Seaside Architecture and Urbanism in Bulgaria and Croatia
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Each summer season, the sun-drenched coasts of Bulgaria and Croatia turn into densely inhabited, intensively exploited tourism industry hot spots. This book traces the various architectural and urban planning strategies that have been pursued there since the mid 1950s—first in order to create, and then to further develop, modern holiday destinations.

It portrays (late) modern resorts of remarkable architectural quality and typological diversity that have lasted for decades; as anchors of the socialist states' "social tourism," as playground for domestic publics in search of recreation and as viable product on the international holiday market. Finally, it shows how individual resorts and outstanding buildings have been restructured both economically and physically since the fall of state socialism, and explores the present-day conflicts triggered by coastal development in the name of tourism.
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'Beside the seaside...'
Architectures of a modern global longing

Michael Zinganel and Elke Beyer

Tourism is unquestionably one of the world’s primary economic sectors. It shapes the working lives and living standards of travellers, the host countries travelled and the service providers encountered en route, and transforms every physical and cultural landscape that it touches. The tourism industry urbanizes target areas at the start of a season and leaves them high and dry, amid a clutter of built infrastructure, when the season ends. All this activity triggers enormous waves of transnational mobility and labour migration, as well as the transfer of money, materials, social attitudes and cultural traditions. Tourism all over the world is seen by many today as a glimmer of hope, as a substitute for employment opportunities decimated by de-industrialization and, often, as a last-ditch attempt to benefit from prosperous people’s buying power.

Modern seaside tourism and the production of space

Historically, tourism’s economic benefits have seemed most promising in countries with access to the sea—for, in the enthused writings of bourgeois elites, this singularly attractive resource has been transformed over the last few centuries from a potentially menacing natural force into an aesthetic source of sublime grandeur or, at least, into a portent of health. In the nineteenth century, a sojourn by the sea was believed to be curative; by the early twentieth century the beach was synonymous with glamour and healthy living and, ever since, a multisensual experience of the seaside has evidently been central to most people’s dream of ‘getting away from it all’. This makes it a genuinely modern phenomenon, claims ethnologist Orvar Löfgren: ‘The modernist cult of simplicity and
functionalism found in the outdoors an important terrain for human improvement and experiments with aesthetics and lifestyle. The beach was so modern. [...] On the classless terrain of the new and healthy democratic mass tourism, the body in [...] a swimsuit represented modernity, not class.2

Of course, it is not the seaside alone that appeals to tourists but rather the tourist product, each variety of which is embedded in a specific tourism location. Globally, the star attraction, "sun, sea and sand", is supported by a diverse band of extras laid on for every mind-set and pocket—from the group experience to the solitary sun lounger, from extreme sports and other forms of physical exhaustion to an inspiring daydream. Yet the majority of tourists travel remarkable distances by advanced technological means of mass transit, simply in order to enjoy a near-naked experience of the seaside and the recreational programs that go with it. This experience on site is by no means a constant. Rather, it is subject to cyclical shifts in location, modes of mobility and types of encounter. Different temperaments seek out and settle in different spatial zones.3 But tourists are not only passive consumers. They also co-produce the social space and visual culture of their resort, respectively their tourism landscape of choice, insofar as they create demand for specific services there, and participate in, or personally instigate, certain rituals. For sure, tourists are open to suggestion or even manipulation, but they also arrive at a location with their personal agenda in mind and make inquiries as to how they may acquire what they want—and they are fickle creatures moreover, very likely to "flirt" not just with one another, but also with the visual media and with the spatial infrastructures that tourism experts, politicians, investors, environmentalists and architects comprehensively plan and negotiate before inviting tourists to appropriate them.

