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

Special Issue

The making of the coastal concession apparatus: a sociohistorical study of Pampelonne Beach (France, 1920s–1970s)

*Isabelle Bruno**
*Grégory Salle***

Abstract

This article examines the sociohistorical emergence of the concession apparatus at Pampelonne Beach (1920s–1970s), a landmark site on the French Riviera. Drawing on archival research, we analyze how a previously unregulated shoreline was gradually transformed into a (at times contested) commercialized recreational space through negotiations among state authorities, local actors, and private managers. While not conferring private property rights, state-issued concessions authorize commercial operators to temporarily exploit beach segments by installing physical amenities on the sand. Operating at the nexus of public ownership and private exploitation, the concession apparatus created a quasi-privatization, segmenting beachgoers between affluent clientele and ordinary users, while generating substantial profits for private operators and public authorities. Illustrating the spatial and social consequences of coastal capitalism, the case of Pampelonne highlights how recreational nature is constructed as a commodity, deepening social and ecological inequalities on the Mediterranean shoreline.

Keywords: Beach; Concession; Environment; Inequality; Shoreline.

* Université de Lille. Centre d'études et de recherches administratives, politiques et sociales (CERAPS). Lille. France. E-mail: isabelle.bruno@univ-lille.fr Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1451-8316 CrediT: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing.

** National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). Université de Lille. Centre lillois d'études et de recherches sociologiques et économiques (Clersé). Lille. France. E-mail: gregory.salle@univ-lille.fr Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8025-5593 CRediT: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing.

Introduction

Along the French Riviera, beachfront concessions create a visually striking alternation between free spaces and commercialized areas. In the high season, open beach strips are interspersed with enclosed sections occupied by expensive bars and restaurants [*fig. 1*]. These upscale businesses have built terraces on the sand, aligned rows of deckchairs and sunbeds, and marked their boundaries with fences, occasionally *monitored* by private security guards. In this context, the designation *private beaches* has been widely used for decades and persists today, despite being technically inaccurate. In France, beaches cannot legally be privatized below the high-water line, as coastal regulations guarantee public access to shorelines and the free use of beaches (Prieur, 2020). This persistent misnomer reveals a fundamental tension: the beach concession regime operates at the nexus of norms and exceptions, ordinary use and elite privilege, private exploitation and public ownership (Le Roux and Morera, 2025).

Figura 1- Pampelonne Beach, Ramatuelle (France), summer 2019.



Source: Photo of the authors during fieldwork, summer 2019.

The beach concession regime has introduced a loophole in the French "maritime public domain" [*Domaine public maritime*], historically deemed inalienable and imprescriptible (Hostiou, 1990; Pancracio, 2024, p. 122 *sq*.). It appears as a quasi-privatization, where public spaces are managed as private amenities. State-issued concessions do not confer private property rights, but they authorize commercial operators to temporarily exploit beach segments by installing physical amenities on the sand. One might assume that beach concessions have developed within a clearly defined contractual framework, since the legal framework governing coastal rights has deep historical roots. The scholarship traces its origins to Colbert's 1681 ordinance, considered "the first coastal law" (Le Bouëdec, 2010, p. 136-137), or even to the 1566 Edict of Moulins[1].

[1] The Edict of Moulins—distinct from the Ordinance of Moulins, issued at the same time—was a regulatory framework governing the French royal domain. It established a clear distinction between a permanent domain, which was strictly inalienable, and a casual domain, over which the King of France retained discretionary authority following its acquisition. As the legal precursor to the principle of inalienability in the modern public domain, this edict remains a cornerstone of French contemporary public law.

In the Mediterranean, where the maritime public domain is spatially limited due to minimal tidal variation, legal scholars even go back to Justinian's sixth-century Institutes[2]. Yet legal and administrative documents reveal a rather unsettled situation. Despite this long tradition, French coastal law was not stable and remained under construction throughout the twentieth century. This is particularly true for beach concessions: they have variable titles and types over time, with several French terms roughly corresponding to "renting" or "leasing" being often used interchangeably. Moreover, the object to which they apply defies clear-cut delimitation and definition: the sandy foreshore is not inert and immutable, but a dynamic ecosystem that resists sovereign control.

This induces an analytical shift beyond legalism, moving from rules to strategies (Bourdieu and Lamaison, 1986). Beach concessions raise issues that extend beyond the legal sphere, encompassing social practices, economic strategies, moral values, ecological dynamics, technical issues, environmental justice concerns, etc. More than a mere contractual agreement, they involve a network of actors, activities, representations, procedures, data, texts, regulatory plans, and calculative logics—all embedded in power-knowledge relations. This is why we conceptualize this whole set as a *concession apparatus* (Agamben, 2009; Lawlor and Nale, 2014).

Figure 2 - Location of the Saint-Tropez Peninsula (France).



Source: Wikimedia Commons. [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/17/Cotedazur.png].

To analyze this apparatus, we will focus on the emblematic case of Pampelonne Beach in Ramatuelle, southeastern France [*fig. 2*]. Located on the eastern Saint-Tropez peninsula, this 4,5 km-far-famed beach is widely regarded as the birthplace of the French Riviera model, or Mediterra-

[2] Commissioned by Emperor Justinian, the Institutes (533 CE) were an elementary legal manual. While carrying the force of law, this set of legal principles also served a pedagogical purpose, designed specifically for law students. Translated into French as early as the 13th century, it laid the foundation for legal education across Europe for over eight centuries, including the Roman principle that coastal shores were inalienable public assets, a concept that shaped Mediterranean maritime law from antiquity to modern public domain doctrines.

nean-style model of beach concessions. While standing out for reasons that are at once historical, geographical, legal, and reputational, it also reveals broader patterns (Ferrand, 2014; Chauchard, 2015). Based on the premise that "all sociology should be historical and all history sociological" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 90), our approach centers on the making of a still-emerging—and at times controversial—concession system over the half-century (1920s-1970s) when "summer bodies" emerged and the "summer Mediterranean" gained renown (Urbain, 2014; Granger, 2017). This case study thus highlights a particularly telling example of "coastal capitalism" (Kahrl, 2020), while enriching the existing scholarship on beaches as contested spaces (Bidet and Devienne, 2017; Sartore, Pereira, and Rodrigues, 2019; Low, 2025).

In doing so, we aim to overcome the two pitfalls of the dominant narrative on Pampelonne Beach (Bruno and Salle, 2017). First, this narrative tends to disconnect this beach from its natural and social surroundings, as an ecosystem and as a territory. Making it a separate, autonomous, nearly insular place is an integral part of a commodified space. Second, most accounts—including official documents—start the story of this beach in the 1950s, coinciding with the emergence of seaside restaurants. They invariably feature the same key events, especially the filming of *And God Created Woman* starring Brigitte Bardot and the founding of a beach venue called Club 55. While this decade was undeniably a turning point, marking the rise of the seaside economy, such a narrow view obscures the beach's earlier social and environmental history. It starts from the moment when the beach became a recreational consumer good, a moment we historicize here by showing how conflicts over appropriation among various actors—government officials, local representatives, beach managers, environmental advocates, and beachgoers—have reshaped the material and symbolic dimensions of "the only place of enjoyment that the human species has discovered in nature" (*ibid*., p. 384).

