences in the field. Among them, and specifically in the context of the marine environment, Bernard Moitessier, historic icon of the single-handed round the world competitive sailing scene, and Glenn Edney, ocean ecologist, underwater naturalist, sailor, professional diver and co-founder of Ocean Spirit New Zealand, have been vocal in their convictions sparking the imagination of both generations of sailors and naturalist groups. As such, within sailing circuits, Moitessier's captivating quotes from his various logbooks run popular. One quote more than others, however, manages to capture the sophisticated concept of the human place in nature and goes thus:

I am the citizen of the most beautiful nation on earth, a nation whose laws are harsh yet simple, a nation that never cheats, which is immense and without borders where life is lived in the present. In this limitless nation, this nation of wind, light, and peace, there is no other ruler beside the sea.

Similarly, but with a touch of scientific flair, on the occasion of The Volvo Ocean Race Summits (ORS 2020) and within the reaches of Racing with Purpose<sup>1</sup>, Edney (2021) condemned the belief, thinking it deceptive, in which humans and nature are separate entities and stated:

The idea that something has value only if it's valuable to humanity comes from a place of separation. It's a delusion because it's simply not true. No matter how much we like to believe that we are separate entities [...] it's simply scientifically not the case. [...] You are the ocean and the ocean is you, there is no separation.

Together, these two statements are popularizations of an eco-centric approach to development that considers the human species a part of nature. Within scholarly circles, this notion has been well explored and elaborated on. The wealth of contributions capturing the essential facets of this unifying view over the humans/nature dichotomy is copious. It ranges from seminal conceptualizations of the garden city model seeking to re-establish a humans/nature connection at the turn of the 20th century (Ebenezer 1965) and early biocentric works on unsustainable urban growth (Geddes 1968), to the articulation of the biophilia hypothesis claiming the inherited origins of the existential affiliation of humans with other living organisms (Wilson 1984). Besides the rise and continuing growth of sustainability imperatives steering sixty years of

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<sup>1</sup> Racing with Purpose (RWP, 2022) is an ocean protection and restoration program promoted by the global sport event organizer The Ocean Race.

development theory, other contributions span the conceptualization of the human ecosystem as a place that brings together humans and nature (Lyle 1985); Naess' (1989) ecosophy and other elaborations of sort aiming to rediscover the human place in nature (e.g. Suzuki 2009) and, more recently, a novel regenerative turn to development thinking that, by partnering culture with natural systems, locates at the core of current environmental problems the "fractured relationship between people and the living web of nature" (Mang and Reed 2017, 9).

And yet, despite over a century of elaborations and debate, the spatiality of a humans/nature divide remains pervasive. Noticeable gigantic infrastructures of separation, spanning for instance the metallic Victorian English pier piercing into the sea, the high-rise ribbon development in Costa Del Sol and the oversized cruise vessel crossing the Venetian lagoon, come to epitomize the believed superiority of humans over the natural elements, the elevation of rationality above all other human faculties and resulting ability, or so it seems, to control and dominate over them indefinitely. Obvious associations aside, the seemingly impalpable and merely philosophical debate over the humans/nature divide, and between humans and the sea in particular, acquires a more tangible and critical profile when considered in the context of development and management of that liminal space (i.e. the seashore) that throughout its evolution has spurred the growth of three generations of seaside towns globally.

This paper, therefore, aims to blueprint a progressive separation of humans from the sea coinciding with urban regeneration and tourism rejuvenation (abbreviated to UR and TR) as a combined process of urban transformation in selected seaside towns. Further, it is to channel a reflection on the opportunity to, and the need for, investigating further the potential of yachting tourism as a tool to bridge this divide in coastal resort change. As such, this paper following this introduction offers an overview of the evolution of coastal resorts leading to an analysis of the UR process and its emulation in seaside towns regeneration with effects that are described in terms of a progressive material and symbolic separation from the sea. This is then followed by a discussion of the need to revert the point of view over the conception of UR policies and TR measures across the broad spectrum of seaside towns and the opportunity for yachting tourism to play a strategic role in seaside towns regeneration whilst bridging a humans/nature divide. The paper then ends inviting an exploration and an evaluation of alternative frameworks within which yachting tourism can deliver a sustainable development function and address the argument of 'separation'.

## 2. COASTAL RESORTS' EVOLUTION: URBAN CHANGE AND PROGRESSIVE SEPARATION FROM THE NATURE AND CULTURE OF THE SEA

The development of selected portions of coastal areas into seaside towns or, alternatively, coastal resorts<sup>2</sup> features a long line of research engagements (e.g. Christaller 1963; Urry 1997; Walton 2000). Some works conceptualized their urbanization process generally (e.g. Mullins 1991). Others, interested in their evolution, investigated resort management interventions including a combination of UR and TR initiatives (e.g. Agarwal and Shaw 2007). Here the 'urbanizing waterfront', and related associations and interactions with the sea, took center stage in public policy setting the quality of their change. Given the significance of this process to the quality of change in these settlements, the following section briefly introduces UR as a process. This is in order to pave the way for a fuller illustration of how it was emulated in seaside towns with consequences that are to be described as a progressive separation from the sea.

