

The Fishermen's Beach: Cultural Heritage and Contested Identity in a Touristic Place

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the relationship between maritime heritage and identity in a coastal town of Catalonia (Spain) which was a fishermen's town until tourism gradually became the main economic activity (1960-1980). In summer 2007 there were actions to recover the maritime heritage of the beach and, simultaneously, there was a popular movement against the construction of a seafront promenade. Both actions affect the main beach of the town known as The Fishermen's Beach transformed by locals into cultural heritage. Analysis of ethnographical fieldwork data leads to the conclusion that the process of converting the beach into heritage emerges in a context of negotiation of identities by local actors, with the tourism industry as backdrop, and with a clear political dimension.

Keywords: Maritime Heritage, Identity, Tourism, Beach, Landscape, Catalonia

1. Introduction: Coastal Tourism, Authenticity, Maritime Heritage and Landscape

The economy of Spain depends, to a large extent, on tourism. Within this country, Catalonia is one of the main tourist destinations. It receives 15 million tourists a year, mostly in coastal areas. Catalonia is an autonomous region in northeastern Spain with 7.5 million inhabitants and more than 500 kilometers of coast. It has its own language, Catalan, and its own history and culture. During the medieval period Catalonia was an important naval power in the Mediterranean. It also played an important role in the commerce with America in modern times. With the loss of the Spanish colonies in the 19th century, maritime activities declined, with the exception of activities associated with artisanal fishing, which remained very important for the Catalan coastal population economy throughout the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, until the present world fisheries crisis that is primarily affecting the artisanal fishing sector (Andreatta and Parlier 2010; Achenson 2011).

Catalonia has an important seafaring past with a rich maritime heritage, which is little known even by the local population and has been only very slightly exploited by tourism industry until recently. Just in the last few years, local communities have begun to discover and recuperate their maritime heritage. Some volunteer associations were created along the coast to recover old vessels, buildings and traditions related to their seafaring past. This paper analyses the role played by one of these associations in a Catalan coastal town and its relation with other local actors who also claim the beach as part of their heritage and identity. All this happens in the context of an economy clearly oriented to coastal tourism, both domestic and foreign.

But the relationship between tourism and heritage is evident, principally in the modality of tourism known as "cultural tourism" (Stebbins 1996; Hugues 1996; Richards 2002). It is also easy to see the relationship between maritime heritage and coastal tourism. What Wang (1999) calls the search for the authenticity of the tourist experience coincides with the search for authenticity that seek many operations of maritime heritage recovery. This is the case discussed in this article by analyzing the recovery of maritime heritage on a Catalan beach.

The relationship between tourism and heritage is not without points of contention. In the Mediterranean, has often been criticized that tourism development has dominated over the conservation of cultural heritage (Boissevain 2004). On the other hand, as stated by Santana (1998), the conversion or adaptation of cultural heritage to tourist uses often involves the perversion of the original values of that heritage. This is also of maritime heritage, a form of cultural heritage.

For example, Knafou (2002) discusses the case of the legendary *Queen Mary*, one of the largest examples of America's floating material heritage because of its importance in the history of navigation and its size, which was profoundly transformed to become a hotel. Thus, the use of maritime heritage for touristic purposes involves, on the one hand, production of wealth, which creates the basis for conservation of the ship, but, on the other hand, also implies forgery (Knafou 2002: 318). The same has been mentioned in relation to the conservation and tourism use of military ships in France (Roques 2002). In short, as stated by Bernard (2002:323), "the relationships established between tourism and maritime heritage rest on the ambiguity of reconciling preservation with tourism exploitation of heritage."

This article is based on ethnographic research on the north coast of Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain), focused on a specific beach of a small town of 5,000 habitants call Sant Pol de Mar. It addresses the process by which a beach became cultural heritage, which is linked to the various social uses of the area over time and to representations of local identity. The traditional activity of small-scale fishing, with the fleet based on the beach itself, disappeared in 1985, and re-emerged as ethnological heritage twenty years after its disappearance throughout an association of volunteers devoted to local maritime heritage conservation, as will be discussed later. However, the boats that have reappeared differ from those used in the 1980s. They predate the motor vessels that were introduced in the 1920s, are more stylized and equipped with lateen sails. It could be said that they are more "authentic." In fact, people who are carrying out the recuperation of the local maritime heritage and transforming the beach are using this category of "authentic" (*autèntic*) to refer they own works.

