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# Creative resources for attractive seaside resorts: The French turn

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**Abstract:** This article presents a qualitative analysis of the specific strategies used by coastal resorts in the South of France to valorise their creative regional resources. These strategies emerge from factors of change in the trajectories of the resorts: change in the relationship between man and nature, environmental turning point and the need for sustainability, emergence of creative tourism centred on recreation, sport and culture. The research is supported by three case studies, Biarritz, Lacanau and Martigues, and assesses the constraints that arise in terms of design and management of coastal resorts and tourist areas, against a background of numerous conflicting requirements, including attractiveness and sustainability. The effects of these strategies can call into question the choice of resources selected, associated forms of governance, as well as conflicts in use that may emerge.

**Keywords:** Seaside Resorts, Regional Resources, Nature, Heritage, Surf, Creative Tourism, Attractiveness, Governance

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## 1. Introduction

The French coast is today the country's foremost tourist destination in terms of overnight stays, and has been the subject of substantial affective and symbolic investment since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as it is the embodiment of a role of pleasure and renewal based on a desire for the shore and for "the seaside" [1]. Although the challenges of coastal tourism are now clearly evident, we must nevertheless consider the dynamics of change that have affected these areas and the ways in which their tourist value is enhanced. Coastal resorts have developed mainly as urban units, whose inhabitants are temporary (tourists, visitors). However, more and more they are also becoming home to a permanent population who have expectations and needs in terms of housing, public services, jobs and quality of living environment. These areas are faced with a triple process of change (societal, economic and environmental) which challenges the frameworks and traditional points of reference of public action, and calls for fresh thinking on the conditions and issues surrounding

sustainability and governance<sup>1</sup>. It is in this context that coastal areas were chosen as an ideal subject for the current research programme on "*Trajectories of tourist areas and resorts in South-West France since the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the dynamics of innovation, development of tensions and future issues*" (Tratso project – 2012/2015<sup>2</sup>). This article questions the way in which institutions redefine their public policy guidelines, i.e. "*the area of meaning that [...] puts limits around the values, standards and causal relations required to form a cognitive and normative framework for the actors involved*" [2]., by mobilising what they consider as "*regional resources*" [3] specific to the spatial structure and sociocultural atmosphere of seaside resorts. Here we are keen to show that as society's expectations have changed, especially the growth of creative tourism in general [4] and more specifically the hybridisation of recreational practices

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1 Source : D.G.U.H.C. (2006). *Planifier l'aménagement, la protection et la mise en valeur du littoral*, Paris : MEDAD et ministère des transports, de l'équipement du tourisme et de la mer.

2 See Tratso website: <http://uranus.msha.fr/tratso>.

with the focus of attention on the environment, this has resulted in an ever-growing awareness of regional resources [5]. An insight is gained into the conditions necessary for this movement of regional “re-registration” to succeed by identifying the levers that managers have developed and their role in the construction and evolution of identity, image and attractiveness of coastal areas. Thus the way in which elected representatives view socio-environmental change is analysed to find out whether, and if so how, they plan to take into account on the one hand, the risks associated with climate change and on the other hand, the hypermodern [6] or even transmodern [7] nature of creative practices (cultural and sports) in the resorts’ strategies to restore tourist enthusiasm. The research is supported by three case studies, covering Biarritz, Lacanau and Martigues, and assesses constraints in terms of management and governance of coastal tourist resorts and areas, against a background of many conflicting requirements, including attractiveness, sustainability and risk awareness (natural and industrial). The data production method of this empirical study is based on a field survey consisting of semi-structured interviews with about thirty local actors on three main themes: the historic character of the place and its urban development; the role of the actors and the method of governance; creativity and the different ways these resorts have introduced innovation. Lastly, the effects of promoting regional resources are analysed by considering the choice of resources that were selected and highlighted, the forms of governance put in place, and any conflicts of use that may have emerged as a result.

## 2. Strategies of Seaside Resorts: Change Factors

The coast as an area put to use by Man can tell us a lot about changes in society and Man’s place in relation to Nature. First, the “domestication” of this environment happened as a result of man’s need to find a specific activity here, one that was different from his daily occupation, moving from a therapeutic approach to a recreational approach. Second, the regulations applied to the coast required man’s occupation of this environment to be channelled and adapted in the interests of conservation, even though difficulties linked with socio-economic activity remained. Third, creativity reflects the continuity and permanence of coastal practices, giving the coastal area a hypermodern and ideally a transmodern outlook, which explains in part its residential orientation.