### 2.1. *Urban regeneration, seaside towns regeneration and tourism rejuvenation*

The process of regenerating declined waterfronts of urban centrality has a history of combined public and private interventions dating back to the 1970s (e.g. Hoyle, Pinder and Hussain 1988). Borne out of the sustainable development era, but child of the neoliberal turn in urban policy nonetheless (Cox 1993; Swyngedouw, Moulaert and Rodriguez 2002), this process pursued a comprehensive transformation of the heavily deprived, derelict and obsolete post-industrial urban waterfronts of large capital cities (Kalltorp *et al.* 1997). By deploying economic, social and environmental measures, UR pursued: (a) the restructuring of local and regional economies through economic diversification strategies; (b) the physical refurbishment of derelict landscapes entailing beautification, sanitization, heritagization and spectacularization schemes; and (c) social revitalization with the attraction of preferably affluent communities and the enhancement of the local quality of life (Roberts, Sykes and Granger 2017). Leading in the process was the establishment of industries as

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<sup>2</sup> The terms "seaside town" and "coastal resort" have often been used interchangeably in England based on Fothergill's (2008) and associated classifications (ONS 2020).

varied as those of finance, insurance, real estate (FIRE) arts, culture, entertainment and creative (ACE) (Smith 2007), through which large central sections of a deindustrialized waterfront were turned into newly attractive, lively and liveable spaces. Within this rapid process of transformation in spaces traditionally disassociated with any significant tourism flow, urban tourism came to perform a strategic development role in material and symbolic change.

Hence, the development of an urban tourism infrastructure complemented the conversion (Judd and Fainstein 1999) of post-industrial waterfronts into, essentially, urban resorts (Hoffman, Fainstein and Judd 2003) performing a distinctive cultural, sport, shopping and creative tourism function. Following a narrative of success stories and best practices, this process has been emulated across the globe in a way that large cities come to look and perform very similarly across all continents (e.g. Rogerson and Rogerson 2021). With recognition of a similar set of socio-economic issues in coastal resorts (e.g. Fothergill 2008), this very process has been also emulated, although with a variation of formats, in many of them. This process, however, is context specific and has to be considered within a typological mix of seaside towns that differ not only in terms of geographical location, size and tourism performance but, more importantly, on development patterns and related quality of interaction with the sea.

A dated but instrumental classification exercise (Knowles and Curtis 1999) identified three 'generations' of coastal resorts. It distinguished: a first generation of cold water, post-mature and declined coastal resorts of the North of Europe, from a second generation including those ex fishing villages that in the space of a decade or so (since 1960s) shifted into high-rise urban resorts upon adopting the ribbon development configuration of the Mediterranean mass tourism seaside town and experienced fatigue and stagnation already in the 1980s; and then a third generation of purposefully built resorts (e.g. the Cancun Model). Both first and second generations reacted when reaching decline and stagnation phases (Agarwal 1997) by adopting various rejuvenation schemes aiming to diversify the product on offer, then reposition in a new marketplace striving to maintaining a resort status. Their resort management interventions however differ as far as UR schemes are concerned: when the latter was preoccupied with rearranging the resort economy and keep up on emerging trends (e.g. Jordan 2001; Figini and Vici 2012), the former, scarred by the fierce decline of tourism of the 1970s and 80s, resumed to marginalizing cultural tourism development to a mere place promo-

tion-based UR strategy and so expand into the creative and knowledge economy in the wake of sustainable urban development directives. For the first generation of costal resorts, this signified a near to complete loss of connection with the sea as the following exemplifies.

## 2.2. *Insights from an urban regeneration and tourism rejuvenation discourse*

The arguments in section 2.1 are potentially contestable given the multitude of contexts represented within the typological reaches of these three generations. As far as some first-generation resorts are concerned, however, even a cursory consultation of relevant grey literature or a stroll through the outcomes of their implementation (e.g. Smith 2004; Benedict and Houghton 2009; Kennell 2010) would support them fully, although strategic efforts were made in order to reconnect the life of regenerating resorts with aspects related to the sea and 'its' culture. This is certainly the case for significantly deprived coastal areas in South East England where, for example, a programme of special events and festivals, on during the golden years of UR interventions (i.e. 1997-2012), was to promote the open sea as a constitutive element of place. On the surface, the *Seafood and Wine Festival*, to name but one, was meant to protect and promote the local sustainable fishing industry and the historic role of the fleet within the community. A poststructuralist analysis (Forte 2009) on this culture-led UR measure, however, reveals its primary place promotion intent where local distinctive structures of meaning (i.e. the culture of the sea) were used as mere cosmetic attractors for foreign capital investments deriving from a desired community of new businesses and affluent residents. Hence, supporting further the argument of a progressive separation of the life of the resort from the sea was also, although not exclusively, a narrative featuring in much of the English government literature making the case for the need to regenerate disadvantaged and failing seaside towns (e.g. CLG 2006-2007). The claims by Government concerned their economic recovery limitations caused by their very coastal morphology and maintained that with only 180° catchment, being at the end of the line, the presence of the sea would act as a big hiccup for their long-term recovery.