Architecture is an essential component of the tourist product, and hence part and parcel both of the modern experience of mobility and of a modern visual culture in which the borders between 'classical high' and 'popular low' culture have become increasingly permeable. The landscape of tourist experience consists of access routes and terminals, multifaceted stages and back-stages: spatial zones in which actors and factors are both signs and signifiers, performing mental and physical cultural exchange against a multivalent backdrop. It consists equally of segregated zones reserved exclusively for the retreat or recuperation of authorized individuals, be they tourists or service providers.5

Architecture has to underpin and fulfill tourists' longing for aesthetic, social and physical encounters, and to structure the choreography of rituals that unfold in the liminal zones between everyday and extraordinary experience, between high-tech transport systems and sublime natural settings, between the private and public spheres. Architecture both stages the landscape and is part of the landscape. At best, it is as modern as the beach experience, yet simultaneously conveys a destination's special qualities. Architecture guides tourists' feet as well as their gazes—but it has also been reduced irreparably to a 'visual representation', endlessly reproduced in catalogues, postcards and snapshots that trigger and substantiate tourists' experience abroad and the narratives they recount, once home again.

The general prerequisites of mass tourism

A whole string of factors helped create mass tourism as we know it today. Technological progress—the railway, steam navigation, the motorcar and their attendant infrastructures—certainly paved the way. Yet it was only after the right to a minimum wage, a shorter working week and a paid annual holiday had been enshrined in law that the working masses could afford to give even a passing thought to the matter of travelling to an unknown destination simply for revelry and repose. In 1919, the world's first ever 'Workers' State'—the Soviet Union—nationalized what had hitherto been aristocratic bathing resorts for curative holidays on the Black Sea coast, claiming them for a modern public health service; then, in 1922, it guaranteed workers two weeks' paid annual leave.6 Throughout the 1920s, Soviet organizations competed to define the appropriate form and content of socialist holidays. The volunteer's movement for proletarian tourism promoted radical, DIY, grassroots tourism focused on political, cultural and physical education but by the 1930s, the prevailing model was the recreational package tour centrally organized by the state respectively by a trade union and allocated selectively through a system of eligibility

vouchers. The Five-Year Plans of the 1930s foresaw a growing number of sanatoria on the Black Sea coast, where such 10 to 24-day convalescence trips could be spent in palatial 'health factories' erected expressly for the working masses.' The Soviet holiday was designed explicitly for the individual in need, not for couples or families, while children and young people were given the opportunity to spend their holidays in pioneer camps. Soviet planners' complement to this, in urban contexts, was the provision of extensive parks for the growing population.

In some West European countries, by contrast, legislation favourable to workers' rights and the 'democratization' of travel was still fiercely contested in the 1930s. Yet certain governments already subsidized holiday programs or had plans to do so: 'Dopolavoro' ('After Work') in Fascist Italy, 'Kraft durch Freude' ('Strength through Joy') in National Socialist Germany, family holiday villages under the Front Populaire in France, Billy Butlin's Holiday Camps in the UK, and workers' union camps in social-democratic Sweden. Nonetheless, it took seriously persuasive campaigns to sell to the masses something they had hitherto considered as an elitist pastime. Travel guides, catalogues and brochures were necessary also to minimize the effort of planning and organizing a trip. And, last but not least, all tourism-related services had to be rationalized sufficiently to make holidays affordable for people on low incomes.

In 1937, the leisure issue was explicitly addressed at an outstanding forum devoted to international architectural discourse—the 5th CIAM congress in Paris. For, after the French Front Populaire government, elected in 1936, made paid annual leave a constitutional right, Le Corbusier and his circle decided it was time to put the focus 'on the most urgent problem of our time: the dwelling [...] which was immediately linked to the 'inseparable' issue of 'leisure'". Most remarkable—in the eyes of architectural historian Tom Avermaete—is the fact that leisure here, above and beyond its benefits for public hygiene and social reform, was presented also as part of a total rethink of 'town and countryside': one that radically distanced itself from the traditional binary opposition inherent to this dual term. At CIAM, the rural and urban spheres were redefined as two directly related and mutually dependent spatial categories. The countryside was no longer seen as being inherently anti-modern but rather, as an additional...
locus of the genuinely modern practices of leisure and tourism in natural settings: ‘Beaches, forests, lakes and rivers will be conquered by the masses!’ Le Corbusier subsequently presented this new reading of town and country as mutually dependent spaces as an installation in his Pavilion des Temps Nouveaux, on the margins of the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937.

