

Exerting Power in a Landscape Management Controversy: A case study of the proposed Penguin Parade at Boulder Bay

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Managing the future of places that are esteemed for both their cultural and natural heritage values is becoming increasingly contentious. This paper examines the spatialised strategies of two groups attempting to influence planning decisions over the fate of ten vernacular buildings in Boulder Bay, Christchurch, and their possible replacement by an eco-tourism proposal. Both groups' strategies include deploying global policy initiatives such as the IUCN Red List¹ and the ICOMOS Charter,² however, they diverge significantly over how the local landscape is portrayed. Those looking to preserve the baches,³ unsurprisingly emphasise local memory and the historical character of the place, while those proposing tourism development downplay many of the impacts of the proposal.

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INTRODUCTION

THE POLITICS OF LANDSCAPE CHANGE have begun to receive increasing attention in human geography and landscape studies. As Jess and Massey note, "issues of place and of the right to control the future of particular areas have, in the era of globalisation, become both more salient and more fraught" (1995, p 134). The challenge is to understand how the global and the local interrelate. Early work on localities saw change as primarily the result of general structural processes (Murdoch and Marsden, 1995). A number of alternative approaches have suggested that change results primarily from local circumstances, where rival claims to define the meaning of places and their future rests on whose interpretation wins out (Jess and Massey, 1995).

One way of analysing how local definitions of places might be related to national and global discourses has been suggested by Murdoch and Marsden, who propose that "localities should be seen as constituted by various networks operating at different scales and that, through the use of political, economic and cultural resources, the local is differently constructed and represented within these networks" (1995, p 368). A local landscape management controversy that highlights the way competing networks utilise resources at a range of scales to affect how a local landscape is managed, involves the fate of private baches on public land at Boulder Bay, and their possible replacement by a conservation and tourism initiative, known as the Godley Head Penguin Parade.

KEY WORDS

*Landscape management
Baches
Penguin parades
Heritage
Endangered species*

BOULDER BAY BACHES AND THE GODLEY HEAD PENGUIN PARADE

Boulder Bay is on the northern side of the rugged, volcanic headland of Godley Head, which separates Lyttelton Harbour from the popular surf beach at Taylors Mistake. The area is also popular with other recreationalists, including walkers, mountain bikers, fishers and those exploring the historic World War Two fortifications on the headland.

The 10 baches in the bay date from the 1910s and 1920s, and are part of a larger group of 45 in the Taylors Mistake area that developed as overnight dwellings for weekend fishing trips, from as early as 1881 (Potts, 1882, p 214). This desire to build a small seaside shack or cottage is by no means unique to New Zealand, however, bach settlements are becoming seen as an iconic, but threatened, part of New Zealand's cultural heritage (Patchett, 1997; Foster, 2003).

The Godley Head Penguin Parade was initially promoted as a conservation and eco-tourism project to celebrate the millennium (Hamilton, 1997), and has continued under the aegis of the White-Flipped Penguin Trust. The project involves predator fencing Boulder Bay and translocating 300 white-flipped penguin chicks a year for ten years from Motunau Island, to establish a colony. Tourists would view the penguins as they came ashore each evening. The proposal is controversial not only because promoters have insisted that eight of the baches need to be removed, but also because of the potential for the tourism infrastructure to impact on the remote character of Godley Head.

METHODS: FOLLOWING THE ACTORS

In assessing how power is exerted in the construction and representation of local places Latour (1986) argues that because power is associative, it is essential to 'follow the actors'. In other words, in order to exert power it is necessary to enrol others to do the work for you, and that the power resides in these linkages. To follow these links, I attended, as participant observer, both the six-day-long City Plan hearing (Marquet, 1998) and the 16-day Environment Court case (*Save the Bay Ltd & ors v Christchurch City Council & ors C 50/2002*), collecting copies of witnesses' evidence and transcriptions of questioning and answers. I also attended three public meetings and a penguin conference. Twenty-one semi-structured interviews with participants directly involved in the controversy, and six further interviews with people involved in penguin or heritage conservation were undertaken. Both the evidence and interviews were analysed for examples of the way the networks utilised local and global representations.