The Dutch anthropologist Rob Van Ginkel (2005) pointed out something worth remembering in relation to the notion of authenticity: the fact that, despite all the theoretical critiques that can be made about the concepts of tradition and authenticity, they are still important for people today. Not all traditions are recently invented; neither can authenticity be seen as fixed and persistent over time. Instead, both traditions and their authenticity can be seen as part of a *bricolage* that involves the building of identity. As stated by Van Ginkel (2005:72):

More recently, however, there has been a tendency among scholars to debunk the 'traditional-ness' of traditions, to expose them as 'myths', 'inventions', 'constructions', 'fabrications' or 'imaginings' (cf., e.g., Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983; for a critique, see Briggs 1996). Sometimes this happened in a rather pejorative manner. Traditions came to be linked with mystification and manipulation, and this in turn thoroughly undermined any claim to authenticity. Despite this scholarly myth hunting, we can observe a 'heritage boom' that is part of 'an international preoccupation with reclaiming, preserving and reconstituting the past' and a national and local 'quest for defining identity' (Nadel-Klein 2003: 173).

The disappearance of traditional fishing in the town of Sant Pol de Mar did not leave an empty space. Instead, the gradual disappearance of the fishing boats in the second half of the twentieth century was accompanied by a progressive and massive seasonal use of the beach by tourists. In this social context in recent years, a movement emerged to recover maritime heritage. I will describe the emergence of this movement later in the paper. Tourism, a prototypical modern phenomenon, occupied an area that had been used for the traditional activity of fishing, which had given the place a particular atmosphere. In response to this occupation, local maritime heritage began to be "recovered." As declared by one of my key informants in an interview in a national newspaper, "the goal of the restoration is to preserve the cultural and maritime heritage of the town and recover the fishermen's beach" (Tudela, 2007, translation mine). The words "heritage" (*patrimoni*), "restoration" (*restauració*), and "recovery" (*recuperació*), as well as the adjective "authentic", are frequently used in the discourses of local actors in which this research is based. Their use involves representations of local identity and disputes over the symbolic appropriation of the area. As stated by Bernard (2002: 323), achieving balance between the preservation of maritime heritage and its exploitation is complex, due in part to the avidity with which tourism consumes waterfront.

On a theoretical level, this study can be classed as anthropology of landscape (Bender 1993; Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995; Tilley 1994), as the beach is seen by locals as a landscape located on the border between the sea and the town that is both mobile and abstract. It is a landscape that is filled with significance by people who use it. One of my informants, a gardener born in this town in 1965 in a fishermen family, expressed this clearly during an interview where I asked what it meant the beach for him:

“Well... the beach without the sea is like an abyss. The beach is what makes the relationship with the sea I love it a lot because of the things I experienced and lived there when I was young. I think that it is very special because is the most abstract space we have. I discovered it later on in the life. It is a space that, as it is abstract, has many possibilities. You can put the content yourself.”

One of its significances locally is as cultural heritage. In recent years, some anthropologists have shown increasing interest in the process of converting landscape into cultural heritage. Research has focused mainly on ethnographic studies of protected natural areas (Vaccaro 2005; Roigé & Frigolé 2010). Here I will explore not a natural protected area but an area used intensively, mainly in summer, as it is a Mediterranean urban beach. Analysis of fieldwork data leads, as will be shown below, to the conclusion that the process of converting the beach into heritage emerges in a context of negotiation of identities by local actors, with the tourism industry as backdrop, and with a clear political dimension.

2. The Beach as Cultural Heritage

The beach under study is situated in front of the historic centre of Sant Pol de Mar. Despite the fact that fishermen have not operated from this beach since the 1980's, it is still know as the Fishermen's Beach. It is a small beach about three hundred meters long. The width of the beach varies according to the action of the sea. In the Mediterranean there are no tides, but the width of the beach change seasonally depending on the action of the sea storms that move the sand. The boundary of the historic centre on the coastal side of the town is demarcated by the train tracks. A level crossing provides access to an avenue that has Apartments buildings on one side and the sea on the other. At the beginning of the avenue, there is a shady plaza with benches and a fountain, which serves as a meeting place for elderly people in the day and young people at night. The Fishermen's Beach is accessed from this plaza.