### 2.1. Man/Nature Relationship at the Heart of the Arrival of Tourism in Coastal Areas

When sea bathing first became popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, visitors began to see the coast differently, having previously feared it or considered it as a domain reserved for men who worked at sea [8]. A “*désir de rivage*” a desire for the shore was born in western populations once interest in the curative aspect had waned. This discovery gave rise to a fascination

for landscapes and a desire for experience, man challenging the harsh climate. This resulted in the appropriation of these areas and the invention of coastal tourism, from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sea bathing as therapy developed along the coastline of the Manche department and the North Sea, then down the Atlantic coastline as villages became occupied by tourists. Publicity and improved accessibility contributed to the growth of burgeoning seaside resorts, again first on the coasts of the Manche department and the North Sea then gradually spreading down the Atlantic coast. The arrival of the railway accelerated the development of tourism on the French coastline, from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the coast of Aquitaine and the Mediterranean. All over the world, accessibility did contribute to the arrival of tourists in the resorts, the urban facilities that were developed were also crucial [9]. The presence of shops, a casino, cafés all contribute to urban life. During the Belle-Epoque beach fashion and bathing now complemented the original therapeutic functions. There were also sporting activities, introduced by the English and French “high society”, such as golf in the South-West or tennis in Brittany. When sea bathing started to occupy only a short time of the bather’s day, it became necessary to “*provide other activities to meet the needs of these temporary residents. Golf courses, tennis courts, beach clubs were created in the most exclusive resorts. [...] Different forms of sociability like cafés, hotels, as in the spa resorts, casinos, that were both gaming rooms and entertainment facilities became the marker for this tourist urbanization which developed through privatisation of communal resources.*”. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the coast finally became the subject of large-scale State-led urban development along the coasts of Languedoc and Aquitaine, contributing to a tourist-driven economic boom [10].

Thus the development of seaside tourist resorts is reflected in a renewal, of sports activities and urban representations and concepts, where nature plays a key role. While the attention currently paid to nature and to the environment in general has resulted in a renewed approach to sensitive areas, the man/nature relationship lies at the very heart of the development of tourist practices, even though the widespread growth of tourism in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sometimes tends to gloss over this fact. In fact, the valorisation of the environment has never been absent from tourist issues; it even created an “*alternative model for bringing order*” [11]. In parallel with the massive development of tourist sites in the 1960s-1970s, the State put in place measures targeting landscape conservation. Different tools were devised to ensure that this protection would be implemented (nature reserves, biotope protection orders, biosphere reserves, etc.), the most powerful and symptomatic being the National Parks<sup>3</sup> and the Regional Nature Parks<sup>4</sup>. Also the action of the MIACA (Interministerial Mission for

3 Law no. 60-708 of 22 July 1960 on the creation of the National Parks (J.O. of 23 July 1960).

4 Decree no. 67-158 of 1 March 1967 which fixed the objectives and the methods for setting up the Regional Nature Parks (J.O. of 2 March 1967).

Developing the Aquitaine Coast), started towards the end of the 1960s, included this question of “nature” in its principles. The determined aim was to integrate man into nature and his environment, based on protecting the natural environment and restoring architectural heritage [12]. In terms of regional development this policy resulted in the joint introduction of priority development units (new resorts) and natural balance sectors<sup>5</sup>.

## 2.2. From an Environmental Turning Point to Requirement for Sustainability

The 1970s marked a turning point, in that collective environmental awareness (together with the 1980s real estate crisis) led the State to put global protection measures in place. Here we are moving away from the productivist and sectorial reasoning of the first six plans on creating resorts (where the main concern was to produce areas for building), and entering a phase of managing them, where heritage protection (especially natural heritage) was now seen as much more important. The first oil crisis and the world economic crisis drew world attention to the excesses of industrialisation and the harm that was being done to the environment. They helped to open a window of opportunity [13] and to put the environmental question at the top of the international and national political agenda<sup>6</sup>. The conditions finally came together for a radical change in coastal development policy. The French “Mountain” and “Coastal area” laws were the high points in the institutionalisation of this change.

Law no. 86-2, on the development, protection and promotion of the coastline, known as the “coastal law”, was adopted unanimously by Parliament on 3 January 1986. It represented a turning point in terms of integrated planning and sustainable development of coastal areas. Questions on habitat and housing, mobility and accessibility, environmental and heritage values in the coastal area were asked with some urgency in relation to new occupants and new activities. For example, the proportion of coastline that has been denatured increased from 39% in 1960 to 61% in the 1990s, and between 2000 and 2006, this denaturation was 2.7 times greater in the coastal municipalities than in the rest of France (MEDDE, 2012; Atout France, 2014), despite the protection targets set by legislation. Coping with these changes is a challenge that faces the political framework of

