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To cite this article: Chad S. Boda (2017) The politics of landscape production in the history of development along Florida's Atlantic coast, Landscape Research, 42:4, 361-374, DOI: [10.1080/01426397.2017.1290790](https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2017.1290790)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2017.1290790>



Published online: 06 Mar 2017.



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The politics of landscape production in the history of development along Florida's Atlantic coast

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ABSTRACT

The politics of landscape production involve questions about the power to define what landscape *means*, who or what belongs *to* landscape and who or what belongs *in* landscape. Asserting the right to participate in landscape production and thus to help steer landscape along desirable development pathways remains a core component of landscape politics and grows in importance as many societies experience widespread citizen withdrawal from engagement in political processes. In this article, I review the history of landscape production in Florida, USA, to reveal the interrelated consequences of adjustments in political economy, administration, land use and spatial representations for future landscape development. In particular, my analysis of the strategic contestation of undesirable development in the production of the local landscape in a small coastal community highlights the increasing need to engage strategically in the politics of landscape production in the pursuit of socially and environmentally desirable landscapes the world over.

KEYWORDS

Land use change;
representations of space;
primitive accumulation;
abstract space; Flagler Beach

Introduction

Questions about the politics of landscape production are questions about who 'owns' landscape or has the capacity to decide what it 'should' look like (Walker & Fortmann, 2003). Such questions involve issues of representation, which in turn consist of whom or what gets included or excluded in landscape: 'representation provides a basis for comprehending the land's physical and social makeup' (Olwig, 2005, p. 21). However, the processes and motivations behind the production of specific landscapes and their representations are not necessarily transparent. They require critical analysis to be understood and their implications revealed. One cannot necessarily 'read' landscape in the normal sense of the word: landscape functions to both reveal *and* obscure the social relations that inform its production (Mitchell, 2008).

How is one to uncover the processes and ideologies that underlie landscape production, including strategies for (de-)politicisation? Widgren (2004) suggests that the past and present land uses prioritised by inhabitants and institutions is a useful indicator for understanding the form and function of a given landscape. This includes an exposition of the socio-political processes within which past and present transformations in land use can be situated. Landscape production processes and outcomes are not necessarily smooth, linear or gradual over time. They may also be 'lumpy', where rapid and uneven change can occur due to adjustments in social, economic or ecological relations at various scales. These

include leaps in technological innovation, major adjustments in land ownership, rapid expansion in capital investment and natural disasters, to name a few (Antrop, 2005).

In this article, I discuss how political economic and institutional change often involves transformations in land use and representation, with socio-political and bio-physical consequences for landscape. Such outcomes can persist over time, potentially locking in development pathways that may be extremely difficult to derail (Mitchell, 2008). Arguing from a particular case of coastal urbanisation in Florida, USA, I confer how developmentally intertwined changes in political economy, state administration, land use and modes of spatial representation laid the foundation for the relatively uncontested commodification of public lands in the early twentieth century on an uninhabited barrier island, opening up the possibility for subdivision and profitable sale. After nearly 70 years of urbanisation in the community of Flagler Beach, the emergence of conflicts over environmental conservation in the 1980s marked a significant shift in the morphology of the local landscape. These conflicts and their outcomes help highlight the need to engage strategically in the politics of landscape production in the pursuit of socially and environmentally desirable landscapes the world over.

The article is organised as follows: I begin by reviewing key concepts relevant to the politics of landscape production which help to guide the study. I then mobilise these concepts to review and analyse select aspects of historical landscape production along Florida's Atlantic coast. As the study contracts in extent but magnifies in grain, I turn to focus in on a concrete case of contestation over landscape production in a small coastal community. Drawing on the case analysis, I conclude by highlighting the increasing need for targeted engagement with the politics of landscape production in Florida and around the world.

Concepts for the political landscape

Landscape

Landscape denotes not only a bounded space, a representation, or the physical arrangement of items on the land, but a dynamic and historically contingent combination of these bio-physical and socio-cultural components (Henderson, 2003). This perspective on landscape stresses the dialectical nature of the human–environment relationship and recognises the importance of ‘community, culture, law and custom in shaping human geographical existence in both idea and practice’ (Olwig, 1996, p. 645). Thus, understanding landscape change dynamics requires a look at the historical shifts in socio-cultural and human–environment interactions which may have persisted, morphed or been annihilated over time (Antrop, 2005).