In Sant Pol de Mar fishing was the main economic activity from the 18th century until the mid-20th century (Alegret & Nadal 1987). A local historian considers that fishing was at its peak in the mid-19th century, when Sant Pol's fishermen travelled as far as the waters of the Bay of Cádiz (Rodríguez 1977). In the 1940's, when the town had a population of 1,600 inhabitants, around 300 men worked in fishing, and over 20 small trawlers, as well as other vessels, operated from the beach. According to Alegret and Nadal (1987: 139), at that time “the beach had more fishermen than any of the other surrounding beaches.”

However, this activity gradually diminished with the emergence of tourism in the 1960s. This coincided with the construction of a fishing port in Arenys de Mar, a neighboring town. In all the towns of this region, the fleets operated from the beach until they moved little by little to the seaport of Arenys de Mar that was finished in 1961. To do that, the fishermen were forced to replace their old wooden vessels, which do not resist being in the water permanently, with new ones. In the 1960's the touristic uses of beaches, added to the obvious advantages of operating from a seaport, pushed most fishermen of this region to finally leave their beaches and go to the port. In Sant Pol de Mar, for example, the last fishing boat operated from the beach until the summer of 1985, when its owner retired.

The decline of local fishing was visibly evidenced by a large wooden boat that was abandoned on the sand to rot until 1989, when the Mayor sent municipal workers to burn it with petrol. The image of the old wooden boat ablaze on the beach contrasts with the movement to recover the town's seafaring past. Twenty two years after that bonfire was lit, this work is being undertaken by a local association that is supported by the Barcelona Provincial Government (*Diputació de Barcelona*), which funded some restoration works. All of the remaining fishing and traditional sailing material is now under heritage protection and, as there are no large fishing boats to restore, replicas have been constructed with considerable human effort and resources.

The Catalan name of this local association is *A Tot Drap*, which means full speed ahead with sails unfurled. Its president is a local fisherman, one of the few Sant Pol fishermen still remaining, who, as all the others remaining, has his boat moored in the port of Arenys de Mar. However, most members of this association are not fishermen, but people in this town with different trades such as architects and doctors, electricians, artists, computer programmers, businessmen and so on. They are mainly men and also some women, mostly in their fifties. The association was founded in 2001 to “promote the conservation and dissemination of maritime heritage,” according to its webpage.¹ It has approximately 50 members, of whom 10 or 12 are very active. They have restored several small fishing boats (7 to 9 metres), called *llaguts* in Catalan.

These are usually small motorized fishing boats built in the mid-20th century. The group installs the equipment needed for lateen sails, which were traditionally used in the Mediterranean until motors were introduced at the decade of 1920. Thus, the group converts the boat into what they call a traditional vessel, despite its being just a motorized fishing vessel equipped with lateen sails rather than a real fishing boat with such sails. In fact, the category of “traditional vessel” is disputed in Spain, especially by Apraiz, Aguirre and Böell (2000) and Apraiz (2007). These authors call into question whether the category of traditional vessel can be applied to vessels substantially different from the old models. As stated by Apraiz (2007: 234), “Instead of investigating our maritime memories we are reinventing: Replicas of originals that have never existed, sizes and designs of sails never used, Latin or Breton gears (in Basque boats), oversized paddles, maneuvers never conducted, etc, etc, etc.” (Translation mine). Moreover, the association has reconstructed a *sardinal* that dates back to 1905. A *sardinal* is a typical local fishing boat for catching blue fish used in the 19th century for long fishing trips from Catalonia the Gulf of Lion in France or even longer ones through the Strait of Gibraltar to the Atlantic coast of Andalusia. Finally, *A Tot Drap* also organizes many activities related to maritime and fishing heritage, including traditional boat events, mainly involving *llaguts* with lateen sails, and demonstrations of traditional fishing methods.

The association’s most important project consisted in restoring in 2007 a small building that is situated on the beach. Originally, this building was constructed in 1932 to house the two engines used to tow the boats out of the sea onto the beach with the help of poles or beams covered in grease. The engine replaced the pair of oxen that were traditionally used to pull the fishing boats. Consequently, it was commonly known as the “engine house” (*la caseta del motor*). After the restoration, the official name of this house is “Interpretive Center of Traditional Launching” (*Centre d’Interpretació de la varada tradicional*). This 30 m² building stands in the upper central area of the Fishermen’s Beach and backs onto one of the train station’s platforms. The three other walls have large windows to ensure maximum visibility to the men who operate the engine from inside the house. The view from inside the building is of the entire beach to the east and west and the horizon of the sea.

