Revista TOMO, São Cristóvão, v. 44, e22700, 2025
DOI:10.21669/tomo.v44.22700
Special Issue - Coastal Squeeze: Beaches under Socio-Economic and Ecological Pressure
E-ISSN:2318-9010 / ISSN:1517-4549

REVIEW REPORT (A)

ID number: 22700
Completed on: 2025-07-03 03:28 PM
Decision: Accept

The article engages directly with the special issue "Coastal Squeeze: Beaches under Socio-Economic and Ecological Pressure", particularly with the topic concerning processes of enclosure of and retreat from natural spaces. It focuses on a historical document-based analysis of the debates and dilemmas that led to the establishment of commercial concessions on the French Riviera as we know them today. However, the authors argue that the “concession” is not merely a contractual act, but rather an apparatus—a historically constituted socio-technical dispositif composed of multiple social actors, practices, procedures, data, texts, plans, norms, and calculations, operating within a field of struggles for power and knowledge.
The central question that animates the article is “Who owns the beach?”, and how the beach becomes constructed as a fictitious commodity. The authors develop this argument by unpacking the various elements that make up the concession apparatus and tracing its evolution between 1912 and 1972. They demonstrate how this evolution—socially dynamic and at times exceeding governmental control—shaped the forms of private and commercial occupation of the French Riviera’s beaches, effectively defining not only who the beach belongs to, but also what the beach is—a commodified space.
Suggestions to strengthen and further visualize the argument:

1. Concession as a state-produced instrument of valuation:

In the case of kiosk concessions in Australia, all concessions are meant to serve the common good. Beach kiosks are not perceived as purely commercial venues, but as public facilities aimed at promoting well-being and providing infrastructure. Part of their revenues must be redirected to benefit the local community.
How does this compare to the French Riviera? While the paper briefly discusses the taxes paid by plagistes, it does not explore the political, symbolic, or moral debates surrounding concession revenues—for example, disputes over taxation, or what constitutes a “morally acceptable” profit margin for concession holders.
Was this dimension absent from political discourse at the time? This seems particularly relevant in light of the authors’ assertion that the concession must be understood as a state-produced apparatus of economic valuation.

2. The article insightfully traces the socio-historical process by which the concession simultaneously redefined the beach as a recreational space and as an object of commercial exploitation. I would suggest emphasizing how the enduring tension between ensuring public access to the beach and reserving areas for private commercial use is what constructs the beach as a contested market—that is, a market whose legitimacy and boundaries are morally and politically debated within society.

3. A graphic timeline presenting the main shifts between 1922 and 1972—alongside the key social actors and institutional dispositifs—would help the reader better visualize the transformation of the concession apparatus.

4. The paper already adopts a temporal structure spanning from 1922 to 1972. For example,

the first historical moment shows how the beach transitioned from being a site of sand extraction to one of seaside tourism. The debate was not whether the beach should remain "wild," but rather how it could be exploited—through private property or commercial concessions. It was in this context that the notion of concession emerged, where leisure as a common good triumphed over industrial development.

Even though formal concessions had not yet been implemented in this phase, the paper could retroactively identify the components of the apparatus already in place. For example:

- (1) Social actors involved (e.g., which mayors, which political parties?)
- (2) Dispositifs (such as letters, administrative procedures, plans)

This same structure could be applied to the subsequent moments of the narrative (e.g., "Conceding… but at what price?"). A systematic comparison across periods—of the actors, dispositifs, data, norms, and calculative logics—would allow a clearer understanding of what changes, and what persists.

A summary table at the end of the article might serve this purpose without altering the structure or tone of the current text.

5. The concession apparatus develops in tandem with the professionalization of the beach. The core debate was not about retreat, but rather: what percentage of the beach could be conceded? 90%? 50%? 30%? And for how many years?

These two dimensions—spatial occupation and temporal duration—are crucial and remain key issues in contemporary discussions around "beach grabbing." They may also reflect broader transformations in how public space is governed.

A genealogy of the concession apparatus touches directly on these contemporary dilemmas. Historical images (e.g., from the 1920s or 1970s, if available), or at least a map of the current situation of concessions, could contribute to this reflection.

This article makes a substantive contribution to the special issue and to the broader field of beach studies and coastal politics. I recommend it for publication. The suggestions above are not mandatory, but are intended to help the authors refine and enhance an already compelling and well-researched piece.

Additional linguistic suggestions regarding word choice and sentence construction are provided in the comment balloons within the manuscript.