Ideological, institutional or material features can become embedded in landscape (Mitchell, 2005), allowing certain characteristics such as land use rights and representations to persist over time. Persistent features provide the foundation for subsequent processes of landscape production. Continuity in the landscape does not necessarily persist on its own; rather, some may work hard to reproduce and maintain a landscape when it serves their interests (Harvey, 1982). As Mitchell (2005, p. 50) has noted, the landscape ‘is enormously difficult to change. It is ossified in property lines (and laws) (Blomley, 1998), in built structures, and it is deeply *invested in*’. Here, Sayer’s (2012, cited in Clark, 2013) distinction between two ‘radically different’ uses of the term investment is relevant. Sayer distinguishes between (1) ‘use-value/object-oriented’ investment focusing on ‘what it is that is invested in (e.g. infrastructure, equipment, training)’ and (2) ‘exchange-value/“investor”-oriented’ investment focusing on ‘the financial gains from any kind of lending, saving, purchase of financial assets or speculation—regardless of whether they contribute to any objective investment (1), or benefit others’ (Clark, 2013, p. 130). Investment type can have radically different implications for landscape development.

What Western (1981, cited in Mitchell, 2005) called the ‘power to define’—what landscape *means*, who belongs *to* landscape and who belongs *in* landscape—can be manifest in various ways, such as the representations of space in art, surveys and maps, in the bricks and mortar of material infrastructure projects, or in the nurturing or destruction of social relations to serve the interests of the powerful

(Harvey, 1989). The right to engage in the politics of landscape production, in line with what Lefebvre (2000) called the *right to the city*, holds critical value for promoting social and environmental justice in the production of landscape (Mitchell, 2012). As Harvey (2008, p. 1) argues, 'the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be ... [the right to the city] is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire'. If this holds for the city then it holds for the landscape, thus placing the right to engage in the politics of landscape production at the heart of the fight for justice (Mitchell, 2003, 2012). However, as studies have shown (e.g. Mels, 2006, 2014; Mitchell, 1996), claiming the right to landscape production requires political engagement, placing struggle at the centre of landscape politics.

Abstract space and land-use change

For most of history, human productive activity was closely coupled to the non-human environment, necessitating the development of local subsistence practices adapted to, and at least partially constrained by, the local bio-physical context (see Crumley, 1994). Social cohesion and establishment of customary law supported the continuation of desirable social–environmental relations (Olwig, 2002). However, land use practices under modern capitalism are increasingly disconnected from the bio-physical and customary constraints that once helped regulate human productive activity. 'What tied economic development to natural conditions', Neil Smith explains:

was first the difficulty of overcoming distance, and second the necessity of close proximity to raw materials. With the development of the means of transportation, the first natural obstacle (distance) diminishes in importance. With the general increase in the productive forces, the second also becomes less important, since raw materials today are the product of an ever increasing number of previous labour processes. (2010, pp. 140, 141)

Smith's account of the *production of nature* explains the emergence of this 'cleavage' between society and ecology. 'With production for exchange', says Smith (2010, p. 65), 'the production of nature takes place on an extended scale. Human beings not only produce the immediate nature of their existence, but produce the entire societal nature of their existence.'

One outcome of the production of nature and the related process of spatial production is that land use practices increasingly operate within what Lefebvre (1991) termed 'abstract space'. Such 'homogenised' abstract space 'erases distinctions, as much those which derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity)' (p. 49). In the context of political landscape production, the abstraction and homogenisation work to annihilate history and de-politicise the struggles which informed landscape production over time, as evidenced by the successive and reinforcing waves of European domination and spatial representations in the Florida peninsula discussed below.

More than a representation of space, abstract space has what Merrifield (2006, pp. 111, 112) called 'real ontological status' which 'gains objective expression in specific buildings, places, activities, and modes of market intercourse over and through space'. Abstract space can only be produced through 'specialised practices' which 'disconnect' space from its social production (Mels, 2002, p. 136). The abstraction of space, like the abstraction of human labour power, makes it available for commodification under the capitalist mode of production and facilitates the 'calculated control over social space' (Mels, 2014, p. 2).

Primitive accumulation and representations of space

Capitalism, which 'produces' abstract space (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 53), has its origins in processes of *primitive accumulation* (Fine & Saad Filho, 2010, pp. 74–82). This concept denotes the 'historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production', transforming 'the social means of subsistence and of production into capital' and 'the immediate producers into wage labourers' (Marx, 1867, p. 714, cited in Glassman, 2006). This process of primitive accumulation has spatial corollaries. Smith (2010, p. 187), for example, discusses how capitalist production is driven by competitive pressures to indefinitely expand its search for relative surplus value and thus is incessantly 'driven to convert external, relatively undeveloped spaces into places of production and accumulation'. Territorial extension and

the systematic surveying of Florida land in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries bear witness to this expansionary tendency. Relating this notion of primitive accumulation to Lefebvre's (1991) theorisation of spatial production, it becomes clearer that, as Mels (2014, p. 1) has said, 'primitive accumulation refers not just to a process of dispossession and proletarianisation—i.e. the rise of abstract labour—but also to ... a polymorphous abstraction of space for commodity production'.