Both the interior and exterior of the building were restored. The roof and the large windows were replaced. Inside, the traces of petrol were removed, the engines were cleaned and tuned and a new lighting system was installed. Members of the association decorated the freshly painted walls with fishing-related objects, photographs and information boards that describe the traditional activity of beaching boats. On the day of the inauguration, in August 2007, I could hear an old woman complaining about how they had thrown away the table where the fishermen had gathered to play cards when bad weather prevented them from going out fishing. This small detail demonstrates the contrast between maritime culture as lived experience and maritime culture as cultural heritage. The exterior of the building was also renovated and the access was improved. Old ropes and pieces of chain were removed and replaced by perfectly coiled ropes next to new beams of wood, like those used to beach the boats. Fiberglass boats were moved out of the field of vision and only restored boats with lateen sails were beached close to the building. Among the fiberglass boats that were displaced was a boat where a poor, homeless, old fisherman lived. According to those interviewed, this old man, a member of a local fishing family, had lost everything gambling. This boat had been situated close to the engine house, as it provided protection from the weather and a certain amount of privacy for the old man. However, as a result of the restoration of the engine house, the boat was moved far out of view from the “Interpretive Center” and now lies exposed to the wind and curiosity of passersby. As I have been able to confirm, this provokes irony rather than compassion amongst local people. We are, therefore, dealing with the most direct victim of the traditional fishing heritagization process, that is, a failed fisherman who lives not in an old wooden boat but rather a modern fiberglass one.

The engine house was officially inaugurated in August 2007 the “Interpretative Center” mentioned above. The restoration had the support of the curator service of the Maritime Museum of Barcelona and, as I said before, financial support of the Barcelona Provincial Government (*Diputació de Barcelona*). After its inauguration, the association began the procedures to get it officially declared Catalan Heritage by the Government of Catalonia (*Generalitat de Catalunya*), which is responsible for Cultural Affairs, as part of Catalan Cultural Heritage List (*BCIN*), which implies certain guarantees of protection and conservation. Currently, these procedures are still ongoing in a positive way. In November 2011 it reached an intermediate level of protection when it was recognized as a “Unique Good” (*Bé Singular*) by the General Direction of Cultural Heritage, Department of Culture, Government of Catalonia, the step immediately prior to full inclusion in the Catalan Cultural Heritage List.

The restoration of the engine house and its transformation into a cultural heritage building are part of a project to give elements heritage status that is not limited to a specific building. Instead, this status extends to the surrounding environment. In other words, the production of heritage involves the beach and the entire seafront. Thus, the landscape itself is now legally considered heritage. According to Christopher Tilley (2006), identity, landscape and heritage are closely linked. The purpose of the processes of transforming landscape into heritage is “to preserve such a romanticized identity” (Tilley 2006:14). The making of heritage process acts as a symbolic return to the past. Landscape provides authenticity. It represents stability in the face of change. The uniqueness of the beach plays a key role in the wealth of local culture as it is preserved in the form of heritage.

The following interchange from my fieldwork is useful to illustrate this. In 2007, on summer evenings, I used to visit the engine house to see how the work of restoration was getting on. In their free time members of the association were carefully reforming, painting and finishing off the last details and preparations for the inauguration. As the inauguration day approached it was easy to see their excitement. It was on one of these evenings that I commented on how everything was going to be beautiful when finished. One of the most active members of the association replied: “Yes, especially when the Red Cross post, toilets, showers and bar have been removed from the beach.”

This commentary highlights a clear feeling of appropriation of the beach on the part of a participant in the heritage-making process. The Fishermen’s Beach was awarded the European Foundation for Environmental Education’s Blue Flag. In order to receive this award a beach must have installations such as showers, toilets, lifeguard, first aid post and wheelchair access right down to the seashore. None of these elements have anything to do with traditional fishing and navigation. Therefore, the beach’s heritage project must be combined with other uses of the beach some of which involve elements that are contradictory to the project. The heritage-making process of the beach aspires to be pure and authentic and anything that does not fit in with it, for example, the fiberglass boats and the homeless fisherman’s boat mentioned earlier, are considered a hindrance.