tourist management and development [14]. Along with the profound change in coastal areas, the institutional framework for applying the development and spatial planning policies for these areas has evolved, introducing new forms of regional governance that must be analysed. In this respect, the concept of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), promoted by the European Union, seems to have opened up interesting prospects in terms of consultation, sharing of a common vision and governance of coastal areas. However, reconciling tourist development and environmental protection seems to be a delicate matter for those involved in tourism for reasons of commitment, both political and financial [15]. For example, we observe a degree of reticence and misunderstanding surrounding ICZM, where initiatives and measures also vary considerably, where sometimes the environmental approach predominates, to the detriment of a human and social approach. It is for all these reasons that management methods, conflicts of use and tourist trajectories of coastal areas must be challenged.

## 2.3. Emergence of a Creative Tourism

In the margins of the changes brought about by institutional actors and the arrival of the sustainability paradigm in the list of operational goals in the field of tourist development, the emergence of creative tourism is another significant change that can also disrupt the socio-spatial organisation of coastal areas and resorts.

This new approach, defined in UK has gradually become established in all regions, urban and rural [16]. Destinations in nature, on the coast and in the mountains are no exception, and France is only just beginning to learn this. Tourism has always benefited from its interdependence with identity and regional cultural practices, including sport and nature. And vice versa. Cultural tourism, at one and the same time cause and consequence of the growth of mass tourism, despite being difficult to assess and judged by the World Tourism Organisation to make up about one third of world tourism, continues to grow. Today this tourism has taken on a new, more creative form. After a mass tourism that focused on *having holidays*, then cultural and elitist tourism which consisted of *must see sights*, consumers next wanted creative tourist experiences. This “creative tourism” is defined as tourism that offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential on the basis of heritage resources (including nature), and also cultural and creative resources, via active participation in characteristic experiences offered by the tourist destination, experiences that aim to transform [17]. It is implied, through this participation, that the tourist becomes an inhabitant of the region he is visiting, that he becomes part of the community, co-creating with it and that the local inhabitant becomes a tourist in his own region, revisiting it through creation. The emergence of creative tourism is firmly rooted both in “new consumer behaviour” (disillusioned, distressed and defiant individualist, with many identities and allegiances, constantly seeking experiences, hedonistic, an aesthete, eclectic, reflective, a hyper- or *alter-consumer* but always an active participant in his own

<sup>5</sup> However, it should not be forgotten that the success of this protection policy was due largely, not to this relative environmental awareness, but rather to the upheaval in the economic climate since the second oil crisis (Prefecture of the Aquitaine Region, Aquitaine coastline mission and General Council of Aquitaine, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> The creation of the United Nations Environment Programme at the UN conference in Stockholm from 5 to 16 June 1972, testifies to this change. There were also many more initiatives at national level. In France, the Ministry for the Protection of Nature and the environment was created in 1971. Five years later it was the instigator of the law on the Protection of Nature, law no. 76-629 of 10 July 1976, which stated in article 1: “it is the duty of every individual to ensure the safeguarding of the natural heritage in which he lives. Any public or private development, equipment and production activities must conform to the same requirements” (<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr>).

consumption) and in the “new strategic and organisational behaviour of tourism actors”, tending to make tourism disappear, blending into daily life, culture and consumption, no longer differentiated from domestic and leisure activities, decompartamentalised in itself and mixing genres, global and local all at the same time, presenteeist (overexploiting signs of the present and overexploring symbols of the past), providing a hyperchoice of hyperreal offers that can provide countless diverse experiences, focusing on sensoriality, product-service design, invented authenticity, emerging from objects and from the self, immediacy, accessibility, technology, communication, images....

At the heart of this trend is the “nature sports” resource, which for a long time was the privilege of just a few social elites with considerable social and cultural capital, and whose sports aesthetic and ethic consisted of adopting a *fun culture* [17]. However, these sports have now become popularised. Factors such as the sacred right to free time, individualisation in tourism practices, the many ways in which we socialise [18], the appeal of wide open natural spaces presented as a response to the standardisation of the territories of everyday life [19], the place of leisure in the social distinction process and also the commodification of recreational sports [20], all contribute to the democratisation of nature sports. However, this democratisation raises a number of issues, an important one of which is the preservation of natural environments, the medium in which these sports and recreational practices take place, and managing the territoriality of those who practice their sport freely. In any event, in 2010, more than 4.4 million French people said that they went mountain-biking for fun<sup>7</sup>. However, by democratising nature sports and structuring sports in this way, a number of issues are raised that are sports-related, social, economic, environmental and in particular space-related and which precipitate the emergence of an awareness of the dynamics specific to nature sport and recreation within sectoral public policies on tourism.