The produced abstract spaces required for advancing accumulation under capitalism are naturalised and made concrete via strategies of representation, for example through practices of cadastral cartography. Lefebvre calls such strategies 'representations of space' which are 'part of the history of ideologies' (1991, p. 116). Few better examples exist of the ideological nature of spatial representation than the historical deployment of the Public Lands Survey System (PLSS) in the United States. Transformations in representations of space and land use under capitalism are indicative of transformations in social relations, both of production and everyday life (Harvey, 2010). Such changes raise important questions about who is in charge, what the desirable direction for social and ecological development should be, and what kind of political engagement is necessary to realise such a development pathway.

How does the relationship between the production of nature, abstract space, and capital accumulation influence the production of (political) landscape? Who controls this process and its outcomes? Are such outcomes developmentally determined? Can the politics of landscape production be strategically employed to promote justice and sustainability? Below, I shed light on these questions by turning to the story of landscape production in Florida's colonial and modern history, drawing on 'data' which I have 'produced' through a combination of inductive, deductive and abductive methods (Brinkmann, 2014) as part of ongoing research in the case study area. I construct an interdisciplinary narrative by conceptualising both synchronic and diachronic forces of change and by interrogating a variety of empirical material through the lens of the above-described concepts. My data production and analytical processes are grounded in what can be termed a critical realist philosophy of science (Benton & Craib, 2010).

Colonial transformations in the Florida landscape

Spanish La Florida

The 'discovery' of Florida is widely attributed to Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de León. However, it is almost certain the coast had been visited prior to Ponce de León's voyage in 1513, most likely by Spanish slave raiders (Tebeau, 1971, p. 19). Regardless of the precise date of Spanish contact, the results for landscape were the same: conquest, proselytism and extensive transformations in spatial representation and land use. The seizing of the La Florida colony by the Spanish Empire represents an important moment in the early production of Florida's political landscape. It marks the first time that the heterogeneous, complex networks of indigenous chiefdoms of pre-Columbian Florida (Milanich, 1996) were conceptualised as consolidated under the power of a single entity, the Spanish crown. This transformation was symbolically achieved by the ceremonial planting of the Spanish flag in the soil of the 'New World', and was eventually codified through colonial spatial representations in the form of territorial maps (Gannon, 1996). The phase of early Spanish contact was dominated by a series of conquistador-led expeditions which initiated the near complete annihilation of many indigenous cultures (Milanich & Milbrath, 1989).

The first permanent settlement of European origin to be established in the new La Florida territory was Saint Augustine, founded by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés in 1565. This also coincides with the appearance of the first cartographical representation of La Florida as a single, consolidated unit under Spanish rule, Gerónimo de Chaves' La Florida, published in 1584 in the collection *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* by Abraham Ortelius. In response to persistent challenges to the new Spanish colony from both French and British imperial interests (Lyon, 1996), Spanish authorities eventually sanctioned the construction of the Castillo de San Marcos at Saint Augustine in 1672 (Figure 1), the oldest masonry fort in the continental United States. The fort was understood to symbolise, in mortar and stone, Spanish permanence and



Figure 1. The east tower of the Castillo de San Marcos, Saint Augustine, FL.

Note: Author's photo, January 2014.

military dominance in La Florida (Tebeau, 1971), and functioned as the epicentre of administrative control over the increasingly Europeanised political landscape for more than two centuries.

Land use under Spanish rule was initially focused on the establishment of military bases like the Castillo de San Marcos as means to protect important trade flows between Spanish settlements in the Americas and the Spanish mainland in Europe. The Gulf Stream was of particular military and economic interest as it offered the fastest shipping route back to the Spanish mainland. Following the wave of militarisation, Spanish authorities turned their attention to the proselytisation of remaining indigenous communities, thus shifting focus from domination of material bodies and resources to domination of the indigenous world-view. This included the establishment of missions throughout the territory in the late sixteenth and all of the seventeenth centuries which served the purpose of homogenising the socio-cultural diversity of indigenous peoples by incorporating them into the Catholic religion, which also represented the source of power for Spanish royalty (McEwan, 1993). Sublimating the minds and bodies of La Florida's indigenous inhabitants into the dominant Spanish ideology enhanced Spain's 'power to define' the developing political landscape.