On one hand, the appropriation of the beach to be transformed into heritage enters into conflict with other uses of the beach. On the other hand, however, the appropriation of the beach as a landscape of great symbolic value is shared by most of people in the town, as can be seen in a conflict over the seafront promenade discussed in the next section. It is important to mention that I am not talking of a private appropriation of the beach but rather a collective one.

3. From the Sand to the Political Arena

The beach has always played an important role in the economic life of the town of Sant Pol de Mar. Probably as a result of this, it is also a place where political and economic social conflicts have frequently arisen. In the past, this was due to the fact that it was the base for the fishing fleet, and therefore essential to the survival of a large segment of the population. Many people still depend on the beach, as much of the local economy is based on coastal tourism, the main assets of which are the “sun, sand and sea.” As we will see in this section, the sand is identified metonymically with the entire town by local inhabitants and acts as a sign of Sant Pol de Mar identity, as a Catalan Town. Discussions about local and national identity use the beach as a symbol that should be defended from outside threats. As we will see, the outside threats came from the Spain’s Railway Company (*Renfe*) and the Spanish Ministry of the Environment. Both, with the support of the Town Council, planned to construct a seafront promenade parallel to the railway. This plan was heavily contested by an important part of local residents, although not all the people in the town were against it.

Summer 2007 was approaching when an event broke the apparent tranquillity of this coastal town. One morning in June, a large Ministry of the Environment (Directorate General of Coasts) billboard appeared next to the engine house announcing the renovation of the town’s seafront, with a budget of almost two million Euros. The reaction was unexpected. After just a few days, the billboard had been covered in graffiti in protest which read: “No more stones.”

The seafront regeneration project consisted of strengthening the seawall, which protects the train tracks, by means of a platform 4 meters wide and 400 meters long. This platform was designed as a walkway or sea promenade that would be separated from the train tracks by a 1.2 meters high wall. It would connect the Fishermen’s Beach with the beach to the west of the town and would have underpasses at both ends. The project had been approved by the Town Council, the Ministry of the Environment’s Directorate General of Coasts and *Renfe*, Spain’s Railway Company.

This project responded, on one side, to the need to protect the railway from the sea storms that affect this area. The people who were against the project argued that the beach would disappear under the stones in a wall designed solely to protect the train tracks from sea storms. In fact, strong storms, which are particularly common in autumn, stop the trains from running fairly frequently. This problem was the main reason for drawing up the project. It has existed since the coastal railway was constructed in the second half of the 19th century. In the mid-1990's Renfe and the Town Council find a permanent solution to resolve problems caused by sea storms on the railway. In 2003 the Town Council presented a waterfront remodeling project that was approved by a majority vote in the Council. The procedure followed slowly being approved in 2005 by the Ministry of Environment, Directorate General of Coasts, passing through a period of allegations and the final approval in 2006. Finally in 2007 the work contract was awarded to the company *Constructora Hispánica S.A.*, and we arrive to the point that I am describing here, in summer 2007.

The defenders of the project argued that the seawall reinforcements were essential. They highlighted the advantages of the resulting sea promenade and stated that the work would not affect the beach, as the increasing lack of sand was due to more general factors, such as changes in the dynamics of the seabed caused by the construction of marinas in the region. On more than one occasion I heard the Mayor arguing that the construction of the promenade was also an opportunity to solve the problem of pedestrian traffic through the town center. Like other towns in the area, the historic downtown streets are very narrow, dating back to the 17th century or even earlier. In Sant Pol de Mar's downtown the combination of car and pedestrian traffic is quite difficult and even dangerous. These traffic problems are accentuated in the summer holiday season, when the population is doubled by the presence of visitors. The construction of the promenade was seen as having a double advantage. While it would solve the problems caused by sea storms on train traffic in the autumn and also solve the problems of vehicles and pedestrians through the town center in the summer months. In favor of the project were the parties that supported the Mayor and members of the local population who considered it a priority to solve the problems of mobility in the center of town, providing thereby a more pleasant atmosphere during the summer. However, a significant number of the owners of shops in the town center, despite being among those who most directly favored tourism, were against the project. Although never publicly stated, it seems clear that these opponents thought that turning pedestrians towards the sea promenade would result in economic loss by decreasing purchases in their stores. Later, an effort by the Council to limit access of motorized vehicles on the streets of the town center also encountered opposition from the town's Merchants Association.