At that same World Exhibition, another explicitly modernist leisure project was awarded a Grand Prix: the so-called ‘Colossus of Prora,’ a bathing resort under construction since 1936 on the German island of Rügen, off the eastern Baltic coast. ‘Kraft durch Freude’—the arm of the National Socialist German Labour Front (DAF) responsible for socio-political and cultural edification—launched the Prora project as part of its efforts to propagate new, modern forms of mass culture, ‘controlling leisure’ being a means to create an ostensibly ‘classless Volksgemeinschaft.’ Prora was designed to encompass a whole range of modern leisure facilities, procedures in which were to be optimized in the Taylorist manner and guests’ movements to be choreographed precisely. The resort was intended for 20,000 tourists and every room was to have a sea-view. The result was one single shoreline building of very shallow depth yet over 4.5 kilometres in length.

Admittedly, the dire economic climate of the interwar period left only limited leeway for such ideas: pilot projects were sacrificed to military objectives, as the prospect of war loomed larger. At the same time, youth holiday camps, whether run by the Boy Scouts, Young Pioneers or Hitler Youth, increasingly accentuated military and physical training. World War II put a temporary end to travel for leisure purposes, of course, but the extent to which it also accelerated the development of international tourism should not be underestimated. Had vehicle and aircraft construction not been so urgently researched to military ends, and had manufacturers not been so anxious to find post-war civil markets, mass motorization and the jet-set age would not have arrived so soon. Moreover, wartime postings, convalescent homes, children's evacuation programs and the like were often people's first ever experience of leaving home ground, and they opened their eyes to the potential of domestic and foreign destinations.13

Post-World War II development of mass tourism in East and West Europe

Only after World War II did the Fordist segregation of production and reproduction—namely the creation in urban areas of distinct zones for dwelling, work, consumption, leisure and culture, such as CIAM architects had advocated in 1937—begin to take hold all across Europe on a significant scale: town dwellers in need of a break could increasingly count on finding not only leisure facilities—on lakesides, at the seaside or in the remoter reaches of mountain ranges—but also the means to reach them. The true ‘democratization’ of travel set in as part of the 1950s' economic boom, when mass transportation first became affordable for many Europeans. In West European consumer democracies, travelling by car to a holiday destination first became a majority preference in the 1960s and put the illusion of individual freedom and choice firmly on tourists’ horizons. Yet in state socialist and capitalist countries alike, a break from city routine could also be easily realized by catching a train or bus or by hitching a ride with a tent in one's backpack.

After 1945, the newly emergent state socialist economies followed the Soviet historical example, making the provision of rest and relaxation for working people (and party cadres) an important component of their social policy agenda. However, international travel and tourism within and between countries of the Comecon bloc was increasingly approved and even promoted by its most dominant member, the USSR, only after consolidation of the Warsaw Pact, reconciliation with Tito and the success of the Austrian State Treaty in late spring 1955 had stabilized the balance of power in Europe to some degree.14 The development of new, large-scale seaside tourism infrastructures in state socialist Romania, Bulgaria, landlocked Hungary (if the shores of Lake Balaton may be considered a seaside) and in the USSR itself accordingly got underway only after the mid 1950s. Such facilities were touted not only to the working masses at home, but also, more or less successfully, to tourists from ‘socialist sister countries’ as well as from the capitalist West, generally in order to balance foreign trade deficits.15

Capitalist employers had likewise realized that rest and relaxation raise productivity among workers and white-collar staff alike, and are hence good for business. So-called ‘social tourism’ was launched