Despite Spanish efforts to maintain control over La Florida, persistent challenges to Spain's territorial claims and the major consequences of the Seven Year's War forced Spain to hand the colony over to the British Empire via the Treaty of Paris in 1763, marking another major adjustment in the changing Florida landscape. After nearly two centuries of rule, Spain had left little in the way of settlements; however, the decimation of indigenous populations and the ideologisation of the territory by Spanish imperial powers meant that the British Empire inherited a significantly transformed landscape which facilitated an accelerated process of domination.

British East and West Florida

Under British rule, which began in 1763, La Florida quickly became divided into East and West Florida to enhance administrative control (Fabel, 1996). While British presence was transitory, lasting only 20 years, some important transformations had significant consequences for future landscape production. In

British East Florida, these transformations came via the distribution of land grants to British subjects and nobility, which was facilitated by the demographic collapse of indigenous communities. Central to the process were reputable London-based interest groups known as Privy Councils. The East Florida Society of London in particular granted 2 856 000 acres of land between 1764 and 1770, surpassing the *combined* land grants in all other British territories in this time period (Rogers, 1976). The distribution of land grants was intended to incentivise settlement (in 1771, the territory had a white population of only 288 with around 900 black slaves), and, combined with 'apocryphal' claims of a healthy climate and optimistic commercial prospects, many rushed to claim lands in East Florida pursuing either plantation agriculture or profits from land speculation (Fabel, 1996, p. 136). These land claims were further secured by a 1765 land treaty between remaining indigenous tribes and British authorities which opened up the entire Atlantic coast line to colonisation (Florida Memory, n.d.).

The distribution of land grants was facilitated by the surveying of coastal lands, most notably by Romans (1775/1999), whose *A concise natural history of East and West Florida* offered the principal diagrams utilised in the distribution of lands throughout East Florida. Romans had been commissioned by the acclaimed cartographer and surveyor general for the British Colonial Southern District, John William Gerard De Brahm. The distribution of these land grants incentivised investment and increased attempts at settlement, boosting the extent of plantation agriculture and the export of natural resources (Fabel, 1996). Eyewitness testimony of this increase in production comes from American naturalist William Bartram who, on his commissioned expedition of East Florida, reported being 'greatly delighted with the pleasing prospect of cultivation, and the increase of human industry' he observed (Van Doren, 1928/1955, p. 85)

Basing the new land grant scheme on Romans' survey of the East Florida territory supported the controlled implementation of the British Land Grant scheme. Many of these land grants contributed to the continued subdivision of colonial lands for private ownership, some of which persist in the landscape today as place names, state park boundaries or historic sites.

The American Revolutionary War, and various simultaneous military conflicts between Spain and England during the same period, culminated in the end of British rule over Florida, formalised by the Treaty of Paris of 1783 where England ceded authority over the two Floridas back to Spain (Coker & Parker, 1996). Spain continued to maintain the division between East and West, promoted settlement and development via a land grant system, and encouraged similar plantation-based agricultural land uses. Though Spain was formally the territorial authority at this time, the presence of a new and increasingly powerful country to the north meant that this occupation of the Floridas was only 'nominally Spanish' (Tebeau, 1971, p. 89).

Though Spanish presence was fleeting, there are a few notable legacies from the Second Spanish Period relevant for understanding future landscape change. First is the Spanish land grant system, which, due to its confusing and patchy nature, severely delayed future systematic surveying efforts (Knetsch, 2002). Another important legacy comes from the shifting demographics in the Florida territories under the Second Spanish Period. Areas which had previously been largely cleared of indigenous populations saw resurgence in population numbers, largely due to the possibility of autonomy, land availability and respite from the harsh treatment of natives in the United States to the north (Coker & Parker, 1996). This had important implications for the contestation of settlement attempts along the Atlantic coast in the early decades of American rule. Eventually, a variety of factors culminated to persuade Spain to cede the Floridas to the United States via the Adams-Onís treaty of 1819, marking the formal end to an extended process of US appropriation (Schafer, 1996).

Landscape changes from territorial Florida to the Sunshine State

Gridding the Florida territory

The American territorial period ran from approximately 1821 to the establishment of Florida as the twenty-seventh US state in 1845. This early territorial period built on the continuity with other preceding

colonial landscape changes and provided the preconditions for the production of an abstract space conducive to land-based capital accumulation. Upon its administrative take over, the United States immediately pursued a policy of land distribution and settlement which involved both the conducting of land surveys and the forced removal of indigenous groups whom had relocated to the territory during the Second Spanish Period. Intrusions into Spanish territories by the United States military already began in 1817 and, upon territorial acquisition, the US ramped up its military efforts to solidify control. US campaigns were met by indigenous resistance, most notably through a series of conflicts collectively known as the Seminole Wars (Walton, 1977). However, persistent conflict led to the eventual expulsion of the Seminole from north Florida (Knetsch, 2003). Rather than exclusion by (mis-)representation, this physical demographic suppression in effect re-opened Florida's coastline for uncontested commodification which would begin in earnest nearly half a century later.