The seafront renovation project ran into strong opposition from a significant portion of the town's population. The field of political antagonism was structured as follows. Against the project were placed the local political parties that had not supported the Mayor, especially a local party with no regional or national affiliation to any other political party, formed by people with diverse political ideologies and led by representatives of local trade and industry. As already noted, among the opponents were some of the shops owners. One among them, a young merchant of separatist ideology² who owned a take-away pizzeria located on the main street of the town center, organized a forum on the Internet that was very belligerent against the project. The slogan of this Internet forum was "Sant Pol, neither city nor Spanish" (*Sant Pol, ni ciutat ni espanyol*).³ This slogan expresses a rejection of urban growth ("neither city") and also an assertion of Catalan identity and independence ("nor Spanish"). Many of the posts against the project and those responsible for it that could be read in this forum alluded to Catalan independence and interpreted the seafront renovation project as an attack from Spain against the town of Sant Pol de Mar, for example: "the Spaniards of the train and the Directorate General of Coasts want to finish eating the little sand that there is in front of Consulat de Mar Street".⁴

The Internet forum was not the only vehicle for protest. Those who opposed the project began to organize themselves into a lobby called "Platform⁵ Sant Pol A Village" (*Plataforma Sant Pol Un Poble*), and the movement against the project rapidly developed into an open conflict. Discussions on the topic could be heard on a daily basis in the bars, shops and even the streets. Meetings, events, efforts to collect signatures in protest and demonstrations took place against the project. Town Council meetings began to be heavily attended, with booing and personal defamatory remarks aimed at the Mayor and the Urban Development Counselor in particular. The press also reported on the protests: "Politics will destroy the beach" or "Slogan: save the beach," were some of the alarming headlines published that summer by Catalan regional newspapers such as *Avui* or *El Punt Diari*.⁶ An intermediate position was held by a neighborhood association called "The Ants" (*Les formigues*), which focuses on environmental issues and is highly involved in aspects of urban development.

This association did not take a stance for or against the project, but requested a more detailed technical study of the effects of the work on the beach. After a summer that was intensely political, as the two sides were strongly divided into support for the Town Council and the sea promenade project or against them, this intermediate position gained ground. The Ants acted as mediator between the Town Council and the Platform against the project. A unanimous decision was reached by all parties involved at the end of September. The Town Council asked the Directorate General of Coasts to suspend the project for six months, during which a special committee would be formed to find the best solution to the controversial project. This committee would be advised by experts from the *Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya* (BarcelonaTech UPC, in its official translation). However, the problem was unexpectedly solved before this six month period had concluded when the Directorate General of Coasts informed the Town Council that it was going to halt the project definitively. This news was received with evident euphoria by the opposition, whose members interpreted it as a victory due to their pressure. In contrast, a statement by the Town Council, ruled by the moderate Catalan nationalist party *Convergència i Unió* (Convergence and Union), concluded that the Spanish State had withdrawn funds in order to allocate them to other activities, in the context of a debate on shortfalls in Catalan infrastructure.

To understand the political context of this situation, additional historical details are needed. In 2007 work was carried out on the high speed railway's route into Barcelona. This caused constant incidents and delays in the operation of the local trains that serve a metropolitan area with three million inhabitants. Along with other serious incidents, such as a power cut that left 300,000 customers in Barcelona without electricity for 60 hours in July 2007, this prompted a debate on the state of infrastructure in the region. In Catalonia, it was considered—particularly by the nationalist and independentist parties—that these infrastructure problems were the result of many years of underinvestment, due to the central government's lack of interest in Catalonia. This opinion is illustrated by an election slogan of the pro-independence party *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Republican Left of Catalonia), which was posted on billboards in areas surrounding all local train stations: "I'm late to work again because of Renfe, that's why I want independence." It was also reflected in the more subtle slogan by the moderate nationalist party *Convergència i Unió* (Convergence and Union), which was also posted close to local stations. In this case, the following phrase was written over the image of a clock: "Renfe is robbing... your time." This is similar to the nationalist slogan "Spain is robbing us" (*Espanya ens roba*), which refers to the opinion that the balance of tax is unfavourable to Catalonia.⁷

These examples show that the nationalist and separatist parties identify the railway company, Renfe, as representative of the oppressive central State, Spain. At a local level, in Sant Pol de Mar, for the opponents to the project, especially those who participated in the Internet forum against the project, the primary aim of the project was to protect the railway line, interpreted as a threat from the Spanish State to the beach, the environment, but also the identity of the town, as discussed below. The double use of the seafront renovation, as a wall for the railway and as a promenade for the tourist, resulted in a unification of the rejection to Spain with the rejection of urban growth promoted by tourists' use of a touristic place.