13 For example, during the war the British Army made use of the holiday camps launched by Billy Butlin in the 1930s, and state-subsidized holiday programs for the armed forces sustained accelerated Butlin's post-war expansion. See John K. Walton, The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century, Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000.
therefore also in Western Europe as a symbol of post-WWII reconstruction and progress: social tourism facilities—the French 'Villages de Vacances Familiales', for example, or the West German model of convalescence in health spas covered by health insurance—played an important role in shaping the welfare state within an otherwise capitalist agenda. The right to a holiday, once the object of fierce and bloody labour struggles, thus became virtually a matter of duty and social standing for the post-war employee/consumer.16

Travel across oceans and national borders gradually became easier, too, in the aftermath of WWII, thanks not only to quicker and more affordable transport, but also to the combined efforts of international and national organizations for the promotion of tourism: 'With so much to add to [post-war] reconstruction, both Marshall Plan officials and the member countries of the Organisation of European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) saw tourism as a cornerstone of a sound economic future'.17 Tourism became a motor of broad-ranging investment, preparing structurally weak or otherwise deserted regions for an economic upturn, and priming domestic and/or foreign tourists to descend on them en masse and part with more money than was usually the case in their ordinary everyday realm. The seaside destination, this object of desire once reserved exclusively for the higher social classes, was treated therefore to a radical post-war make-over. And the more 'economically backward' such destinations were, the greater the appeal of their intact natural landscapes, fishing villages, impoverished farms and romantic historic city centres—especially once transport and tourism infrastructures had made them easy to consume.

Whether in the aspiring young democracies of Central America or under the fascist dictatorships of Franco in Spain and Salazar in Portugal, whether in Greece after its civil war or in Gaullist France, in state socialist countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, or on the Crimea or in non-aligned Yugoslavia, new resorts were vital components of the more general centrally planned and state-funded modernization programs. Major tourism resorts served moreover to showcase a country's economic and social performance, its ability both to assure its citizens affordable holidays and to keep pace with (or even exceed) the planning and technology required to drive modernization, all of which incidentally helped hold at bay other political aspects of the Cold War world, such as painful processes of decolonization.18 Another factor not to be underestimated is the role tourism played in forging a sense of national identity—insofar as holidays were opportunities for people to learn more about their own country and compatriots—or in cementing a country's international standing: 'Hotel design was instrumental in negotiating national identity and, in turn, in shaping international relations'.19 Of course, the agenda and procedures for shaping economic and planning policy in these various countries differed fundamentally. The ownership and economic models underpinning investments in the tourism sector were often most patently obvious in the urban structures that ensued in tourism regions.

An international typology of beachfront tourism architecture and urbanism

The most striking feature of global construction activity in the tourism sector since 1945 has been the worldwide proliferation of certain basic types that are only ever slightly modified, if at all. The abundance of 'International Style' tourism facilities was as emphatic a manifestation of modernity as modernist office blocks were in the corporate sector. One of the first significant types was the hotel tower or high-rise, transposed from its usual urban context to the beachfront. The first Hilton International, the Caribe Hilton (1946–49) built by Toro, Ferrer and Torregrosa in San Juan, Puerto Rico, is an early example from the pro-American capitalist sphere.20 Above the horizontal slab containing the public areas and service zones rises a gigantic vertical slab, set at a right-angle to the beach, while the orientation of its guestrooms and balconies is slightly oblique so as to better assure a sea-view from them all. We find another example of this same type in the Hotel de Mar (1962) built in Palma de Mallorca by José Antonio Coderc de Sentmenat21 and, increasingly throughout the 1960s, during densification of resorts both on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast and the Croatian Adriatic. (+ 83, 223) Likewise in the Soviet Union: from the early 1930s until the mid 1950s, new sanatoria had generally been pompous

19 Katrijn Ross emphasizes how the high-profile development of certain regions for tourism purposes in Gaullist France served to divert public attention from the 'dirty wars' taking place concurrently in the former colonists' overseas backyard. Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999.
replicas of classicist palaces, yet modernist high-rise towers propelled the expansion of tourism infrastructure in the 1960s: rather slender towers, such as that of the Pitsunda Trade Union Holiday Houses (M. Posokhin, 1962–67) or massive slabs set either parallel or obliquely to the coastline, such as the Sochi Sanatorium (Yu. Shvartsbreyv et al., 1965) or the Inturist Hotel Yalta with its over 1,000 guestrooms (A. Polyansky et al., 1977).72