Another differentiation strategy used for coastal resorts that want to become more creative is the mobilisation of the “heritage” resource which has intensified, sometimes becoming the main factor in the destination [21] and responding to authenticity quest of demand [22]. From a standpoint of economic and urban regeneration, the post-modern combining heritage and creation, “*future heritage*” to use Fairclough’s expression, [23], several resorts have developed their own “*industrial archaeology worthy of being preserved and displayed*” [24] from non-traditional heritage artefacts linked with their recent past: natural resources, built environments and intangible heritage, of course (Deauville, Saint-Jean-de Luz or Collioure in France...), but also the industrial heritage of these resorts linked with specific socio-economics conditions (Bilbao, Blackpool, Brighton...) and sometimes all of these forms of heritage combined (Arcachon Basin, Brest, Toulon...).

### 3. Valorisation of Specific Creative Regional Resources: Nature, Surfing, Heritage

In this context of an emerging creative tourism and the requirement for sustainable development, the key issue for development strategies is to seize upon the essential identity of the region in order to mobilise it more directly. The generic resources on which the attractiveness of coastal destinations are based (the *sea, sand and sun* triptych of mass tourism, Turner and Ash, 1975) are exploited in ways that are no longer sufficient to ensure successful tourist development. Furthermore, it is necessary to reveal *regional resources* within the meaning given by the economists Peyrache-Gradeau and Pecqueur [25]. This phenomenon of “revealing” specific resources is a key factor, especially as the resource is always relative, with its use value dependent on its socialisation and its appropriation by the actors involved. These specific resources are the key to transforming resorts into creative areas, in the sense of cultural districts [26]: first of all they are resources of regional identity through which the district can be developed via land use planning strategies focused on innovation and creative integration in an urban context. Sacco [27] insists that these districts must have the necessary governance ability if they are to be developed and maintained.

Having opted for a differentiated analysis, it was decided to use resorts with different forms and created in a variety of ways: an “old” resort (Biarritz, created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the first phase of tourist development in the coastal areas), a contemporary resort (Lacanau-Océan developed from an older town, with the sea front created *ex nihilo* and the forest planted during the “Thirty Glorious Years” post-world war two, using a Fordist design model) and a “new” resort (Martigues, industrial town on the Berre lagoon, approved as a seaside tourist resort for the first time in 2008). In these three resorts, regional resources are mobilised in unusual ways: nature in Lacanau, surfing in Biarritz and heritage in Martigues. Nevertheless they show that the political decision-makers have appropriated new dogmatic viewpoints that structure the neo-paradigm of public policies on tourism based on trying to find a suitable level of habitability in these regions, both for tourists and residents.

#### 3.1. Nature as a Resource for the Development of Lacanau-Océan

The development of Lacanau as a tourist resort grew out of a desire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to tame the dunes and to have access to the sea. The first recreational activities took place in the winter town of Le Moutchic, close to Lacanau lake, before access to the coast was provided at the start of the last century by extending the railway line from the town and building properties [28]. Equipped with basic infrastructure for seaside activities (beaches, hotels, restaurants), the resort of Lacanau-Océan next experienced a considerable impetus to its urban development through the MIACA

<sup>7</sup> Source : Ministry of sports. *Les chiffres clés du sport en France*, December 2010.

(Interministerial Mission for Developing the Aquitaine Coast) (1967-1984). Thus the state incorporated Lacanau-Océan into its measures to create main development units. Planning for tourism began in 1974, after agreements had been reached between the municipalities and the National Office of Forests regarding the development conditions, which were then approved by the State (Augustin, 2007). Two sites were selected in the framework of this development, which revealed the role that natural resources were to play: the seafront (creation of accommodation); the forest, with Artilouse as a designated zone for development, intended mainly for sports activities (golf course, tennis courts, gyms and playing fields). Spatial development and urbanisation also resulted in demographic growth in the municipality as the population of Lacanau increased from 1,306 inhabitants in 1906 to 4,426 in 2010 with the population in the summer ranging between 80,000 and 100,00 visitors. Also, given that the resort underwent a rapid planned development over forty years, it now faces questions in relation to sustainable development. Consideration has to be given to the risk of erosion and the retreating coastline, issues that are now a catalyst for change in public policies in this region, where nature is a key resource (especially the dunes, the sea and the forests). In fact, dune management was a major concern in the development model for the resort produced in the 1960s. The dunes continue to be eroded, especially during severe weather conditions and storms. Pierre Barrère measured an annual displacement of 25 m<sup>3</sup> of sand per linear metre to the north of Lacanau in 1997 (Clus-Auby, 2003). Problems related to the retreating coastline in Lacanau were the subject of studies organised by the regional consultation unit, the Public Interest Group Littoral Aquitain (GIP Littoral Aquitain). First, jointly with the Lacanau municipality, they organised the first discussion forum on “Coastal retreat and erosion of the beaches” on 20 June 2009. Next, Lacanau was chosen as an experimental test site for various possible coastal development scenarios.