Drawing on local and national archives, our study aims to embed the case of Pampelonne Beach within a broader context[3]. This helps avoid a teleological bias, according to which Pampelonne Beach was "naturally" destined to become a famed recreational space and an economic asset. By unpacking a pivotal era, during which the concession apparatus took shape—not without some strife—, our approach investigates the power relations and social conflicts that have rendered the shoreline exploitable, showing how recreational "nature" has been constructed through a process that turned (seaside) land into a "fictitious commodity" (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]).

Conceding the beach: converting *natural beauties into sources of profit*

French historian Alain Corbin (1995) has shown how the beach was gradually "invented" as a desirable space in upper-class perceptions and practices from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. Yet his analysis primarily focused on the Atlantic coast, leaving the Mediterranean on the periphery. By the early twentieth century, Pampelonne Beach was not a no-man's-land. It was not yet a place occupied on a durable basis but a place where people came and went for subsistence and local uses. For instance, farmers collected sand and harvested seagrass, merchants used this part of the shore to ship wine by boat, and workers sought refreshment in the sea during the grape harvest.

[3] We drew on national, regional, and local archival collections, mainly public, but also private. We used the following acronyms: NA (National Archives, Pierrefitte); DAV (Departmental Archives of Var, Draguignan); CAR (Communal Archives, Ramatuelle), and FIA (French Institute of Architecture, Paris); PA (Private archives).

From this point forward, however, Pampelonne Beach underwent a rapid yet profound transformation. In half a century, and despite war damage, an uncultivated space, hardly seen as an economic asset by locals and untouched by tourism, was transformed into a profitable, "assembled resource" (Li, 2014), ultimately becoming the driving force behind regional economic growth. To understand this process, we must examine the formation of the concession apparatus as a state-crafted instrument of valuation, capitalizing on the scenic qualities of the place.

Valuing uncultivated nature: from sand mining to seaside tourism

Converting *natural beauties* into *sources of profit*: this is the ambition expressed by Théophile Barnier, prefect [*préfet*] of Var, in a letter addressed in February 1922 to the mayors of coastal towns in the area[4]. A lawyer by training, representing the central state at the local level, he exhorted them to "safeguard the situation of beaches" against "the selfish" who harmed the landscape through real estate construction or mineral extraction.

> Both through the splendor of its sites and the mildness of its climate, the Côte d'Azur has undoubtedly acquired a worldwide reputation. [...] It is indeed undeniable that the Var's Côte d'Azur is incomparable, encompassing the shores along which descend the forests of the Estérel and the Maures, these two wooded massifs being entirely included in our *département*. This region thus constitutes, at the same time as one of the most beautiful jewels of the natural beauties of our Country, one of the most important sources of profit through the influx of foreign money it provokes. It therefore appears that there is not only a local interest in seeing our Côte d'Azur take the considerable extension that seems to be its destiny: it is also of national interest. You will no doubt agree with me that there is, indeed, a wealth on which we must watch and which it is our duty to encourage the growth of.
> (Letter from the *Préfet* of Var, T. Barnier, to the mayors of the Var coast, February 27th, 1922. [FIA, 343 AA 4/6].)

Through the creation of an *ad hoc* intermunicipal body called *syndicate*, the prefect sought to unite several coastal municipalities around the development of the Var shoreline. This initiative aimed to leverage the tourist expansion of the neighboring Alpes-Maritimes *département*—home to cities like Cannes and Nice—while preserving the Var's unique rural character. As the *picturesque nature* was framed as a resource to be exploited, it was not to be compromised by excessive urbanization.

In March 1922, the Ramatuelle municipal council held an extraordinary session in response to this letter, during which members unanimously decided to follow Barnier's recommendations. Together with other coastal municipalities, Ramatuelle then joined a new syndicate devoted to "the protection, development, and enhancement of the Var's Côte d'Azur"[5]. The following year, the syndicate's first bulletin clearly made beaches a priority:

[4] On the historical role of the French préfet, see Machin (1974), Tanguy (2021). At the time of this letter, France was led by a right-wing coalition government known as the Bloc national.

[5] Extraordinary session on March 19th, 1922 [CAR, 2W 1 D 10]. The term Côte d'Azur was coined by the French writer and politician Stéphen Liégeard in his 1887 eponymous book. Reissued in 1894, it played a key role in popularizing the region. For broader historical context, see Blume (1992) and Miles (2024).

> The defense of beaches ranks at the top of our agenda. The question is of the highest importance for all our municipalities, whose beaches are more or less threatened by the intervention of individuals.
> (Syndicate of coastal municipalities for the protection, development and enhancement of the Var Côte d'Azur, Bulletin no. 1, Draguignan, Olivier-Joulian Print., 1923. [FIA, 343 AA 4/6].)

By *intervention of individuals*, the president of the syndicate was alluding to the possibility opened up by the *Administration des Domaines* (similar to state lands administration) of acquiring coastal land by auction. According to the mayor of Cogolin, a neighboring town of Ramatuelle, this applied to a small beach in his territory: he speaks of a "sale", of "alienation to a buyer", but not of a concession; this word has not yet been pronounced, not even by the prefect. Local representatives did not only blame individual potential buyers but also the central state. By alienating its territory, they lamented, state officials hamper public access to the coast. Consequently, the syndicate collectively adopted a motion—supported by the prefect, who declared that he was "personally and vehemently opposed to this sale"—stating that the state should "under no circumstances" put coastal plots of land up for sale.

Municipalities then faced conflicting demands regarding beach governance. On one hand, local elected representatives were prompted by a high-ranking state civil servant to view "their" beaches as "resources" whose "value" should be increased. They were thus expected to develop and exploit local beaches to attract seasonal residents and vacationers. On the other hand, the shorelines remained under the responsibility of the state, which already utilized them for profit, including through the sale of foreshore plots to the highest bidders. This practice has indeed a long history: it was used on the Channel and Atlantic coasts since the first half of the nineteenth century, although sometimes triggering local reluctance or resistance. A royal ordinance of 1825 authorizing prefects to put portions of the French shoreline out to tender has fuelled continuous controversy around the "renting" or "leasing" of the maritime public domain by the central state (Vincent, 2007, p. 67 *sq*.). On the Var coast, state-directed practices were of particular concern for municipalities because they seemed to contradict the project supported by Prefect Barnier.

Moreover, his successor, Paul Cameau, took a rather different line. In a letter addressed in 1925 to the mayor of Gassin, also located on the Saint-Tropez peninsula, the new prefect of Var argued that "to put up for sale by auction in a public and competitive way" was what actually allows a "sale at the best price". He further explained:

> […] current necessities require that the State draws the most advantageous benefit from its Domain. While it is a rule that facilities are granted to Municipalities to take account of the interests of the populations they administer, one cannot, however, grant them domain properties for prices substantially lower than their real value.
> (Letter from the prefect of Var to the mayor of Gassin, December 11th, 1925. [DAV, 4S 7-11].)

Thus, the new prefect voiced the state's interests in profiting from its domain, opposing local aspirations for municipal control of the shore. When a project to put up for sale the foreshore of Pampelonne beach by public auction [*adjudication*] emerged, it provoked strong opposition from Ramatuelle elected representatives. Notably, however, it was less the principle of the sale itself that generated protest than the terms of the auction, which would not allow control over the identity of potential purchasers. When approached by state officials regarding this matter, local representatives suggested that the foreshore plots might interest future owners from a parcel of land it

had just approved and expressed concern that an auction would potentially open the way to sand mining companies.