Hotels composed of horizontal blocks in the sober modernist tradition, arranged either in clusters or around a courtyard, atrium-style, were also fairly typical. In Greece, they were realized inter alia under the direction of Zurich-trained architect Aris Konstantinidis, on behalf of the national tourist board’s Xenia Hotels and Motels chain, as part of a more general move to upgrade the tourism industry with Marshall Plan funding in the wake of WWII and the civil war (1945–49), under the supervision of American consultants and planners.73 In Croatia, such hotels made an appearance as of the mid 1960s both in a purist, solitary form (→ 181, 226) and as a constellation of several atrium structures set on high pilotes, as in the award-winning Solaris hotel complex. In Bulgaria, by contrast, low-rise hotel complexes became increasingly dynamic in layout, especially in the late 1960s, drawing frequently on the traditional monastery type to create series of semi-public, cloistered inner courtyards. [→ 131]

Another popular type in hotel architecture was the Y-shaped ground plan with three arms straddling the landscape. In this case, all three guestroom sections could be accessed via a single stairway at the hub. An early outstanding example of this design is the Hotel do Garbe in Armação de Pêra (1959–64) built by Jorge Chaves and Frederico Sant’Ana on the steep cliffs of the Algarve.74 The terraced variation of the same type can be found at La Grande Motte in the south of France, for example, as well as at Albena in Bulgaria and in Poreč in Croatia. [→ 88, 157] The Mauna Kea Beach Hotel (1961–65) is often mistakenly held to be a pioneer of the terraced hotel type. Shortly after Hawaii became the USA’s youngest federal state in 1959, SOM Architects built the luxurious and sophisticated hotel for Rockefeller, who planned to put a part of his art collection on permanent
display there. Given the prominence, not only of the commissioning client and the international jet-set that regularly dropped by but also of the architecture office itself, the hotel was one of the best publicized projects of its day, extensively covered by lifestyle magazines and professional journals alike.25 Yet Francisco Conceição Silva had completed the outstanding Hotel do Mar (1960–63) in Sesimbra, Portugal, one step ahead.26 Terraced structures often proved an ideal choice for cliffs: an optimal means to make use of the difficult steep terrain, and therefore became a defining element of Croatian tourism architecture in southern Dalmatia in the late 1960s. [→ 162, 230] Another less cost effective and therefore less popular strategy was to embed horizontal bands in the topography, setting guestroom sections one below the other, for example, so as to span the slope between the coast road and the sea, in a manner used to grandiose effect inter alia by Yaacov Rechter for the Mivtachim Sanatorium in Zichron Yaacov, Israel (1966–69).27 But the dips and hollows of forested cliff slopes also at times inspired a less dense distribution of architectural components, emphasizing the ‘back to nature’ appeal of a light and airy holiday village atmosphere. The spectrum ranged from camping sites and modest chalet parks through to the ingeniously simple modular architecture of the Novy Artek Pioneer Camp (A. Polansky et al., 1960–63)28 or a mountain-hut style ClubMed, as at the Russalka resort near Cape Kaliakra in northern Bulgaria (M. Marinov et al., 1968/69). [→ 141]

Architects quite frequently drew on the tried and tested spatial organization and flair of densely built small Mediterranean towns, interlinking the holiday camps’ limited public and private exterior spaces in such a way as to optimize their potential both for solitude and sociability.29 Examples of this type of densely built ‘village complex’ can be found in the south of France: the Village du Merlier holiday resort (1959–69) designed by Atelier de Montrouge is a complex cluster of interlocking exposed concrete cubes built on a cliff face near Saint-Tropez; while for the Leucate-Le Barcarès resort, launched in Languedoc-Roussillon in 1964, Candidis Josic Woods designed and built tight clusters of minimal apartments interlinked by patios, terraces, balconies and porches: whitewashed, simple, geometric forms that were strongly reminiscent of Greek villages.29 The Port Grimaud marina (1989–) near Saint-Tropez was planned and