At the same time that the United States was forcing many indigenous people to face the infamous 'trail of tears', the establishment of baselines and meridians by the survey-general Colonel Robert Butler in 1824 laid the ground work for the systematic surveying of all Florida lands under the Public Lands Survey System (PLSS) (White, 1983). The PLSS was an 'early monument to geometric rationality' and 'could only have been accomplished in a government that was centralised and efficient' (Olwig, 2002, p. xviii).

The PLSS stands in stark contrast to the metes and bounds system utilised in Britain and the early American colonies (Figure 2). The employment of the PLSS has important implications because, as Scott

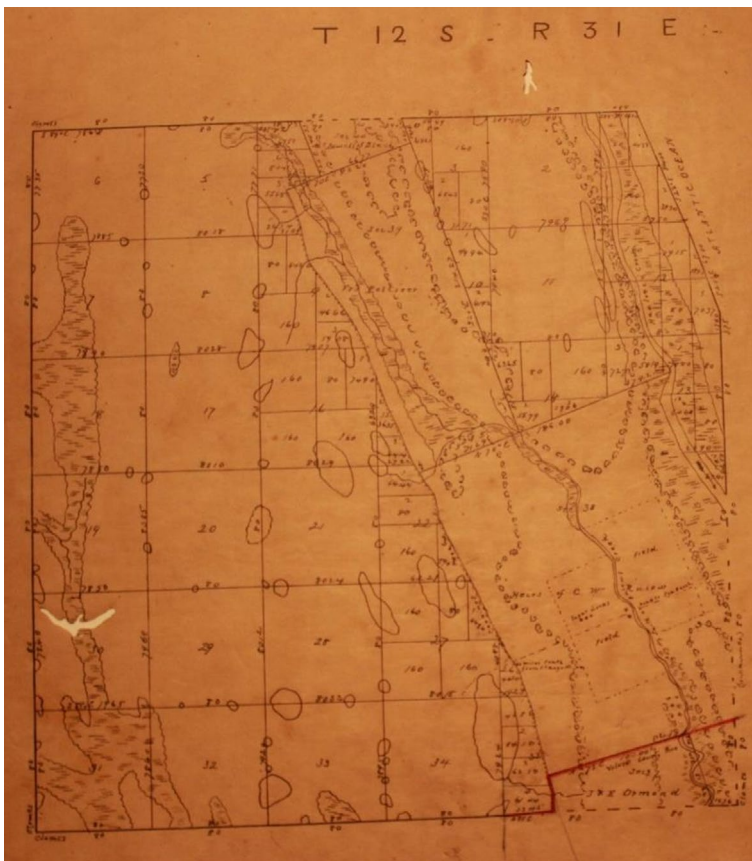


Figure 2. PLSS survey map (1850) for Township 12 South, Range 31 East, within which Flagler Beach was settled (section 12).

Notes: This map also shows the influence of land grants prior to the PLSS system. The non-conforming parcels are plantation properties originating from the British Period. Map courtesy of the Flagler County Historical Society.

(1998) points out, adopting a systematic approach to land surveying increases the efficacy of distance-based state land distribution and improves the capacity for efficient taxation and regulation in the future.

The PLSS in the United States fundamentally transformed the way authorities view the Florida landscape, producing what Cosgrove (1985, p. 55) has called 'a way of seeing, a composition and structuring of the world so that it may be appropriated by a detached, individual spectator to whom an illusion of order and control is offered through the composition of space according to the certainties of geometry'. This new way of seeing supported the parcelling and subdivision of extensive tracts of land which, via the PLSS, were homogenised and abstracted, producing spaces which could be efficiently allocated from a distance.

Homesteading, subdivision and urbanisation in Flagler Beach

After the establishment of Florida as the twenty-seventh state in 1845, several laws which facilitated the distribution, 'improvement' and settlement of unoccupied lands were implemented through the national government. The Swamp Lands Act of 1850 brought more than 20 300 000 acres under the control of the newly established State of Florida (United States Geological Survey [USGS], 2013). In addition, the Florida Homestead Act of 1862 facilitated the transfer of 160 acres of public land to those willing to reside on and improve such land (Schamel & Potter, 1997). The consequences of both the Seminole Indian Wars and the American Civil War left huge tracts of unoccupied lands available for reclamation and homesteading. These historical outcomes, combined with the systematic abstraction of land through the PLSS, laid the cornerstone for the region's urban development.