Such industrial activity, they warned, would prove detrimental to beachfront property owners, whose lands would be subject to saltwater intrusion, as well as to tourists, who would lose access to the shoreline. In the eyes of local officials, the emerging seaside economy would thus be endangered. In 1929, during a municipal council session, members formally protested against the "project to put the foreshore of Pampelonne beach up for public auction"[6]. At that time, and then again in 1930, the town council proposed a more direct solution: "to acquire [from the state] the totality of the foreshore at a price compatible with its financial resources". The council specifically noted that it "does not wish to make any profit", but merely intends "to keep the beach in its current state and thus preserve its bathing, tourist, and picturesque value[7]".

Ultimately, the auction was cancelled in favor of a state-driven project for developing the Var area, more specifically, the Saint-Tropez peninsula. Aligning with earlier Barnier's recommendations, its objective was to "preserve the aesthetic character" of the region, a precious natural resource that the "tourist industry" should exploit[8]. But this time, local actors were excluded from the process. State officials intended to exploit the coastal public domain directly and exclusively. Importantly, however, it was no longer through the sale of foreshore plots, but through auctioning the rights to sea bathing[9].

As early as 1912, a standard set of specifications for beach "rental" had been jointly developed at the state level by the French Ministry of Public Works and the Department of Finance to standardize previously informal local practices[10]. The aim was to generalize the auction system as a method of allocating to the highest bidders the provisional right to exploit beach parcels. While the words "rental" [*location*] and "auction" [*adjudication*] remained predominant, "concession" was also used. Article 9 of the terms and conditions stated "the cancellation of the concession" in case of non-execution of prescribed measures. As evidenced by archival sources, the beach concession system in Pampelonne really emerged in the late 1940s, when the first improvised beach entrepreneurs began negotiating directly with public authorities[11]. As seaside tourism grew, municipalities—working in tandem with the General Office of Tourism (attached to the Ministry of Public Works, Transport, and Tourism)—succeeded in establishing themselves as a key component of the concession apparatus.

6 Municipal council of Ramatuelle, session of October 17th, 1929 [CAR, 2W 1 D 10].

7 Deliberations of the municipal council of Ramatuelle, sessions of October 17th, 1929 and April 27, 1930 [CAR, 2W 1 D 10].

8 *Programme de l'aménagement de la presqu'île tropézienne*, Department of Var, n.d. [1931] [CAR, 3D series].

9 Sea bathing was believed to have therapeutic virtues, in tandem with natural sunlight (Woloshyn, 2013; Urbain, 2014). At that time, the beach *per se* was not yet isolated as a separate environment: what mattered most was its situation as an interface between land and sea.

10 Letter from the Minister of Public Works, Posts and Telegraphs to the Chief Engineer, the department of civil engineering [*Ponts et Chaussées*], December 30th, 1912 [NA, 19920097/65].

11 Letters addressed to the mayor of Ramatuelle in the mid-1960s suggest that the first beach establishments date back to the immediate post-war period, without counting at least one unofficial forerunner as early as the late 1930s. In a letter from February 1966, one of the very first beach managers (the French word *plagiste* was just emerging, as we will see) mentions a beach operated since 1946. In a letter from December 1964, another mentions an authorization to run a bar-restaurant granted in 1949 [CAR 6W 23/2].

Sharing the spoils: conceding… but at what price?

A dozen years after the Provence landings in 1944, French geographer Étienne Juillard (1957) described a Maures coastline in full transformation. This coastline, which he distinguished from the Côte d'Azur strictly speaking, was changing under the effect of the rise of automobile transport and mass tourism. The author argued that the Mediterranean agricultural economy was gradually being complemented, if not replaced, by a seaside economy. Profit perspectives were shifting, as well as power dynamics.

In this context, coastal mayors advocated more assertively for a local control of beaches. Officially created in 1930, the *Association nationale des maires des stations thermales, climatiques, balnéaires et touristiques* (National Association of Mayors of Thermal, Climatic, Seaside, and Tourist Resorts, in English) relaunched its activities with a congress in 1947. In a stance adopted in 1956, its General Assembly challenged the attitude of the Civil Service, which "secure ownership of the beaches of which the municipalities are dispossessed". The mayors affirmed their desire to supervise the beaches located in their territory themselves "because of their tourist importance and, possibly, the budgetary commitments they entail"[12].

This position was embraced by the president of the association when he visited the Ministry of Finance, accompanied by a representative of the General Directorate of Tourism. The aim was to put an end to the systematic application of the auction procedure, whose results were deemed "unfortunate", since it "leads to the attribution of the concession to the highest bidder but does not offer the municipality all the desirable guarantees regarding safety and hygiene, and in case of public discontent, the mayor is often blamed[13]." The association therefore advocated prioritizing the attribution of beach concessions to municipalities, a claim that aroused serious reluctance from the state administration in charge of the public domain. State officials defended the auction procedure—and thus a system based on free competition— while striving to appear accommodating. They recalled that in practice, they generally favored an amicable agreement with the municipality, as long as the financial conditions were considered satisfactory.

In 1958, a delegation from the mayors' association once again approached the central administration. Subsequently, the latter undertook to draft a new set of standard specifications in collaboration with the General Office of Tourism. After multiple attempts by mayors to ensure the right to exploit beach lots in the context of rising mass tourism in this area, a circular issued in March 1959 partially met their demands. Two aspects of this development deserve particular attention. First, whereas the rights of municipal concessionaires had previously been restricted to installing cabins in addition to tables and chairs, it was "decided to generalize the practice of including in the concession granted to the municipality the exploitations that had previously been the subject of particular concessions: physical education classes, children's gardens, pedal boats, miniature golf courses, etc." Second, the new regulations extended granting durations to nine years, departing from the previous principle of annual concessions[14].

[12] Extract from the note of the Director General of Taxes (Domain service) to the Minister of Public Works, Transport and Tourism about the rental of the right to exploit beaches, July 21st, 1958 [NA 19920097/65].

[13] *Note sur l'adjudication des plages*, n.d. [1956] [NA 19920097/65].

[14] *Note sur les problèmes posés par les locations et concessions de plages*, n.d. [1959] [NA 19920097/65].

In Ramatuelle, the mayor seized this opportunity to claim control over Pampelonne beach. Having consulted with the central administration, he informed the town council as early as 1959 that granting portions of the beach would be financially advantageous. Negotiations were promptly initiated, and by 1960, an agreement was reached for four beach plots, resulting in a '3-6-9' (years) licensing agreement, with a concession fee amounting to 15% of revenues. In 1961, the municipality requested to rent the "entire free portions of the beach that may be sublet" and proposed "a fixed fee as a minimum, plus an exceptional fee equal to 50% of the revenue from sublets".