In addition to the environmental risks linked with erosion in particular and hence with the retreat of the dune and the weakening of the built infrastructure, the design of the entire resort is called into question since tourism is the main economic resource if not the only resource. Actors interviewed between December 2013 and March 2014 dealt with the question of regional dynamics through the prism of the resort’s urban function which has evolved and which needs to be taken into account, but also with regard to the state of relations between populations and the co-presence that this creates. In the end a “redefinition” of the resort of Lacanau was decided on rather than a “withdrawal” since some types of infrastructure are linked exclusively with coastal activity and cannot be considered in any other spatial context. Indeed, several of those interviewed hoped that the future development of the resort would focus on a long-term solution, given the phenomenon of the erosion of the dune, looking also at managing the co-presence of tourists, residents, day-trippers in the hopes of ultimately achieving an integrated management of the resort, modelled on a coastal

town where the seasonal effect is reduced. Redefining the resort involved studying the tourist accommodation available in large apartment buildings. Today these aging facilities do not properly meet current expectations and practices, and they are very much affected by the shorter tourist stays and the wide diversity in coastal activities that operate throughout the year. With regard to this subject, Cécile Ha, head of press promotion with the Regional Tourist Committee of Aquitaine<sup>8</sup>, stressed this problem of the aesthetics of the housing stock, “several resorts along the coast are faced with this problem of aging, but the long beaches and the ocean compensate somewhat. Nevertheless, the seasonal effect is too strong, in any case the fact that everything is operating at full capacity for only a short period would seem prejudicial to the future of the economic model envisaged for these resorts since the 1960s which differ from the coastal towns that operate all year round.” The challenge is for the municipality of Lacanau to adapt a socio-spatial organisation that will meet the needs of both the permanent residents and the temporary residents.

### 3.2. Surfing as a Symbolic Sports Resource of Biarritz

Surfing is the second example of a resource mobilised by the coastal resorts. It now contributes to the sociospatial organisation of coastal areas in tourist resorts along the Aquitaine coast [29]. It even appears in pride of place in regional management and planning measures. The Aquitaine coastline sustainable development plan for 2007-2020, run by GIP Littoral, includes surfing as one of the aspects that should be promoted in the framework of the list of operational goals for tourist development. A prospective study on tourism in Aquitaine, piloted by the Aquitaine Regional Council and GIP Littoral, established that “surfing has helped to reinvent sea bathing and is a reference point for inventing new and imaginary uses”<sup>9</sup>. Confronted with these forms of renewal of “beach sociabilities” [1], the study recommends “restoring enthusiasm for the Aquitaine coast, complementing it and telling a new story” by mobilising surfing, given that this sport has this “ability to deseasonalise the numbers of tourists visiting the area [given the fact that] these different activities are spread evenly across the entire region”. Political discourse leaves little room for ambiguity as far as local development goals are concerned. The surfer, before being seen as a gifted practitioner of a notable recreational, sporting intentionality is first of all seen as a “client”. This study also highlights the fact that these surfer tourists contribute about 1.5% of tourist spending in Aquitaine and that almost 46 million euros are generated through organising stays based on the surfing theme. In this context, it really is the case that the standardisation, the institutionalisation and the merchandising of surfing must be strengthened. Surfing is clearly a product of tourist marketing,

<sup>8</sup> Interview in Bordeaux, on 27 November 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Howarth Htl – Kanopée Consultants, *Etude prospective relative au tourisme en Aquitaine. Document phase 3 – Orientations stratégiques et actions prioritaires*, 2012.

it is included in public policies and participates in spatial innovation and local tourist systems. Tourism in this segment has to be promoted, the safety of participants must be guaranteed, the image of Aquitaine as the land of surfing must be strengthened and regional development encouraged through the promotion of surfing.