After the American Civil War, investment along Florida's north-east Atlantic coast began to gain steam with the dredging of the Florida East Coast Canal circa 1885. The development of the Florida East Coast Railway by real estate tycoon and developer Henry Flagler at the turn of the twentieth century was another important boon for development. H. Flagler is of particular significance as his push to develop a series of resorts and passenger train lines along the entire Atlantic coast encouraged speculation and increases in land prices, incentivising further public and private investment along the railroads corridor (Bramson, 2003). The 'frontier industries' (e.g. timber, turpentine, gum naval stores, phosphate) and cattle ranching dominated the Florida economy at the turn of the twentieth century, providing for 55% of the total economic output in 1899; however, the balance shifted in favour of urban development and tourism with the transfer of public lands into private hands and the further expansion of amenities in the early decades of the twentieth century (Stronge, 2008). By the year 1930, what Stronge (2008, p. 114) calls Florida's 'sunshine sector' (dominated by tourism) had grown to more than 30% of Florida's total economic output. By 1960 it would capture more than 50%, and by the year 2000 it accounted for more than 70% of the total value of production in Florida's economy (Stronge, 2008).

One individual who rode the early wave of settlement and speculation was George Moody. In 1904, Moody moved from Georgia to join his family in the turpentine business in what is today Flagler County. Being an active member of local government and maintaining family ties to the influential Bunnell Land Development Company, Moody pursued the establishment of a beach-side resort along the Atlantic Ocean on the nearby barrier island in 1913. Since the land of interest remained under state control, Moody submitted a homestead application for 169 acres, including one mile of beach front, on the uninhabited island directly east of the city of Bunnell where he and his family resided, which he eventually secured (St. Johns Tribune, 1915).

In 1917, George Moody partitioned his homesteaded land into the Ocean City subdivision of Flagler Beach which involved the design of core transportation pathways and proposals for public school and park locations and drainage canals for much of the coastal marsh land (Figure 3).

To expedite the development of needed infrastructure and ultimately the selling of these newly subdivided lands, Moody helped incorporate the Ocean City Improvement Company in 1921 (Deen, n.d.). Moody also served as the city's first mayor and as a city commissioner while actively developing his subdivision. The population of Flagler Beach grew between the 1920s and the 1950s and received state support in the form of transportation investments like State Road A1A and State Road 100. In 1952,