Three years later, the municipal council formally proposed to acquire grants for the remaining portions of beach still directly administered by the state, with the objective of "continuing the development of the beach to allow its access and exploitation"[15]. All in all, through incremental steps, the municipality eventually obtained what was then designated as a "lease of the right to exploit sea bathing". In turn, the municipality subleased this right to private entrepreneurs on an annual basis. This method was a decisive factor in the formation of the concession apparatus. Yet the procedural implementation could remain remarkably informal, as illustrated by a hastily drafted handwritten letter from 1965:

> Mr. Mayor,
> I have the honor to request from your high benevolence the renewal for 1966 of the beach concession No. 3 (located at Pampelonne – Le Pinet) that I have occupied for 4/6 [*illegible*] years.
> I left Ramatuelle this year, "my" beach is clean and free of all my suppliers, and my debts to the Treasury were settled on time. With my gratitude, please receive, Sir, the assurance of my respectful greetings.
> (Letter addressed to the mayor of Ramatuelle, October 1965 [CAR – n.c.].)

To be sure, the state's granting of concession rights was based on strict terms and conditions, from the determination of the terms of reference to the calculation of associated fees. On the whole, the concession apparatus was beneficial for the state in two ways. It acted both as a mechanism for steady fee-based revenue collection and as a regulatory instrument through which the government could control the activities of concessionaires. This arrangement, however, was troubled by an emerging *public* that began to organize itself to assert collective access rights against the *de facto* exclusionary practices that beach operators had gradually assumed.

The (granted) beach as a contentious space

From the mid-1960s, conflicts over the use of the beach intensified due to the permanent presence of beach businesses on the foreshore. These businesses tended to extend beyond the limits set by law, or at least to take advantage of a legal grey area. Only two decades after the Allied landings in Provence (Operation Dragoon), during which Pampelonne Beach had served as a battlefield in August 1944, local and national newspapers characterized the situation, with some exaggeration, as a "beach war". The "belligerents" comprised not only the state and the municipalities, but also an emerging professional group, beach concessionaires or commercial beach managers [*plagistes*]. The formation of this new, soon powerful collective actor needs to be outlined to comprehend the socio-spatial reconfiguration that unfolded during the 1960s and 1970s.

[15] Deliberations of the Municipal Council of Ramatuelle, session of February 20, 1964 [CAR 2W2].

The proliferation of beach venues and professionalization of beach managers

The French word *plagiste* was coined in 1964 to refer to beach managers operating profit-making establishments. At that time, these actors had already begun to organize themselves on a national level. They were grouped in a *Fédération des syndicats d'exploitants* de plage (Federation of Beach Concessionaires' Unions, in English), which aimed to counterbalance the aforementioned Mayors Association.

In December 1960, following a merger project within a *Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants de piscines et d'établissements de bains de mer et de rivières* (National Federation of Unions of Swimming Pools and Seaside Bathing Establishments, in English), two organizations, the *Fédération des syndicats de plages des Alpes-Maritimes* (Federation of Beach Unions of the Alpes-Maritimes, in English), based in Nice, and the *Syndicat national des piscines et plages à baignades de France* (National Union of France's Pools and Bathing Establishments, in English), based in Paris, drew up a "draft defining the status of the profession of bathing establishment manager[16]".

This text challenged the legal regime that defined the conditions of occupation of the maritime public domain. The "concession of limited real rights", the authors argued, harmed their "productivity" and the "optimal economic promotion" of the coastline. Complaining about an excessively short duration, coupled with a risk of revocability that was deemed to discourage investment, the operators called for a traditional commercial lease or long-term occupation grant. Distrusting of central authorities, they also advocated the creation of local beach commissions, within a fully formalized legal framework yet to be established. This new pressure group could lean on the enactment of a 1963 law on maritime public domain, which fostered "the search for a rational and profitable use of the national territory" (Juret, 1964, p. 16).

At the regional level, a significant advancement in the professionalization of *plagistes* occurred a decade later. As growing stakeholders, they strategically attempted to influence a still volatile legislation to align with their commercial interests. In October 1972, Mediterranean commercial beach managers—two hundred delegates from four *départements*, including Var—convened in Nice and voiced three main demands[17]. First, an improved legal status that would shield them from what they viewed as the "arbitrary power" of the granting authority. Second, the creation of a national beach board to harmonize administrative decisions, considered "often contradictory". Third, the implementation of long-term concession agreements to facilitate steady investment.

These demands articulated a more general protest against what beach operators perceived as the "precariousness" of their professional situation. This claim for stability and recognition was the premise of an enduring grievance that would be reinvigorated with the adoption of the 1986 French Coastal Act—a legislation partly designed to curtail the increasing encroachment on the coast by private interests—and has been persistently reiterated in subsequent decades.

At the local level, beach establishments proliferated during the 1960s and 1970s [*fig. 3a, 3b*]. By exploiting a contentious legal situation, they not only multiplied but also established permanent

[16] "Draft text establishing the status of the profession of operators of bathing establishments", December 9th, 1960 [NA 19920097/65]. Note that the operators mention "private" establishments, not the administrative-legal category of "public service transfer" [*délégation de service public*] that will later prevail.

[17] See *Les plagistes demandent un statut*, *Le Monde*, October 23rd, 1972. As we will see, this meeting took place shortly after the adoption of a new standard national concession contract in June 1972.

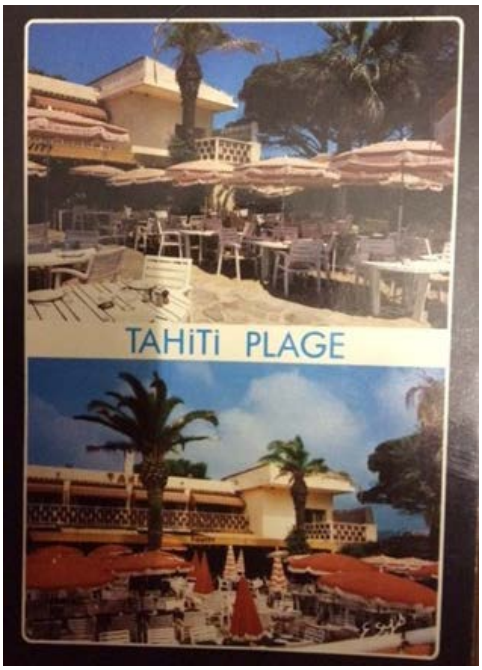
structures on the sand—even outside the peak season—far beyond the simple, removable straw huts or shacks that the law was intended to allow. As early as 1964, 44 plots were rented out in Pampelonne, some of them with fifty meters of seafront. In August 1965, an article in *Le Monde* condemned the "monopolization of the beaches", describing a "rather confused" legal situation and deploring the "downright 'caging' of the beaches and the most famous sites resulting from the multiplication of concessions granted by the municipalities[18]".

Figure 3a - Tahiti Beach" establishment (postcards, 1955 and 1980).



Source: Communal Archives, Ramatuelle

Figure 3b - Tahiti Beach" establishment (postcards, 1955 and 1980).



Source: Communal Archives, Ramatuelle.

[18] "Des touristes manifestent contre l'accaparement des plages", *Le Monde*, August 19, 1965.

As in other contexts, the social trajectory of beach entrepreneurs matters (Sartore, Leite and Rodrigues, 2023). In this case, most were outsiders to the region, lacking local ties; this status not only shaped the ostentatiously "exotic" style of these venues but also oriented them toward an external clientele. They were also prone to bending the rules and frequently exceeding the authorized norms—regarding both time (permanent occupation instead of temporary use) and space (surpassing the prescribed limits in width or length). At that time, few environmental associations existed to challenge the influence of beach operators. Moreover, they often adopted an ambiguous stance—advocating for environmental protection while resisting socio-economic diversity (Chabert, 2016).