In this context, we propose to analyse the case of Biarritz in more detail, a town described as the birthplace of surfing in Europe. Here we analyse the role of surfing in the socioterritorial organisation of this unusual seaside resort and the way in which this sport influenced the management and uses of public space. *Surf spots*, i.e. those areas in the sea where surf devotees congregate, crystallise surfers' sporting aspirations and give rise to new social demands in terms of recreational facilities. Local politicians are aware of the challenges involved in developing surfing in their tourist resort. Guy Lafitte, deputy to the Mayor, even stated that surfing was, "a key feature of Biarritz's identity"<sup>10</sup>. Michel Veunac, who was at that time deputy to the Mayor believes that, "surfing is in the town's DNA; it is one of the elements of blue growth" and that they must "valorise the role of surfing in the town's cultural, economic, and sports culture"<sup>11</sup>. In addition to this discourse on valorising the history of surfing in the municipality, the sport is also firmly rooted in space and thus contributes to the emergence of a spatial organisation at odds with the definition and the urban and seaside resort that structure the town of Biarritz. Choices made in the context of urban operations and appropriation of public space by tourists and residents bring about a transformation in the coastal landscapes and urban atmospheres where exchanges and meetings can take place. The emergence of areas that are appropriated by the surfers can lead to conflicts in spatial planning [30]. The beach and the *spots*, which are the spaces where surfing is practised, are subject to special scrutiny in terms of management by the local political powers. In fact, the municipality makes by-laws which clearly define the limits of the areas allocated to each group of users of the maritime space. Surfing therefore has its own institutional legitimacy in the public area. This legal recognition also includes recognition in terms of spatial area in that the well-defined zones are dedicated exclusively to this sport. The municipality's desire for development now extends beyond simple discourse. The construction of the *Cité de l'Océan et du Surf* ensures that the roots of surfing are a little more firmly planted in the town despite attendance figures failing to match up to initial expectations

Surfing is therefore an essential product of tourism marketing. The value of the surfing culture is enhanced and used as a support when organising sports events and festive events, with *Roxy Jam* undeniably the most emblematic of all of these. These cultural and sports events give structure to

new forms of social link at the heart of the public space. They represent time to meet others, time for exchanges that shape the rhythm of leisure time of both tourists and residents in the summer. Surfing is incorporated into the framework of sectoral public policies on economic development, on tourism, on sport, on culture... and is becoming a major player in regional development in the town of Biarritz not like in the third world's surf zones [31] [32].

### 3.3. Nature, Industry and Urban Heritage as a Resource in Martigues

The last example is the municipality of Martigues, a historic industrial town at the edge of the Berre lagoon, which took the decision in the 2000s to showcase their tourist resources, as can be seen from their classification as a seaside and tourist resort in 2008.

In the case of Martigues, it is clear that the request for the town to be ranked as a seaside and tourist resort can be explained in part by the will of the former mayor to consider the possibility of opening of a casino; it was also made possible by the change in mentalities in this industrial area. Urban and nature heritage were gradually considered as resources that could be exploited. The gradual (although fairly measured) opening of this town to tourist development follows on from the promotion of the beauty of the landscapes and local heritage begun in the 1980s, at the same time as the industrial sector was experiencing difficulties. As highlighted by the director of the department of town planning<sup>12</sup>, "a change occurred with the arrival of the notion of heritage at the time of the RHI [measure to remove substandard housing, introduced from 1985-1990]. Something changed in the minds of the town councillors, the town was no longer simply an oil town, but we also considered the question of its heritage. [...] MP2013 helped promote this, but a turning point was reached in the 1990s which resulted in a period of redefining." And so the town gradually became aware of its assets and the quality of its landscapes, which have earned it the name of the "Venice of Provence". The "Martigues en couleur" operation, started at the end of the 1980s, is one of the urban promotion measures initially put in place. Finally, in Martigues, "we put the town project and the tourist project in place at the same time. We wanted to create a project for residents and new residents, which is also favourable for our temporary residents, the tourists" (the words of the town's Chief Architect<sup>13</sup>). After urban heritage, it was nature heritage that was the second resource mobilised by the local authority. Martigues was an exceptional case on the Côte Bleue (compared with Sausset and Carry for example) in setting up a real regional protection, in parallel with the industrial development that intensified after the 1960s. A proactive land acquisition policy enabled them to limit urbanisation of the coastline in favour of an urbanisation in limited sectors and in more depth along the coast. Tourist development in fact was introduced

10 Statement taken in a pilot committee organised on 12 April 2013 on the preparation of the "Surfing white paper" devised by the municipal team as a surfing development strategy planning tool which required contributions from those in the surfing world, from the sports movement, from private enterprise, from the French Surfing Federation, and associations.

11 Statement taken on 12 April 2013.

12 Interview with Didier Pagès, 28 January 2013.

13 Interview with Sophie Bertran de Balanda, 13 December 2013.

around three urban sites, with natural breaks being kept between them. The paradox, if there is one, is that ultimately it is the industrial development that has promoted both the protection of nature and the development of local leisure facilities, and then tourism.