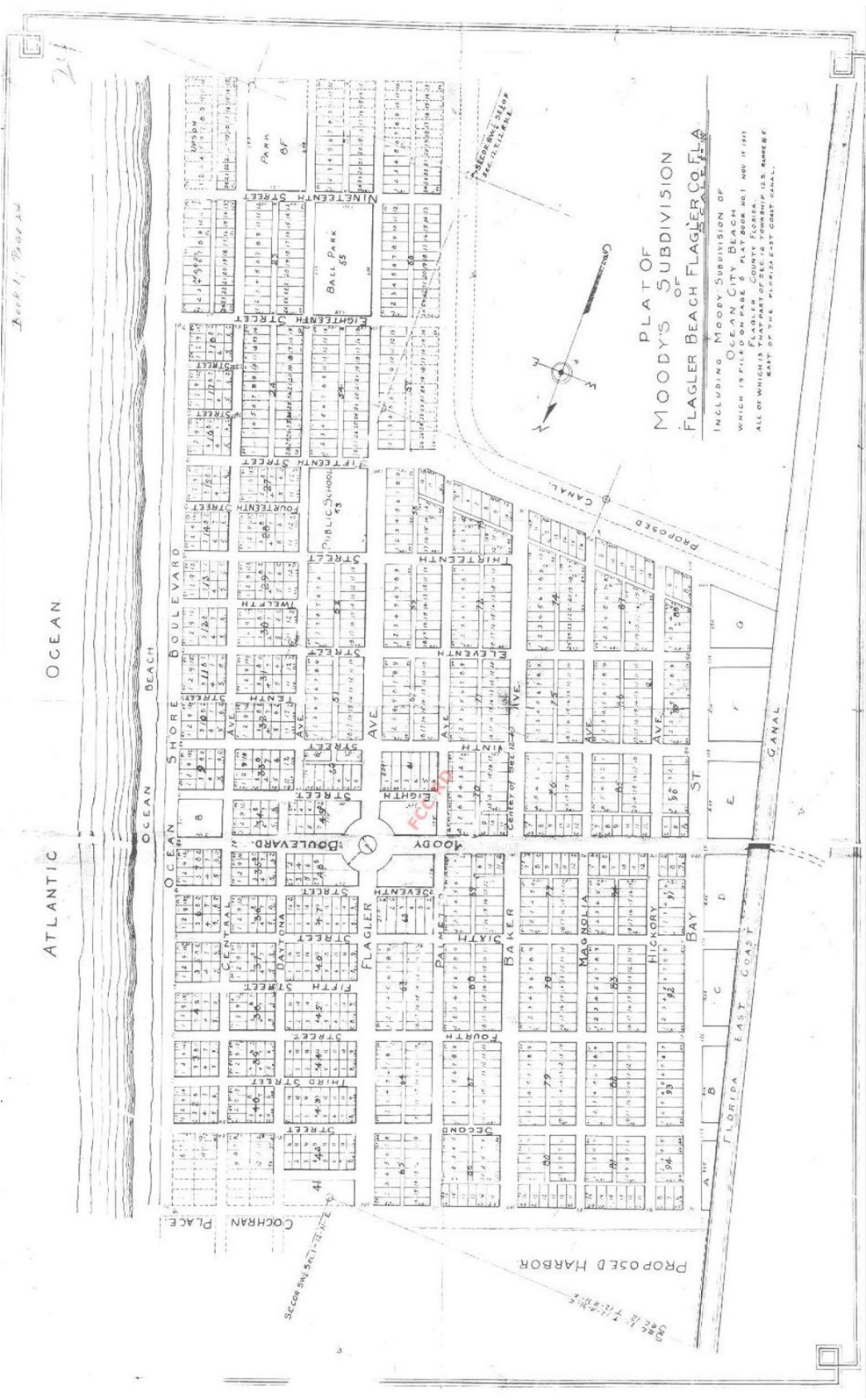


Figure 3. Original plat map for Moody subdivision in Flagler Beach (1917).
Notes: PLSS gridlines are also visible in various locations. Plat courtesy of Flagler County Clerk of Court.

Moody began construction on a portion of his original subdivision that would become the Venice Park single-family housing development (and Moody's place of residence). Completion of the subdivision involved the use of a hydraulic dredge to fill in marsh lands and the construction of bulkheads and seawalls to support the newly filled land. The resulting bio-physical transformations were substantial, involving the near complete annihilation of the barrier island marsh that once provided important habitat for a wide variety of flora and fauna, some of which today are threatened or endangered. The conversion of barrier island habitat became more and more common during the mid-twentieth century, contributing to the current condition where large portions of Florida's original barrier island salt marsh habitat have been filled, drained or otherwise destroyed to serve the interests of Florida developers and prospective residents (Florida Natural Areas Inventory, 2010, p. 173).

The Moody subdivision exemplifies the most recent step in the concretisation of a historical process of spatial representation which transformed all Florida lands into a homogenised grid of abstract space conducive to capital accumulation. The homogenised spaces represented under Moody's subdivision have, however, not all been sold for private use, though the vast majority has been developed into residential and commercial properties. A brief look at the divergent development of two adjacent plots of land, both slotted for development in Moody's original plan, can offer some important insights into why political engagement continues to matter for the fight over landscape production in contemporary times.

Divergence in the local landscape

On the other side of State Road 100 from the Venice Park housing development there is a similar series of land plots, collectively known as Flagship Harbour. Interest in the development of the Flagship Harbour property followed a marked increase in settlement and investment in the general area beginning in the early 1970s. Flagler Beach's population grew nearly 500% between 1970 and 1990, following the trend within Flagler County as a whole (United States Census Bureau, 1995). County wide construction followed suit, with total building construction tripling between 1970 and 1980, and then doubling again between 1980 and 1990 (Florida Housing Data Clearinghouse, 2013). In Flagler Beach, proposed plans for development of the Flagship Harbour property were first approved in 1974 and reaffirmed in 1978 (resolutions 74-33 and 78-37, respectively) and involved the construction of a housing development and shopping centre. However, unlike the Venice Park housing development in the 1950s, the development plans for this plot of land met political resistance in the chambers of the Flagler Beach City Commission, spearheaded by citizen and city commissioner Betty Steflik.

After numerous years of discussion and debate in the chambers of the Flagler Beach City Commission over the desirability of local development trends and their social and environmental consequences, Commissioner Steflik, in collaboration with other private and public organisations, developed and submitted resolution 90-16, *A Resolution Supporting the Preservation of Real Property Known as 'Flagship Harbour'* to formally request that the city take action to preserve the threatened marshland habitat. Resolution 90-16 particularly emphasised the ecological and recreational benefits of preservation, including 'extensive wetlands and waterways providing nesting, feeding, and spawning grounds for many varieties of wildlife ... as well as upland areas and waterfront suitable for public recreation' (City of Flagler Beach, 1990, p. 34). After being presented and discussed in the chamber, the resolution unanimously passed the Flagler Beach City Commission on 8 March 1990. The divergence in physical morphology between Flagship Harbour and Venice Park resulting from this decision is clearly visible through aerial rephotography (Figure 4).