This situation sparked numerous conflicts in Pampelonne Beach, as elsewhere along the Mediterranean coast. Albin Chalandon, Minister of Infrastructure and Housing from 1968 to 1972, was forced to intervene repeatedly to defuse tensions. In August 1970, he appeared on television to defend the legality of the concessions, insisting that the beach was public and thus open to all, against the alleged existence of so-called *private beaches*. A year later, faced with ongoing conflicts, he announced a moratorium on new concession requests. Yet the concession apparatus was already entrenched, and the term *private beaches* persisted in public discourse, even being used by his own advisors in the progressive press[19]. This revealed the *de facto* privatization enabled by the concession apparatus.

Beach Wars

Coinciding with the emergence of the French term *plagiste*, the mid-1960s witnessed the press--coined phrase *beach wars*[20]. Centered around several local scandals and legal cases that gained national significance (notably in Saint-Raphaël in 1965 and in Le Lavandou in 1970), this metaphorical *war* manifested in two distinct dimensions.

The first aspect concerned physical access to the beach, which was hindered by private property. At Pampelonne, in the absence of a seafront road, the municipality assumed responsibility for carving out vertical access routes by incorporating some rural and neighborhood pathways into the municipal road network. Local representatives had to negotiate with owners of land adjacent to the beach to secure their consent, achieving amicable agreements that state authorities would likely have been unable to obtain.

The second dimension involved not only access but occupation, stemming from the commercial operation of the beaches. The subletting of conceded foreshore to beach managers—who were installing facilities and erecting fences to demarcate their allocated lots—effectively reduced the area available to the general public who did not patronize these beachfront venues and impeded free movement along the coastline.

In 1966, against a background of increasing incidents between summer vacationers and beach managers, Ramatuelle's town council, considered responsible for the public order on the beach, put on the agenda a "project for the revision of the plots" to "respond to the protests of the public

[19] "We do not want to "shoot the beach managers", but to legalize the situation and find a balance between public beaches and private beaches." Quoted in "Plages privées: nouvelle réglementation mise au point cet hiver", *Combat*, July 30th, 1971.

[20] See e.g. "La 'guerre des plages' à Saint-Raphaël", *Le Monde*, August 27th, 1965; "La guerre des plages doit être gagnée", *Témoignage chrétien*, September 2nd, 1965.

for more extensive open spaces". Four related decisions were taken: (1) "to pursue the removal of all installations unduly remaining in the maritime domain" and "to draw all consequences that will be deemed useful regarding latecomers", suggesting a threat of non-renewal; (2) "to proceed to a new implantation of lots to be rented", while planning to "reduce their importance in order to extend the zones of free beaches", with a view to curb the creeping privatization of the coast; (3) "to define the conditions of subletting by mutual agreement, according to the situation of the plots", to put an end to more or less informal agreements; (4) "to take all provisions for the maintenance of portions of free beach, in particular by partially imposing it as a charge on subtenants adjacent to the unrented portions", a way to transfer part of this burden to beach managers themselves[21].

However, the management of Pampelonne beach proved to be increasingly burdensome and costly for a small rural municipality like Ramatuelle, which in 1965 had only 655 voters and thirteen town councilors, most of whom were small farm owners and/or wine growers. In early 1967, their deliberations indicated that "the maintenance and rental of the beaches pose difficult problems for the municipality[22]". That year, the summer season was once again contentious, as illustrated by a letter sent to the mayor by a Parisian press editor in which he declared that he would file a complaint with the public prosecutor and notify the prefect of Var to assert his right to "free access to the maritime public domain":

> Mr. Mayor, [...]
> I have the honor to report to you the illegal, criminal actions of the operator of the first hut on the right, coming from St. Tropez, which are likely to tarnish the good reputation of your beaches. [...]
> The facts are as follows:
> As I was going to bathe with my family in this place, this individual ordered me to take a mattress or to clear off. When I refused, I was shoved, insulted in public, as well as my wife, and finally [...] I was surrounded by five musclemen who threatened to "smash my face in", me and my three children, if I did not leave immediately. […]
> P.S.: I am not the only one who was treated this way and this attitude was systematic.
> (Recorded handwritten letter addressed to the mayor of Ramatuelle, August 27th, 1967 [CAR 6W 23/2].)

The seemingly local weakness provided an opportunity for state officials to gain ground within the concession apparatus at the expense of local representatives. The same year, 1967, a *Commission interministérielle d'aménagement touristique du littoral* (Interministerial Committee for the Development of Tourism and Coastal Planning, in English) was created under the Prime Minister's authority.

Its objective was to promote a "real" investment policy for coastal development, especially on the French Riviera. As it turns out, it was in Ramatuelle/Pampelonne that this committee planned to test a new legal status for beach exploitation. The concession was then granted to a mixed-economy company, called SCETO (for *Société centrale pour l'équipement touristique*, Central Office for Tourist Equipment in English), in charge of promoting and implementing "sustainable planning". The aim, however, was not to preserve the natural environment of the beach, but to combat the "precariousness" of beach managers by giving them guarantees for the amortization of their in-

21 Municipal Council of Ramatuelle, session of January 21st, 1966 [CAR 2W2].
22 Municipal Council of Ramatuelle, session of January 12th, 1967 [CAR 2W2].

vestments. For this purpose, the option of a fifty-year emphyteutic lease was even suggested[23]. But the SCETO was viewed with a certain suspicion by the Ramatuelle town council. While initially self-described as a study office in charge of developing planning projects, it then attempted to take over the management of the beach. It apparently did so for a very short period of time but the controversial attempt to move from consultancy to effective management quickly failed.

In 1972, at the national level, an interministerial circular modified the specifications dating from 1912. It replaced the legal regime of the *rental* with that of a proper *concession* to modernize and clarify existing regulations. The new concession contract model was characterized as "more adapted to current operating conditions", especially "in the Mediterranean region where the density of tourist frequentation" presented "particularly acute problems"[24]. Theoretically, the circular ostensibly positioned the rights of the public—free access and circulation along the shoreline—and the obligations of concessionaires as foundational principles of the new regime. Practically, it sealed an ambivalent compromise. While it claimed to contain beach concessions within strict proportions, it institutionalized them permanently. The size of the establishments, the length of the contracts, or the rates charged could still be discussed, but not so much the existence of the beach establishments themselves.

Municipalities secured recognition as the "privileged partner of the state", which was now obligated to contract primarily with local authorities. At the same time, a quantitative threshold was defined: up to 30% of beach surface area could be allocated to beach managers, who could install facilities and "make the stationing of the public subject to their use"[25]. This represented a shift from a legal regime in which the state granted rights to exploit sea bathing activities to one where the physical beach space itself, as a socially produced space, became the explicit object of the concession.

In Ramatuelle, the new mayor elected in 1971, Albert Raphaël, negotiated the concession to take control of beach management. Against SCETO, this local figure of the French Socialist Party allied with beach operators to obtain a fifteen-year concession, exempt from domain fees, to undertake the necessary works for the development of a beach of national reputation. After negotiations, in 1974, the *Direction départementale de l'Équipement* (Departmental Directorate of Equipment, in English) sent to the town council a concession application file for fifteen years. It came with an annual fee, but in return, it was accompanied by public support granted by the Ministry of Territorial Development within the framework of a national objective aimed at opening up one hundred kilometers of beaches by 1977. In the eyes of the mayor of Ramatuelle, the attribution of this concession marked a supervision of the beach by the municipality[26]".