Finally, the Martigues region became a tourist region and little by little has laid claim to this identity. This has happened over the last thirty years, along with the municipal policy in favour of valorising urban and natural heritage for the residents – and indirectly for potential visitors. In the mid-1990s the municipality therefore acquired a tourism and entertainment department responsible for promoting tourism in this region as it undergoes renewal. Today, there is a new phase in this evolution, the regional heritage promotion policy also resulted in obtaining the quality Label for Town of Art and History in 2012. While the worries of the past seemed to worsen, translating a need to be firmly rooted in a diversified and complex world, overloaded with information, the heritage argument emerges as the evidence of overinvestment in the local. Heritage holds a central place, since it gives meaning to places and participates in regional legitimisation. To meet the changing needs and activities of tourists, regions now exploit their heritage, seen as a resource for tourist development. Whereas the industrial crisis resulted in company relocations, the development of tourism, by exploiting regional resources that cannot be relocated, seems to be a great asset, which can guarantee local jobs, and this can be a reason for changing people's mentalities on the subject. As well as the process of revealing heritage resources, the town has also been able to communicate about this change and has "claimed" these resources as its own. According to the director of the local public company for tourism and events management<sup>14</sup>, although it may be true that "*it could have seemed a little presumptuous at first to claim that we were a tourist town, perhaps even crazy or unrealistic. But that too is a voluntary, voluntarist discourse, which is also included in a strategy, I think, to develop other activities*". In the 1990s, it was a case of diversifying economic activities in the area, by proposing perhaps not an alternative, but at least a supplement to historic industrial development through tourist development. What we see is a change in the system of representation initiated by local actors: "*there is potential that has been recognised. There is an image of self, an image of the town with a self-representation that has been built up gradually, and that didn't exist in the years 1960-1970.*"<sup>15</sup> As the head of tourism recalled<sup>16</sup>, the town first developed infrastructure and improved the quality of the living environment for its inhabitants before valorising this move outwards by embarking on a process to obtain a ranking as a seaside and tourist resort.

14 Interview on 27 May 2014 with Nicole Girard, resident of Martigues, former municipal representative in Martigues and teacher-researcher in geography.

15 Interview on 27 May 2014 with Nicole Girard.

16 Interview on 27 May 2014 with Alain Salducci in charge of tourism, events, agriculture, fishing, hunting and commemoration.

## 4. Discussion about the Resource Selection Process: Governance and Issues of Rhetoric

These three case studies have shown the phenomena of regional resource valorisation currently underway in coastal resorts. Strategies are differentiated and closely dependent on identifying resources specific to the identity of the areas and to the rationales of governance within which the arbitrages demonstrate a political direction. We therefore question this phenomenon of "*re-definition*", applied to specific resources that reflect the various processes by which a local society is organised and reconsider the collective value attributed to this resource.

### 4.1. Interactions between Players, Modes of Governance

Analysis of the processes for valorising regional resources has highlighted interactions between actors and potential conflicts of use and governance associated with these processes. In particular, the place reserved for this region within its tourist area is called into question.

At Lacanau-Océan, the rapid growth of the resort, sometimes considered too hasty and with a lack of long-term planning, especially in the framework of creating main development units, came up against problems of governance. Lacanau's transitional situation, from a large rural village to a small coastal town in forty years, and the resulting growth in population required local representatives to consider what actions to carry out: should they continue their growth or slow down development? There was indeed a paradox between the need to provide urban facilities to cope with tourist numbers and the low average population present across the year. However, even though the town's population had increased by more than 3,000 inhabitants in a century, and it was trying to continue its demographic growth, it nevertheless wanted to escape the periurbanisation of the Bordeaux urban area and the risk of becoming just a dormitory suburb on the coast. This situation, in parallel with the change in the role of the actors present, characterises a new governance, which remains fairly complex, and which makes it difficult to prepare a vision for development in the medium or the long term. However, the organisational structuring around an inter-municipality tourist office makes it possible right away to create a situation with a central pole, with more links between those involved and a clarity in what is on offer around a brand going out to multipole and complementary destinations, "Médoc-Océan". However, tourist practices are not limited to this area. The key issue for Lacanau lies both in an intensification of its urban function but also in an increase in its command force as the pole of a vast tourist area.

In the case of Biarritz, the valorisation of this historic heritage that is the establishment of surfing requires the public authorities to be vigilant inasmuch as they are the guarantors of accessibility for all to the *surf spots*. This is currently threatened, however, by appropriation rationales

caused by overcrowding in the waves during the summer. This is doubtless the reason why Michel Veunac, mayor of the town since the last elections, believes it is time to “*give to surfing what surfing has given the town*”. Pragmatically speaking, the surfing General Assembly in Biarritz, recognised as a tool serving a participative democracy, is due to be held on 17 October 2014 so that the actors can construct their surfing development strategies jointly and include a prospective dimension. For without a *terra incognita* conducive to surfing at the scale of the town of Biarritz, it is clear that new regulations must be established concerning the development of surfing so that in future, the history of surfing in Biarritz can perpetuate the values of tolerance and communion with nature in which the myth of the surfing culture is immersed.