Evidence shows that after years of regeneration schemes, substantial injections of public and private funding for their design and implementation, starting in the late 1990s with the Single Regeneration Budget (e.g.

Fordham, Hutchinson and Foley 1999), the first generation of resorts is still associated with the stigmas of high levels of deprivation. As such, they remain a national issue yet to be resolved in need of inspiration and reinvention (e.g. O'Connor 2019; UK Parliament 2019). Whether this is as a direct result of this narrative of separation from the sea remains open to further systematic investigation. Nevertheless, the experience of first-generation resorts is of great significance to the debate over the management of change in seaside towns specifically and to the relationship between humans and nature more broadly. What follows channels therefore a reflection on the need to revert the point of view over the conception of UR policies and TR measures across the broad spectrum of seaside towns whilst bringing attention to second generation resorts.

### 3. REVERTING THE POINT OF VIEW OVER THE CONCEPTION OF COASTAL RESORT CHANGE

Classifications aside, there are sufficient elements to recognize that the combined process of UR and TR hitherto discussed has pursued a narrative of change which elaboration is based on the concept 'from the land towards the seashore' rather than 'from the open sea towards the coast and its hinterlands', thus missing the opportunity to value the ecological and cultural wealth that the sea holds for the sustainable development of seaside towns. This conception was also confirmed during the conference sessions held at the 2021 edition of the *Salone Nautico di Venezia* (SNV) in Italy. On that occasion, professor Renzo Rosso (SNV 2021) outlined "the need to rethink the seafront by thinking from the sea rather than from the land" and claimed that it is through the culture of the sea, including that of going by sea, that the sustainability principles can be realized (translated from original). The argument of 'reuniting with the sea' run through all the conference sections hosted by the SNV, which is significant at a time when an unprecedented wealth of programs aiming to preserve and promote the sustainable use of the sea (e.g. ORS 2020; FIV 2021; OOF 2021; UNDOS 2021) denote an upsurge of interest in, and commitment to, its ecological wellbeing and related relationship to humans. At the SNV, academics, politicians and industry representatives recognised the untapped potential of a sustainable, therefore systemic and integrated, yachting tourism development formula in respect of the evolution of both Italian coastal towns and coastal resorts, including

respective hinterlands. Consequently, a missing link between the open sea and the Italian Coastal dynamics was identified which needs to be built if this potential is to be realised.

### 3.1. *Yachting tourism: opportunity to reunite with the sea in seaside towns' change*

The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered an exponential growth of the yachting tourism sector in Italy (MIT 2021). By signaling a surge of public interest in 'being at sea', it represents an unprecedented opportunity for the sector to contribute to the evolution of coastal areas and, in turn, challenge the separation between humans and nature. Tapping into the development potential of a sustainable yachting tourism sector in coastal resort regeneration could indeed translate into a policy priority. This relates primarily to two key factors, namely: the linkages yachting tourism holds with both land-based structures and marine-orientated dynamics and the strong associations the sector has with the culture of the sea, including the maritime culture of going by sea, demanding a significant quality of contact between humans and nature. Regrettably, although nautical tourism scholarship is well articulated and sustainable yachting tourism, within it, also retains some ground (e.g. Ioannidis 2019; Trstenjak, Žiković and Mansour 2020), they fail nonetheless to consider the many opportunities for yachting tourism to contribute to the sustainable development of coastal resorts in the above terms.

The arguments so far deployed indicate that the approaches used in the management of change in coastal resorts contain an oversight requiring a deep exploration for an evaluation of alternatives that put the sea, including both internal waters and the open sea, back at the center of the coastal resort regeneration debate. This requires, however, looking beyond the most conventional approaches to yachting tourism development and putting alternative frameworks at work including those coherent with a sustainable tourism development formula (Sharpley 2020), such as well tested route-based models (e.g. Berti, Denu and Mariotti 2015) as well as novel regenerative tourism-based theorizations (Bellato, Frantzeskaki and Nygaard 2022) in which, despite the strong cultural and ecological referents, 'yachting' remains alien and in need for further consideration, application and scrutiny.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper aligns the affiliation of humans and nature with processes of change in specific coastal areas. The aim was to blueprint, and then problematize, the progressive material and symbolic separation of humans from the sea and, consequently, from nature. It is argued that this process has occurred within the workings of urban regeneration and tourism rejuvenation as combined measures setting the quality of change in selected seaside towns. By reifying the aftermaths of such process as being potential contributors to their struggles, we substantiated the need and opportunity to shift the point of view over the conception of these measures by 'reuniting with the sea'. Yachting tourism, then, emerged as a potential strategic tool to break through a crystalizing human/nature divide but one that requires, nonetheless, to be reconsidered within the confines of alternative approaches and frameworks which are in line with the consolidated precepts of the sustainable tourism development agenda but are novel to the world of yachting therefore requiring further investigation.

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