This increasing local control, however, should not be interpreted as a simple abdication of state authority through power transfer. As revealed by the specifications' provisions, prefectural decrees, and correspondence exchanged with concessionary municipalities, the granting state maintained vigilant attention to the exploitation modalities of subcontracted lots. Prefectural services

23 "Deux objectifs pour la commission d'aménagement du littoral", Les Échos, June 8th, 1967.

24 Letter from the Ministry of Equipment and Housing (Directorate of Maritime Ports and Waterways), the Ministry of Economy and Finance (General Directorate of Taxes, Department of Land and Domain Affairs), to Prefects, "Subject: concession of a natural beach to a municipality, to a syndicate of municipalities or to a department", June 1st, 1972 [CAR, n.c.].

25 Circular N° 72-86 of June 1st, 1972 relating to the concession of natural beaches to a municipality, to a syndicate of municipalities or to a department ("Specifications").

26 Retrospectively, he would summarize the operation in these terms: "from 1973 on, we took control of [Pampelonne beach]: Raphaël Albert, *Mayor for thirty years (1971-2001)* (provisional title), unpublished typescript [PA].

occasionally exhibited meticulous, even fastidious oversight. Effective law enforcement and regulatory control must be qualified, however, given that annual repetition of identical warnings and sanction threats rarely materialized into enforcement measures. While official instructions consistently emphasized the theoretically and legally "precarious and revocable" character of beach businesses, these open-air beachfront venues had, in fact, established themselves firmly in the coastal landscape. Overall, beach operators have effectively prevailed. By asserting their presence—frequently extending to or beyond the legal boundaries of their concessions—they have durably transformed the social uses of the beach, redirecting them toward a commercial logic.

Conclusion

Who owns the beach? By showing how the concession apparatus took shape in an emblematic spot of the French Riviera, this article provides one situated answer to this somewhat unexpected yet recurring question (e.g., Ritchie, 2021, p. 224-243). The concession apparatus serves as a legal means of "privatizing the Mediterranean coastline" (Selwyn, 2004) without formal privatization. Now, let us outline the two main effects produced by this apparatus. First, it has resulted in substantial profits for private operators while providing a stable revenue stream for local and national public authorities. By the late 2010s, the combined annual turnover of Pampelonne's 25 to 30 beach establishments—depending on the year—was estimated at € 30–40 million, generating € 8 million annually in taxes and fees, including € 1 to 1.5 million in municipal concession payments[27]. Second, commercial enterprises have divided distinct social groups, separating ordinary beachgoers accessing the shoreline for free leisure from an affluent clientele, leaving the "space of consumption" to shift towards the "consumption of space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 352-353) in distinctive beach establishments. By the 1980s, Pampelonne had become (in)famously known as a jet-set beach.

From then on, social stratification would manifest spatially in a distinctive territorial division across the sandy shoreline, even in the absence of *no trespassing* signs. Vertically, the concession system has symbolically deterritorialized the beach, precipitating a quasi-insularization that has established Pampelonne as a recognized toponym in its own right, seemingly released from its administrative connection to the town of Ramatuelle it belongs to. Horizontally, acting as a land registry or cadastral system, the concession apparatus has partitioned the coastal space into separate and competitive plots, in a distribution supposedly designed to accommodate all social groups and tastes.

In practice, however, inequalities have deepened in Pampelonne. Members of the working class are there as employees, not customers, while even middle-class vacationers are put off by the physical and symbolic barriers created by the concession apparatus. As André Gorz (1980, p. 87) pointed out in the mid-1975, "if you want to stretch out in the sun, *you have got to use (and pay for) these industrial* facilities. Enjoyment of the sun, the beach, and relaxation is made dependent on renting them. Capitalism has accomplished the feat of capitalizing picturesque spots and scenery—that is, it has transformed them into capital—of managing, operating and renting them out to *users*. To do this, all they had to do was *industrialize the means of access and use of these sites*"[28].

[27] *Rapport de présentation du SCOT du Golfe de Saint-Tropez*, t. 1 (Le diagnostic territorial), n° 2019/10/02-06, October 2019, p. 106.

[28] Italics are from Gorz himself. Earlier in the book, he condemns the "luxury of the private beach" as opposed to the "democratization of access to the beaches" (*ibid*., p. 69).

Despite the aforementioned conflicts, the situation did not fully fall under the concept of a *contested market*, at least not during the period under study. The discourse justifying beach establishments emphasized economic development rather than the common good or general interest. As the *private beaches* designation suggests, these venues were largely perceived as *pure* commercial enterprises, not as public service facilities. Critical voices were not so much opposed to market mechanisms *per se*—occasionally criticized yet rarely condemned as inherently immoral—but rather to the exclusive appropriation of coastal areas, which restricted public access and use, along with the soaring prices that made beach restaurants unaffordable to much of the population. While the beach underwent commodification, the core moral dispute centered less on marketization than on the exclusionary effects of beach grabbing and coastal enclosure.

In this regard, the case of Pampelonne Beach exemplifies a dual process where *social erosion* goes hand in hand with natural erosion. Over the last decades, Pampelonne has indeed not been exempt—albeit to a moderated degree—from coastal squeeze. This situation calls for a socio-ecological approach that acknowledges how natural processes—such as coastal erosion and sea-level rise—challenge the static logic of the concession apparatus, so as to consider the beach as a critical site for observing how "nature" and "society" constitute one another. The shoreline resists the passive, malleable image projected by the concession apparatus. Exacerbated by rampant artificialization, coastal squeeze is undermining the foundations of the seaside order based on beach concessions, even *causing the disappearance of small beaches in the Var region*.

In other words, while the concession has made the beach available or disposable in subjecting it to commercial appropriation against the *de jure* "unavailability" that characterizes public things (Thomas, 2002, p. 1435 *sq*.), its dynamic environmental context now forcefully demonstrates a *de facto* unavailability. In the early twenty-first century, this "return of the uncontrollable" (Rosa, 2020[29]), whereby natural processes manifest themselves forcefully, has served as a stark reminder to policymakers and concessionaires alike that the beach is a living environment, not merely a *resource* to be exploited. Observations of coastal squeeze at Pampelonne Beach prompted to adoption of a new coastal development plan that now limits the space occupied by seaside establishments on the foreshore.

Funding

This research was supported by the Institut Universitaire de France (IUF) and The Fondation Maisons des Sciences de l'Homme (FMSH)

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank archivist Caroline Martin for her assistance.

Archival Sources

NA = National Archives, Pierrefitte. DAV = Departmental Archives of Var, Draguignan. CAR = Communal Archives, Ramatuelle. FIA = French Institute of Architecture, Paris. PA = Private Archives.

29 As explained in the English version's foreword, the German original title could have been translated as "unavailability" or "unpredictability". The issue at stake is "modernity's incessant desire to make the world engineerable, predictable, available, accessible, disposable (i.e. *verfügbar*) in all its aspects" (p. viii).

Deliberations of the Municipal Council of Ramatuelle, session of February 20th, 1964 [CAR 2W2].