I would like to describe now some of the activities undertaken by the *Plataforma Sant Pol un poble* against the seafront regeneration in order to illustrate the role of the notion of identity linked to the beach. One graphic image is as follows. At the end of a street demonstration, the representatives of the Platform against the seafront promenade planted a bucket of sand from the beach in front of the Town Hall with a plaque that read: "The beach, 1599-2007."⁸ The town was founded in 1599, when it separated from the inland town of which it had been a fishermen's neighborhood. The beach, an element of the landscape that has a geological time scale, was made to coincide with the time scale of historical chronology, through the identification of the origin of the beach with that of the town. Thus, if the beach was destroyed in 2007, it was implied that this would also mean the end of the town itself. In other actions, coffins, Catalan flags and protest banners were placed on the beach.

One poster announcing a protest to be held on August 2, 2007 consisted of a photomontage showing General Franco attending a military parade. Instead of tanks, the image showed local trains rolling out under the Romanesque chapel, the town's icon which stands on a hill overlooking the beach, as if they had been sent to attack the beach and, by the symbolic equation of beach with town, to invade the town itself.⁹ On August 11th, another call for a demonstration against the project showed another photomontage made with Spanish flags, trains, the Spanish Ministry of Environment and the local Urban Development Counselor dressed as clowns, and a roll of bills, calling the people to express them "against the destruction of our waterfront."¹⁰

With these examples I wanted to show the role of the beach in the local identity and how coastal environment and the beach became symbols for independentist in front of a presumed assault of the Spanish State, through the railway company and the Spanish Ministry of Environment, Directorate General of Coasts. As we have seen, the purpose of this project was to protect the train's traffic and facilitate pedestrians' mobility during the summer season, when the town receives many visitors coming mainly from the nearest city, Barcelona, by far the largest city in the autonomous region of Catalonia and its capital, but also from other places in Catalonia, the rest of Spain and Europe. What do I want to emphasize is that the beach is seen by local population as part of their own identity. The beach is transformed into cultural heritage when they are attempting to remain as "A Village" by means of defending the beach. It is in this point that the two discourses meet: the discourse on maritime heritage recovery by the cultural association *A Tot Drap* and the discourse on the defense of the same beach by the platform *Sant Pol, un poble* organized as a reaction against the construction of the sea promenade which also claimed beach as a symbol of local identity.

4. Conclusions

In this article I have shown a very specific example of a small beach in a small town where life is usually pretty quiet and nothing seems to happen. Today it is one of the towns chosen by people from Barcelona looking for a quieter place to live than the great city. It is a seaside town located relatively close to Barcelona (50 km), and is well-connected by rail and highway. But in summer, Sant Pol de Mar does not escape from the phenomenon of tourism and its population doubles in number. Tranquility of winter is transformed into the bustle summer, with streets full of people, traffic congestion, queuing at the door of a tiny bakery to buy some bread, etc. All this will sound familiar to anyone who has spent summer days at any coastal small town in southern Europe. What, in my opinion, makes the case presented here relevant is to see how, in this social context, there is a movement to recover the maritime heritage. It is not a movement promoted by the administration, but by citizens in the form of a voluntary association working for, as we have seen in their own words, "the recovery of the maritime heritage" lost when traditional activities like artisanal fishing ended in the town. Fishery was replaced by tourism as the main activity on the beach from the 1960's onwards. But at the same moment that this heritage recovery movement appears –the association *A Tot Drap* was created in 2001 but their main project, the Interpretive Center of Traditional Launching, was inaugurated in 2007–, a specific conflict caused by an intervention on the town's waterfront brings out a claim by townspeople that the beach is part of local identity and heritage, mixed with feelings of rejection of Spain, seen as an oppressive State by separatists, who see in this project external aggression (with internal accomplices) to their coastal landscape.

