

**From Boats to Bicycles:
Diversification, Social Networks,
and Culture on Small Shipyards
in Alabama and South Louisiana**

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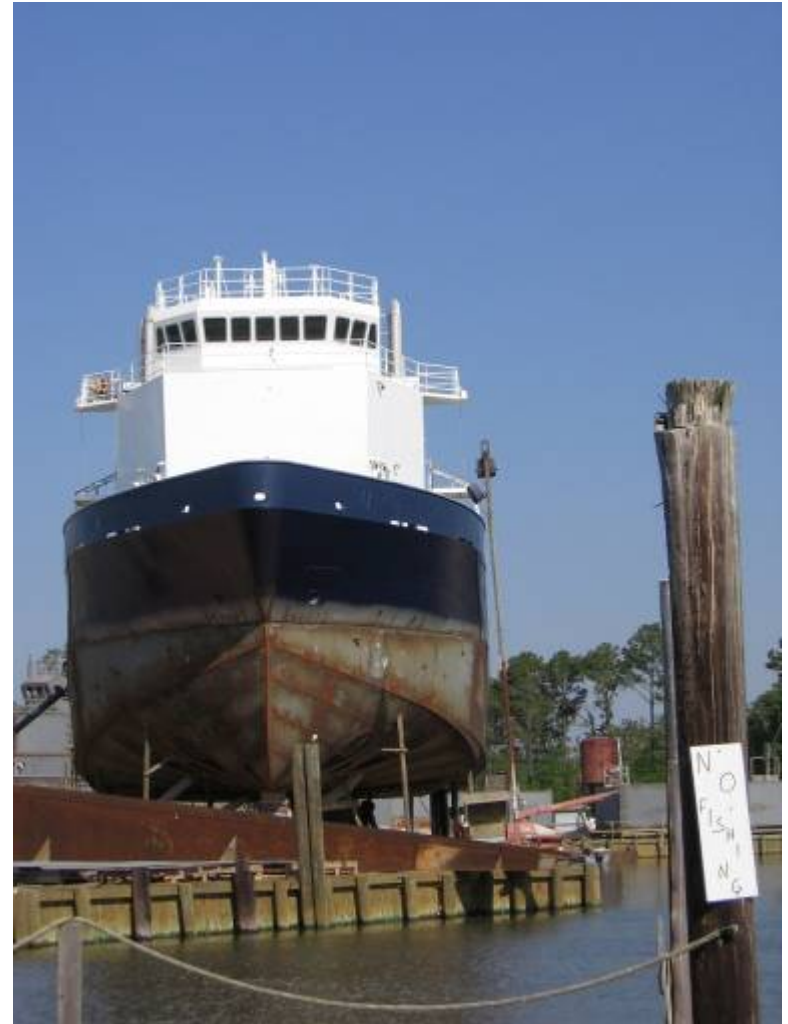
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Introduction

- Shipyards are among key sites where bayou culture is perpetuated.
- Diversification and social networks are both facets of local culture that are simultaneously preserved by the industry and aid in its success.

Outline

- Small shipyards are sites of cultural preservation
 - Social networks
 - Diversification
- 4 case studies from
 - Alabama
 - Louisiana
- Compilations of examples, with identifying information altered to protect informants



Cultural Reproduction

- Occurs through formal and informal education and training
- Lee and Wolff (2004)
“Mastery and skills are viewed in terms of degree of being an insider, of the continued (re)production of oneself as a member of particular community and of (re)producing the relevant practices that are valued there.”

Social Networks

- Strong ties: connections involving many different kinds of relational links
 - Provide support and availability
- Weak ties: connections involving limited numbers of relational links
 - Allow individuals to access innovations and information from other social networks

Diversification

- Any significant change in how a company does business: its customer base, product, or method of production. Can include market and non-market logics and values



More Pull than Push

Shipyards that diversify in reaction to external factors, particularly global industry trends (decline of fishing, boom/bust cycles)

More Push than Pull

Shipyards that diversify deliberately or in response to unique opportunities or innovations



More Pull than Push

Case Study 1, Alabama:

Informal training as a seafood processor and shrimper

→ Ship building and ship repair

→ Boat owner/operator for offshore oil

→ Focus on repair

→ Shift to using boat for non-oil government contracts

Emphasis: Importance of weak ties. Use of non-market values in decision making.



More Pull than Push

Case Study 2, Louisiana:

Informal training building small aluminum fishing boats

→ Shipyard (tugs, barges, OSVs)

→ Out of business (oil bust)

→ Small business building small aluminum fishing boats

→ Shipyard (offshore oil)

Emphasis: Importance of strong and weak ties.

Diversity of training leading to diversity of business strategies.

More Push than Pull

Case Study 3, Louisiana:

Ship fitter and foreman at a shipyard

→ Found a fabrication yard doing manhole construction

“There was demand for it and not too many people were doing it.”

→ Diversification of client base

→ Add shipbuilding, small fabrication, and scrap metal

- Yard created out of diversification
- No desire to grow bigger
- Wants to keep the industry local

Emphasis: Calculated risk. No desire to grow business larger, want to maintain what they have, continue with traditional industry.

More Push than Pull

Case study 4, Alabama:

Limited usable land.

It must

- Be available (economic/natural causes)

- Fit needs/resources (rent/buy)

- Be accessible at advantageous terms



Emphasis: Local specificities. Social networks used to find resources necessary for diversification.

Conclusion

- Small shipyards in Alabama and Louisiana use diversification and social networks to weather the up- and downturns in the industry.
- This contributes to perpetuation of traditional cultural patterns and values.
- Most use combination of push, pull, and selective diversification and weak and strong ties.
- “We build tanks, baskets. We can fix a bicycle to ... whatever.”
- Not all examples have such positive results as the ones portrayed here.

Reference

Lee, Y.-J. and M.R. Wolff. 2004. They've gotta learn something unless they're just out to lunch: Becoming an expert in a salmon hatchery. *Anthropology of Work Review* 15(1-2):15–21.