**A Critique of “Hawaii’s Beaches Are Disappearing” by ProPublica**

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URL: <https://projects.propublica.org/hawaii-beach-loss/>

This article from ProPublica draws you in as a reader with a video of Mokuleia Beach in Oahu Hawaii. The video infographic takes you through a handful of interesting facts about why Hawaii’s beaches are disappearing. I love this data piece for a multitude of reasons but like any story, there is always room for improvement.

First and foremost, the infographic timeline showcasing how the beaches have been lost due to seawalls from 1968 all the way to 2020, is absolutely fantastic. It showcases how beaches in Hawaii, the first example being Lanikai Beach, was lost perfectly. It’s simple and very visually pleasing. The infographic then takes the reader through where the shoreline of Lanikai Beach started in 1967 and compares it to 2015. I love how the data reporters also included and coded in the side bars of information and even real life videos of the shorelines.

Second, I think the way they integrated the data into the story helps tell a very interesting story. I think the data and coding really adds to this piece. If a reporter were just to write this story, I don’t think the reader would find it as interesting, even if the reporter included pictures. Because of the data integration piece, it really walks the reader through time and space both through words and through data graphics and visuals which makes for a very powerful reading experience.

After the reader goes through the animation they move onto another one that looks like a map graphic. In this map graphic of Oahu there are four highlighted facts the reader can interact with through the map: seawall easements, emergency sandbags, county approvals and multiple exemptions. The reader can hover over each dot on the map representing one of those categories and it will then animate a text box with information about that category at that location. I like how the data reporters transitioned from a moving timeline graphic to a map one. I think it really helped to show variety in presenting the data and it gives it a more complete picture of the story. Then the map graphic animation zooms about and allows the reader to explore the other islands of Hawaii and it’s disappearing beaches.

Third, I like how in the explore shoreline exemplifies graphic animation, you can plug in any neighborhood, address or zip code in Hawaii and it will take you to that part of the graphic. I like how interactive they made all of the data graphics. I think it helps take the reader through the story.

Finally, the critiques I have start off first with the writing. I believe that a data story with strong visuals should also have really strong writing. I just wasn’t blown away by it. I think the lead is a little watered down, I think they could have made it a little more dramatic. The visuals are strong and dramatic so I expected the same for the writing and I was honestly kind of disappointed. Secondly, while I really liked all of the animation and the interactive data, it was a little bit distracting and chaotic at times. I think the reporters overdid it at times, I think perhaps simplifying it, would make it a little bit easier for the reader to digest. I also think because this is such a large timeline, that it would have been helpful to have a more static graph showing the progression of the information from 1968 to 2020. With the interactive animation, it’s hard at times for the reader to stay grounded and remember the time span of the information that they are receiving, at least that’s how I felt going through the story.

I also would have liked the text of the story to be kept in more static form throughout. While I liked the text boxes that animated through the graphics and I do think they paired well with the data graphics, they were also too repetitive at times I felt. I think overall, the story was hard to follow at times because it was a little too animation heavy. I think if they kept some of the text of the story more static like a typical article as the reader would scroll through the visuals, it would have translated a little better.

There were also some spots while moving through the animation that could have been cleaned up. There were a few spots as the reader moved through the story, where the data animation did not have text and where it was kind of empty. It could have overall used a little clean up to make sure organizationally it flowed seamlessly.

Overall, I think this was a fantastically interesting story and a great example of how data can really add depth.