To conclude I would like to go back to the anthropology of landscape and, specifically, to Christopher Tilley (1994, 2006) work, which showed that identity, landscape and heritage are very closely related. According to Tilley (2006:14), transformation of landscape into heritage aims "to preserve such a romanticized identity, a search for the purity of ethnic groups and continuity in the face of change." The people of the Platform *Sant Pol, un poble*, as we have seen, when they claims that they want to remains a village ("neither city"), maintains its preference for a model of no-change, and to continue to be an old idealized fishermen village. This is tied to the defense of a Catalan national identity ("nor Spanish") in their own slogan. Meanwhile, the people of *A Tot Drap* association who works to preserve the local maritime heritage, in turn, also works to maintain an idealized image of the Fishermen's Beach, as it was before the arrival of tourism almost half a century ago.

The conversion of the landscape into heritage acts as "a symbolic return to the past" (Tilley, 2006:14), which is frequently a defensive strategy against the uncertainty of the present. According to Tilley, landscape provides authenticity, which represents stability in the face of change. In the first section of the article I have also argued that authenticity is something important for local populations. With the case described here, I tried to show to which extent this is true. Tilley (2006: 15) adds that the type of landscape that is finally produced is inextricably linked to politics of identity, to ideas about who people would like to live with and whom they want to exclude, on who forms part of the group and who is left on the outside. In the case described above, conflict over the construction of a seafront promenade arose in response to a perceived attack by the Spain's railway company and the Spanish Ministry of Environment. As we have seen, at a symbolic level, the train represents a threatening State that is far removed from the problems of the beach and the coastal landscape. Furthermore, the association working for the recovery of maritime heritage also defines which objects and which boats can stay at Fishermen's Beach and which instead should be excluded, in a project to transform the beach in a sort of outdoor museum or the reconstruction of an *authentic* fishermen's beach.

Through the arrangement of old restored boats on the beach, an ideal beach landscape has been created. This process occurred in an ideological context in which, as we have seen, the beach becomes a sign of identity of the town, the place where the tourists plant their beach umbrellas in the sand, like conquistadors their flags.

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¹ <http://www.atotdrap.cat/node/2> [Accessed on 20/01/2012].

² Catalonia is nowadays one of the seventeen “Autonomous Communities” in which Spain is divided. Each community has its own regional government and parliament. In Spain there are three autonomous communities, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia, where there is an important nationalist feeling for independence from Spain. There are several separatist parties, the most important of which is the Republican Left of Catalonia (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*), which was, between 2003 and 2010, part of the Government of Catalonia in coalition with the Catalan Socialist Party (*Partit dels socialistes de Catalunya*) and the Initiative for Catalonia-Greens (*Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds*). However, the moderate nationalist party Convergence and Union (*Convergència i Unió*), which currently governs in Catalonia, has an ambiguous position in favor of the independence of Catalonia, with being clearer in its youth branch being more explicitly separatist than other branches. The last large show of strength of the Catalan separatism movement was a demonstration through the streets of Barcelona on July 10, 2010 that brought together 1,5 million in favor of the right to self-determination.

³ <http://webs.racocatala.cat/santpolunpoble/> [Accessed on 26/01/2012]

⁴ <http://santpolunpoble.blogspot.com/2007/07/mes-dinamic-mes-combatiu-el-blog-de.html> [Accessed on 26/01/2012]

⁵ A train platform and a political platform do not use the same word in Catalan, in which political platform is *plataforma* and train platform is *andana*.

⁶ G. Aguilera, “La política destrossarà la platja de pescadors”, *Avui*, 29.02.2007; T. Márquez, “Consigna: salvar la platja de Sant Pol. Rebuig veïnal a un projecte de passera”, *El Punt Diari*, 15.08.2007

⁷ See as an exemple: <http://www.espanyaensroba.cat/> [Accessed on 27/01/2012].

⁸ T. Márquez, “Consigna: salvar la platja de Sant Pol. Rebuig veïnal a un projecte de passera”, *El Punt Diari*, 15.08.2007

⁹ The poster announcing the protest said: “Demonstration against the seafront promenade! Thursday 2 at 7 pm in the Town Hall Square. Against an undemocratic attitude! We want to hear the voices of the fishermen and people who love the town! Against the dirty play and the riffraff of Renfe!”

<http://santpolunpoble.blogspot.com/2007/08/manifestacio-contra-la-passera-dijous.html> [Accessed on 26/01/2012].

¹⁰ <http://santpolunpoble.blogspot.com/2007/08/dissabte-11-d-agost-concentraci-la-plaa.html> [Accessed on 26/01/2012].