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realized by François Spoerry as a postmodern reinterpretation of a small Mediterranean port town.30

Architecture and urban planning overlapped increasingly, the larger the holiday resorts became, not least when they were built on hitherto unused or agricultural land. The speed with which developments were springing up in attractive coastal spots such as the Côte d’Azur set alarm bells ringing, moreover, leading to demands for better regional planning and the stricter regulation of construction projects in emergent tourism regions. Many advocates of modern architecture and urban planning clearly recognized the benefits of the centralized economic and urban planning pursued in state socialist countries. In Romania, for example, Cezar Lăzărescu and his team began working on a master plan for the development of the Black Sea coast as early as 1953/54, and also drew up plans for key buildings in Constanța, Mamaia and Eforie, which were implemented from 1956 on.31 In Bulgaria, where the 380 km coastline consisted largely of undeveloped stretches of dunes and sandy beach, the state began outlining plans for several holiday resorts on an urban scale in 1956; but it wisely restricted them to a few distinct locations so as to prevent random sprawl. [→ 60] The French state also inaugurated a development scheme for its 180 km of coastline between Montpellier and the Spanish border, which was no less ambitious than those of the state socialist countries. In fact, what came to be known as ‘Mission Racine’—named after Pierre Racine, appointed director general in 1963—ranks among the largest regional and urban planning operations ever undertaken in Europe.32 Georges Candilis was head of the urban planning team. The scheme included six resort towns, the most famous of which is probably Jean Balladur’s La Grande Motte, with its striking truncated pyramid structures. A single architect designed each resort to accommodate 100,000 guests, in a typological mix mainly comprised of apartment blocks and villas built for private sale, as well as some camping sites and a handful of hotels. Likewise in Yugoslavia, in the framework of the UN-funded ‘Jadranski Projekti’ development scheme for the Adriatic Coast, international planning experts proposed densely built resorts on an urban scale; but, unlike in Bulgaria and France, their implementation was deemed either not feasible or not wanted. [→ 175]
The parallels between the seaside architecture and urbanism of state socialist and capitalist countries in the post-war era gives us an opportunity to consider in retrospect whether, or to what extent, the state control of tourism development was a specifically socialist ambition or a sign of a more general modern, Fordist trend: the economic exploitation both of leisure time and undeveloped land. A commitment to rational planning and predominantly modern architecture was not a prerogative only of state socialist regimes, for examples of centrally planned large-scale tourism development schemes abound also in the capitalist West; yet the Eastern bloc was certainly better placed to give uncompromised expression to it, in the framework of a planned economy. Conversely, while Western Europe was surveying its own versions of ‘social tourism’, most state socialist countries were making allowance for private property, private holiday homes, private lets and (whatever the official line on the matter) also for ‘wild tourism’, as Christian Noack, in particular, has shown.\(^{33}\) Planners and the tourism industry in both political blocs did everything they possibly could to control both the exploding numbers of tourists and the extent of construction activity—not least so the state could take its own cut of the latest economic boom.

A closer look at the post-war history of tourism architecture thus allows us not only to track the distinctions presumed to exist between East and West but also to appreciate how permeable the two blocs’ borders were, how similarly their planners and tourists regarded their respective spaces and paces of leisure, and how the dream of ‘getting away from it all’—despite very real differences in each political system—ultimately took shape in remarkably similar heterotopia, namely those that served to control the pursuit of leisure. For, from the viewpoint of the powers-that-be, holiday resorts were conceived (and still are today) in such a way that both the control of leisure and indoctrination with hegemonic ideology are assured. From the viewpoint of the guests subject to such control and indoctrination, however, resorts generally represent territory that is just waiting to be appropriated by any individual pleasure-seeker, in ways highly likely to culminate in carnivalesque excess; with the result that many a worker returns from a holiday in a worse physical condition than when s/he set off.