#### 4.2. A risk of Narrative Reduction

After analysis of the conflicts inherent in the methods used to select and valorise regional resources, we ultimately question the limitations of this process or at least the queries that it has raised.

In the case of Martigues, while the municipality has taken the decision to exploit its heritage resources in order to promote its attractiveness, the question still remains as to the resources selected and staged as internal conflicts that were revealed with reference to the choices made. The choice fell to the joint valorisation of the seaside town and the historic town, over the industrial town, according to a process of narrative reduction which was to the regret of some members. However, as the head of engineering at Bouches-du-Rhône Tourism<sup>17</sup> recalls, “*this is part of the strong identity of this area, it’s an area of contrasts, oxymoron. It’s a gentle violence*”. To this end, several local actors seem to identify a contradiction in policies between the tourism and the culture departments which appear to be in confrontation, whereas they could more easily act to their mutual advantage. This opposition amongst actors around the image portrayed of Martigues, between seaside tourism and industry, seems to have crystallised around the MP2013 event, when a “night of industry” was organised in Martigues. For some this was a tremendous success, testimony to this new challenge, for others it was mildly successful, revealing a lack of image, and there was no consensus for the event as a whole within the local authority departments. For the person responsible for tourism<sup>18</sup>, who admitted he was not in agreement on this point with the head of culture, “*Industry remains part of the heritage of Martigues, we can’t sweep industry away, but from there to making it the spearhead of the tourist industry, for me that’s a mistake*”.

In Biarritz too, one might wonder if this transformation of the public space imposed by surfing and its iconographic planned staging by local actors from the municipality is not plunging the town into a valorisation dynamic for one aspect

of sports tourism while running the risk that tourists may create a caricatural representation of this tourist resort where surfing is in fact only one asset among so many others.

The process for selecting the regional resources ultimately appears to be a determining and non-consensual issue in tourist development policies. To what extent does the rhetoric of creative regional resources prevail over reality in a unifying myth, instrumentalised by public policies (Belfiore, X).

## 5. Conclusion

Analysis of the processes for valorising creative regional resources in the resorts of Biarritz, Lacanau and Martigues has highlighted several observations. First, geographic and environmental location is of paramount importance when reflecting on a framework of permanence for places and their tourist trajectories. In the case of resorts such as Biarritz or Lacanau, which have experienced urban sprawl and spatial densification associated with their coastal activities (related especially to the beach and sports), the current situation of urban expansion and the co-presence of various populations makes us wonder what will remain from creating these places. Furthermore, changes in activities tend to give a different outlook on development. We note that in Biarritz, the image of surfing has encouraged the resort to define a marketing strategy for the destination which leads to focus on a practice that is localising and localised, the definition of an urbanised region; in Lacanau, however, the reverse is the case, and although surfing has helped to boost the resort’s image, the aims of urban development predominate over the reality of this sporting activity. Nevertheless, in both these resorts it is definitely tourism that has enabled urbanisation to occur. In the case of Lacanau, however, State intervention in the form of rapid concentrated development in the 1970s has frozen the valorisation of regional resources, so that now there is a situation of duality in governance between taking urban change into account and measuring environmental risks. In Martigues, the trajectory is quite different, as the municipality only recently decided to become oriented towards new practices by opening up to tourism. In this case, creative tourism practices have become an integral part of the valorisation of regional resources, where transformation into heritage is one of the processes co-constructed by the actors involved.

This multi-case study presents several limitations that are important to take into account in order to define further options in the research agenda. First of all, it would be relevant to study more cases on the French Coast in order to enrich the observation sample and its validity, especially regarding implementation and governance of creative regional resources. Next, there are two issues related to the spatial dimension: first, is the transformation of the resorts limited to the resort itself, or does it cover the entire coastline? Second, the mobilisation of creative resources is restricted as the space has become confused by political issues between municipalities, and the different governmental levels which interfere with the application of European directives. Finally,

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Valérie Carbone, on 10 July 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Interview on 27 May 2014 with Alain Salducci in charge of tourism, events, agriculture, fishing, hunting and commemoration.

this research does not cover enough questions on resistance and on conflicts arising from the tourist development choices made in the 3 case studies; these aspects were noted in the survey and can be dealt with at a later stage.

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