Deliberations of the municipal council of Ramatuelle, sessions of October 17th, 1929 and April 27th, 1930 [CAR, 2W 1 D 10].

Draft text establishing the status of the profession of operators of bathing establishments", December 9th, 1960 [NA 19920097/65].

Extract from the note of the Director General of Taxes (Domain service) to the Minister of Public Works, Transport and Tourism about the rental of the right to exploit beaches, July 21st, 1958 [NA 19920097/65].

Letter addressed to the mayor of Ramatuelle, August 27th, 1967 [CAR 6W 23/2].

Letter addressed to the mayor of Ramatuelle, October 1965 [CAR – n.c.].

Letters from beach operators, December 1964 and February 1966 [CAR 6W 23/2].

Letter from the Minister of Public Works, Posts and Telegraphs to the Chief Engineer the department of civil engineering [*Ponts et Chaussées*], December 30th, 1912 [NA, 19920097/65].

Letter from the prefect of Var to the mayor of Gassin, December 11th, 1925. [DAV, 4S 7-11].

Letter from the Préfet of Var, T. Barnier, to the mayors of the Var coast, February 27th, 1922. [FIA, 343 AA 4/6].

Ministry of Equipment and Housing (Directorate of Maritime Ports and Waterways), the Ministry of Economy and Finance (General Directorate of Taxes, Department of Land and Domain Affairs), to Prefects, "Subject: concession of a natural beach to a municipality, to a syndicate of municipalities or to a department", June 1st, 1972 [CAR 2W2].

Municipal Council of Ramatuelle, sessions of January 21st, 1966 and January 12th, 1967 [CAR 2W2].

Municipal council of Ramatuelle, Extraordinary session on March 19th, 1922, and session of October 17th, 1929 [CAR, 2W 1 D 10].

Note sur l'adjudication des plages, n.d. [1956] [NA 19920097/65].

Note sur les problèmes posés par les locations et concessions de plages, n.d. [1959] [NA 19920097/65].

Programme de l'aménagement de la presqu'île tropézienne, Department of Var, n.d. [1931] [CAR, 3D series].

Raphaël Albert, *Mayor for thirty years (1971-2001)* [provisional title], unpublished typescript [PA].

Syndicate of coastal municipalities for the protection, development and enhancement of the Var Côte d'Azur, Bulletin no. 1, Draguignan, Olivier-Joulian Print., 1923. [FIA, 343 AA 4/6].

Official Documents And Legislation

Circular n. 72-86 of June 1st, 1972 relating to the concession of natural beaches to a municipality, to a syndicate of municipalities or to a department ("Specifications"). Internal document, restricted access.

Rapport de présentation du SCOT du Golfe de Saint-Tropez, t. 1 (Le diagnostic territorial), n. 2019/10/02-06, October 2019. Available on: https://www.golfe-sainttropez.fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/11/RP_TOME1_Diagnostic_Territorial_Approuv.pdf. Accessed on: 30 nov. 2025.

Newspaper And Periodical Articles

Accessed via: Dossier de presse « Domaine public » (t. 1, n. 117, 1956-2005), Fondation nationale des sciences politiques (FNSP), Paris.

Deux objectifs pour la commission d'aménagement du littoral, *Les Échos*, June 8th, 1967.

La 'guerre des plages' à Saint-Raphaël, *Le Monde*, August 27th, 1965.

LE GOFF, J.-P., La guerre des plages doit être gagnée, *Témoignage chrétien*, September 2nd, 1965.

Les plagistes demandent un statut, *Le Monde*, October 23rd, 1972.

Plages privées: nouvelle réglementation mise au point cet hiver, *Combat*, July 30th, 1971.

SIMON, J.-F., Des touristes manifestent contre l'accaparement des plages, *Le Monde*, August 19th, 1965.

References

AGAMBEN, Giorgio. **What is an Apparatus?** Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009. 80 p.

BIDET, Jennifer; DEVIENNE, Elsa. Beaches of Contention. **Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales**, n. 218, v. 3, p. 4-9, 2017. Available on: https://doi.org/10.3917/arss.218.0004. Accessed on: 15 nov. 2025.

BLUME, Mary. **Côte d'Azur:** Inventing the French Riviera. London: Thames & Hudson, 1992. 208 p.

BOURDIEU, Pierre; LAMAISON Pierre. From Rules to Strategies. An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu. **Cultural Anthropology**, v. 1, n. 1, p. 110-120, 1986. Available on: https://www.jstor.org/stable/656327. Accessed on: 30 mar. 2025.

BOURDIEU, Pierre; WACQUANT, Loïc. **An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology**. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

BRUNO, Isabelle; SALLE, Grégory. État ne touche pas à mon matelas! Conflits d'usage et luttes d'appropriation sur la plage de Pampelonne. **Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales**, n. 218, v. 3 p. 26-45, 2017. Available on: https://doi.org/10.3917/arss.218.0026. Accessed on: 15 nov. 2025.

CHABERT, Jean-Baptiste. L'action foncière : une ressource pour des mobilisations riveraines. **Norois**, n. 238-239, p. 43-58, 2016. Available on: https://journals.openedition.org/norois/pdf/5855. Accessed on: 15 nov. 2025.

CHAUCHARD, Cécile. Entre menace commerciale et protection juridique, la plage de Pampelonne. In: BROGINI, Anne. **La Méditerranée au prisme des rivages. Menaces, protections, aménagements en Méditerranée occidentale (XVIe-XXIe siècles)**. Saint-Denis: Bouchène, p. 311-315, 2015. Available on: https://shs.cairn.info/la-mediterranee-au-prisme-des-rivages--9782356760371-page-311?site_lang=fr. Accessed on: 15 nov. 2025.

CORBIN, Alain. **The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840**. Berkeley/Los Angeles: UC Press, 1995 [1988]. 400 p.

FERRAND, Jean-Pierre. La protection de la plage par le droit de l'urbanisme. **Revue juridique de l'environnement**, v. 39, n. 3, p. 447-463, 2014. Available on: https://droit.cairn.info/article/RJE_143_0447/pdf?lang=fr. Accessed on: 15 nov. 2025.

GORZ, André. **Ecology as Politics**. Boston: South End Press, 1980. 215 p.

GRANGER, Christophe. **La saison des apparences. Naissance des corps d'été**. Paris: Anamosa, 2017.

HOSTIOU, René. Du domaine public maritime: notion et régime juridique. **Cahiers nantais**, n. 35-36, p. 99-105, 1990. Available on: https://www.persee.fr/doc/canan_0755-9232_1990_num_35_1_1519. Accessed on: 30 mar. 2025.

JUILLARD, Étienne. La côte des Maures. Son évolution économique et sociale depuis cent ans étudiée dans la région de Saint-Tropez. **Revue de géographie alpine**, v. 45, n. 2, p. 289-350, 1957. Available on: https://www.persee.fr/doc/rga_0035-1121_1957_num_45_2_1900. Accessed on: 15 nov. 2025.

JURET, Pierre-Marie. **Le domaine public maritime.** Bulletin législatif Dalloz, March 16th, 1964. 230 p.

KAHRL, Andrew W. From Commons to Capital: The Creative Destruction of Coastal Real Estate, Environments, and Communities in the US South. **Transatlantica**, n. 2, 2020. Available on: https://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/pdf/16278. Accessed on: 15 nov. 2025.