DISCUSSION: COMPETING NETWORKS

The bachholders and penguin supporters have deployed local and global discourses differentially as part of their respective strategies to influence landscape management decisions. Although bachholders seek to make connections with national historical narratives and the international ICOMOS Charter, they have



Figure 1: The Jamieson family bach sometime in the 1920s or 1930s and in 2001. The penguins would parade up the valley to the left of the two baches, which are deemed to be incompatible with the Penguin Parade.

highlighted the particularity and experiential qualities of the local landscape. Conversely, penguin supporters highlight the importance of global biodiversity conservation, invoking the IUCN Red List threatened species classifications and selectively highlighting international eco-tourism operations, while downplaying the effects on the local landscape.

Those in favour of retaining the baches at Boulder Bay stressed how the baches had become naturalised in their location, and increasingly they emphasised the heritage status of their baches. While that status connected with national historical narratives and invoked the ICOMOS Charter to defend the additive nature of the baches (McEwan, 2001), it remained intimately linked to local memories. One bachholder spoke of being conceived in the bach he now owned and illustrated his evidence with a photo of his grandparents (see Figure 1, Jamieson, 2001), while another suggested he would “never forget the backbreaking work involved in getting the building materials down the hill to Boulder Bay when the replacement bach was erected in 1956” (Robertson, 1998, p 4).

Supporters of the Penguin Parade emphasise that the white-flipped penguin is an ‘endangered species’, which is endemic to Banks Peninsula (where it has supposedly suffered a 70 percent population decrease since 1980) and nearby 9 hectare Motunau Island (for example, White-flipped Penguin Trust, 2001; Morrill, 2003; Baldwin, 2002). They argue that the project will be an asset for Christchurch, which benefits nature conservation and fulfils the most rigorous criteria for eco-tourism (Menzie and Simmons, 2000). The Phillip Island Penguin Parade near Melbourne (which has approximately 500,000 visitors a year, valued at AU\$97 million) has been suggested as a model for Boulder Bay, and an article about it (Attwood, 1999), was circulated to all Christchurch city councillors prior to a council meeting where possible support for the Parade was discussed. At a public talk to a conservation group, the key proponent of the Parade discussed Phillip Island and stated “I’m not frightened of success”, yet when asked in the Environment Court about visitor numbers, he envisaged only 20,000 visitors per year and hoped that commercial operations, such as restaurants and souvenir shops “wouldn’t happen” (STBL v CCC, C50/2002, transcript page 48).

A public reluctance to discuss infrastructural requirements of the project, contrasted with private ideas about what would be required, as a White-flipped Penguin Trust trustee noted, “the main constriction to the whole thing was the road from the existing car park at the top back to the Evans Pass turnoff [6 kilometres]. That’s such a dangerous road you wouldn’t get buses on it. That road would have to be wider no doubt about that if it’s going to take off”. The army built the road in question in the late 1930s, at the same time as the fortifications at Godley Head, and it is regarded as part of the same heritage complex by the Department of Conservation (Hill, pers comm).

Menzies and Simmons (2000) suggest that the failure, so far, of the Penguin Parade to be built can be seen as a story of private privilege and political intransigence thwarting global biodiversity conservation, however, the project can also be seen as an attempt to develop tourism infrastructure under the guise of international conservation. This reading is possible because Banks *et al* (2002) have shown that species status for the white-flipped variant of the little penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) is highly unlikely, because it is closely related to three other New Zealand populations, and a recent population survey found four times the previously estimated number of penguins on Banks Peninsula (Smith, pers comm).

CONCLUSION

This case study highlights some of the ways networks of local actors differentially invoke the global/local to exert power in landscape management controversies. Both sides drew upon policy initiatives at the global scale, but to differing extents. While the ICOMOS Charter merely reinforced emphasis on the local buildings, the importance of saving an ‘endangered species’ was promoted as the primary justification for the penguin parade, even after the new contrary taxonomic evidence had been published in a peer-reviewed journal. By emphasising penguin conservation, while attempting to downplay the possible infrastructural impacts of the project in official hearings and only selectively promoting its tourism benefits, the promoters of the penguin parade have presented a project that is hard to argue against. Bachholders, however, have created a network that has highlighted the intimate historic character of the local landscape and their ongoing involvement with the place, and have been able to convince the two most recent hearings that their baches should not be demolished to make way for the penguin parade. The controversy, rather than being settled, however, has merely shifted to different forums, because with landscape management there is no end of the day.

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NOTES

- ¹ International Union for the Conservation of Nature.
- ² International Council on Monuments and Sites, a UNESCO affiliate, which New Zealand became a signatory of in 1992.
- ³ A small, usually coastal, holiday cottage or hut.