Commissioner Steflik's push to preserve portions of the local barrier island habitat is viewed as an important legacy within the Flagler Beach community. Much of the praise that Betty Steflik received was in regards to how her environmental politics helped maintain the 'Old Florida' and 'small town' feeling which city residents and officials view as extremely important for community identity and tourism appeal. Local obituaries recalled that 'Flagler Beach would have a totally different look today if it were

not for her vision and commitment' (Daytona Beach News-Journal, 2004) and how 'the picturesque Flagler Beach of today is a result of Steflik's commitment and vision for the environment' (Service, 2004).

Today, while Venice Park remains a single-family housing development comprised of individual, privately owned parcels, the Betty Steflik Memorial Preserve at Flagship Harbour (renamed in 2006) is a publicly accessible wetland park where educational and recreational opportunities are available to the community and visitors (Figure 5). Flagship Harbour has been formally zoned as a conservation area



Figure 4. Aerial rephotography of the Flagler Beach area from 1943 (left) and 2012 (right). Source: 1943 aerial photo (left) (United States Department of Environmental Protection [USDEP], 2014); 2012 satellite image (right) (Google Earth, 2013).

Notes: The red square identifies the approximate location of the Venice Park subdivision and the white square the approximate location of the Betty Steflik Memorial Preserve at Flagship Harbour.



Figure 5. Public walkway through the salt marsh at Betty Steflik Memorial Preserve at Flagship Harbour.

Note: Author's Photo, January 2014.

under Flagler Beach zoning code, institutionalising the outcomes of the struggle over the local landscape that Betty Steflik represented. While the motivation for and consequences of nature preservation efforts have been rightfully problematised within critical landscape studies (e.g. Duncan & Duncan, 2001; Mels, 2002), the point I want to emphasise here is the *potential* for local citizens to steer landscape production towards desired ends through strategic engagement in local politics. This is particularly important in the context of a society where citizens are increasingly detached from many forms of civil engagement (e.g. Putnam, 2000).

Conclusion and a call for active engagement

The history of landscape change in the Florida peninsula is not only a history of gradual, linear adjustments in land use practices, demographics and economic developments; rather, in addition to gradual changes over time, the outcomes of often punctuated and uneven historical events like the wholesale shift in territorial administration, sweeping adjustments to spatial representation and even war have played major roles in forming the contemporary (political) landscape along the Florida Atlantic coast. Don Mitchell reminds us that:

History is lumpy ... but it is also a sea of constant change, in which waves of investment, innovation, and struggle of varying periodicity and intensity wash back and forth. Within this sea it is sometimes hard to see that the landscape is not just flow—not just the constant transformation of social relations as some contemporary theory avers—but also stasis, a repository of a great deal of inertia, a storehouse of values that can only be destroyed at great human and economic cost. (2008, pp. 41, 42)

The historical adjustments in administration, land use practices, political economy and representations of space have continuously reworked and unsettled the social relations and spatialities which constituted Florida's landscape at any given period. The often violent suppression of contesting voices and the employment of particular strategies of spatial representation amounted to a situation conducive to accumulation through urban development in what appeared to be an uncontested and uncontroversial political environment. The illusion of *tabula rasa* or *terra nullius* was made possible through the abstraction of space and the resulting erasure of historical influence and difference. Though social and environmental oppression have remained primary tools in the production of Florida's political landscape over time, the emergence of community-based political intervention in 1990s Flagler Beach should encourage confidence in the potential for effective political engagement at the local level in the struggle to create socially desirable and sustainable landscapes.

In an age where the unceasing drive of competitive capitalism works to pull all land under its homogenised spaces of accumulation, it seems only through direct engagement with the politics of landscape production can a different logic of development take hold. It is crucial to remember that, as Neil Smith has said, 'it is not merely capital that must be restructured but the political basis of society, in order to produce a genuinely social geography' (2010, p. 211). As settlements and fragile habitats in Florida and elsewhere continue to be developed at an ever faster rate, being guided predominantly by the logic of capital, the need to understand landscape politics and strategically intervene in those politics continues to grow in importance. Betty Steflik's story in Flagler Beach offers important precedent for contemporary and future concerned citizens that their participation matters. She showed that the outcomes of political participation can continue to matter for generations to come.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the Svenska Forskningsrådet Formas [grant number 259-2008-1718].

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