LAWLOR, Leonard; NALE, John (eds.). Dispositif (Apparatus). In: **The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 126-132, 2014.

LE BOUËDEC, Gérard. Pour une histoire sociale de l'estran français. Du XVIe siècle à la Seconde Guerre mondiale. **Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest**, v. 117, n. 4, p. 135-164, 2010. Available on: https://journals.openedition.org/abpo/pdf/1844. Accessed on: 15 nov. 2025.

LEFEBVRE, Henri. **The Production of Space**. Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991.

LE ROUX, Thomas; MORERA, Raphaël (Dir.). **La nature sous contrat:** concession, histoire et environnement (XVIe-XXIe s.). Rennes: PUR, 2025. 322 p.

LI, Tania Murray. What is land? Assembling a resource for global investment. **Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers**, n. 39, p. 589-602, 2014. Available on: https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12065. Accessed on: 15 nov. 2025.

LOW, Setha (Ed.). **Beach Politics:** Social, Racial, and Environmental Injustice on the Shoreline. New York: New York University Press, 2025.

MACHIN, Howard. The French Prefects and Local Administration. **Parliamentary Affairs**, v. 27, p. 237-250, 1974. Available on: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.pa.a051695. Accessed on: 15 nov. 2025.

MILES, Jonathan. **Once upon a time world:** the dark and sparkling story of the French Riviera. London: Atlantic Books, 2024. 464 p.

POLANYI, Karl. **The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time**. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 [1944].

PANCRACIO, Jean-Paul. **Droit du littoral**. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2024. 424 p.

PRIEUR, Loïc. **France.** *In:* Regulating Coastal Zones. Londres: Routledge, 2020. p. 169-189. Available on: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/reader/download/638a7251-f341-4e43-a801-5549d797e397/chapter/pdf?context=ubx. Accessed on: 15 nov. 2025.

RITCHIE, Robert C. **The Lure of the Beach.** A Global History. Oakland: UC Press, 2021. 525 p.

ROSA, Hartmut. **The Uncontrollability of the World**. Cambridge: Polity, 2020. 140 p.

SARTORE, Marina de Souza; PEREIRA, Simone de Araújo; RODRIGUES, Cae. Aracaju beach bars as a contested market: Conflicts and overlaps between market and nature. **Ocean and Coastal Management**, v. 179, no. 104828, 2019. Available on: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2019.104828. Accessed on: 30 mar. 2025.

SARTORE, Marina de Souza; LEITE, Elaine da Silveira; RODRIGUES, Cae. Economic Evaluation Rationalities: How Life Trajectories Shape Beach Commerce as Seen Through the Bourdieusian Framework. **Mondes du Tourisme**, 2023. Available on: https://journals.openedition.org/tourisme/pdf/5298. Accessed on: 30 mar. 2025.

SELWYN, Tom. Privatising the Mediterranean Coastline. *In:* BOISSEVAIN, Jeremy; SELWYN, Tom (eds.). **Contesting the Foreshore**. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004. p. 35-60.

TANGUY, Gildas. French Prefects: Genesis and Institutionalization of a State 'Grand Corps' (Nineteenth–Twenty-First Centuries). In: TANGUY, Gilda; EYMERI-DOUZANS, Jean-Michel. (eds.). **Prefects, Governors and Commissioners**. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 39-64, 2021. Available on: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-030-59396-4_2. Access on : 15 nov. 2025.

THOMAS, Yan. La valeur des choses. Le droit romain hors la religion. **Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales**, v. 57, n. 6, p. 1431-1462, 2002. Available on: https://doi.org/10.3406/ahess.2002.280119. Accessed on: 30 mar. 2025.

URBAIN, Jean-Didier. **Au soleil: Naissance de la Méditerranée estivale**. Paris: Payot, 2014. 304 p.

VINCENT, Johan. **L'intrusion balnéaire. Les populations littorales bretonnes et vendéennes face au tourisme (1800-1945)**. Rennes: PUR, 2007. 278 p.

WOLOSHYN, Tania. **Le Pays du Soleil**: The Art of Heliotherapy on the Côte d'Azur. Social History of Medicine, v. 26, n. 1, p. 74-93, 2013. Available on: https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/hks052. Accessed on: 30 mar. 2025.

A formação do aparato de concessões costeiras: um estudo socio-histórico da Praia de Pampelonne (França, 1920-1970)

Resumo

Este artigo examina a emergência socio-histórica do aparato de concessões na praia de Pampelonne (décadas de 1920 a 1970), local emblemático da Riviera Francesa. Com base em pesquisa arquivística, analisamos como uma costa antes não regulamentada foi gradualmente transformada em um espaço recreativo comercializado (às vezes contestado) por meio de negociações entre autoridades estatais, atores locais e gestores privados. Embora as concessões emitidas pelo Estado não confiram direitos de propriedade privada, autorizam operadores comerciais a explorar temporariamente segmentos da praia mediante a instalação de infraestruturas físicas na areia. Operando na interseção entre propriedade pública e exploração privada, esse aparato criou uma quase-privatização, segmentando os frequentadores entre uma clientela abastada e usuários comuns, ao mesmo tempo em que gerava lucros substanciais para operadores privados e autoridades públicas. O caso de Pampelonne, que ilustra as consequências espaciais e sociais do capitalismo costeiro, destaca como a natureza recreativa é construída como uma mercadoria, aprofundando desigualdades sociais e ecológicas no litoral mediterrâneo.

Palavras-chave: Praia; Concessão; Meio Ambiente; Desigualdade; Litoral.

La construcción del aparato de concesiones costeras: un estudio socio-histórico de la playa Pampelonne (Francia, 1920-1970)

Este artículo examina la emergencia sociohistórica del aparato de concesiones en la playa de Pampelonne (décadas de 1920 a 1970), un sitio emblemático de la Riviera francesa. A partir de una investigación archivística, analizamos cómo una costa antes no regulada se transformó gradualmente en un espacio recreativo comercializado (en ocasiones, disputado) mediante negociaciones entre autoridades estatales, actores locales y gestores privados. Aunque las concesiones otorgadas por el Estado no confieren derechos de propiedad privada, autorizan a los operadores comerciales a explotar temporalmente segmentos de la playa mediante la instalación de infraestructuras físicas en la arena. Operando en la encrucijada entre la propiedad pública y la explotación privada, este aparato generó una cuasi-privatización, segmentando a los usuarios entre una clientela adinerada y los bañistas comunes, al tiempo que generaba ganancias sustanciales para operadores privados y autoridades públicas. El caso de Pampelonne, que ilustra las consecuencias espaciales y sociales del capitalismo costero, subraya cómo la naturaleza recreativa se construye como una mercancía, y así profundiza las desigualdades sociales y ecológicas en la costa mediterránea.

Palabras clave: Playa; Concesión; Medio Ambiente; Desigualdad; Litoral.

Timeline of the Manuscript

- ✓ Received: May 2025
- ✓ First Review: July 2025
- ✓ Second Review: June 2025
- ✓ Third Review: June 2025
- ✓ Accepted for Publication: September 2025
- ✓ Author revision: September 2025
- ✓ Grammar, Spelling and ABNT review: October 2025
- ✓ Author revision: November 2025
- ✓ Published on December 2025