Seaside Architecture and Urbanism in Bulgaria and Croatia
Edited by Elke Beyer, Anke Hagemann and Michael Zinganel

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 a viable product on the international holidays 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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Tourism is vital to Croatia's economy today, for the sector accounts for 25 percent of the GDP. After years of war and a long-drawn-out, non-transparent privatization process, Croatia is fighting to re-establish itself as a leading leisure periphery for the European middle-class— and, even more ambitiously, for upper class and nouveau riche tourists from all over the globe. But only a few new facilities have been realized over the last twenty or thirty years. Most of the infrastructure now in use—especially the big, quality hotels and resorts of the late 1960s and early 70s— was built as part of the socialist modernization drive launched under Tito after WWII.

Croatia numbered among the six member states of the Socialist Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) founded in 1945: an agglomeration of regions that had been dominated for centuries by very disparate multinational empires. Most significantly, the SFRY represented a singular hybrid solution at the time, for it chose to tread the middle ground between the political and economic blocs of East and West. 'Socialist Yugoslavia blurred the black and white picture of the Cold War world. From its sudden break from the Soviet orbit in 1948 until the fall of the Berlin Wall four decades later, it was an oddity wedged between the ideologically opposed Eastern and Western blocs that found a middle ground between them'; and hence, argues architecture historian Vladimir Kulić, architects and planners also blurred the lines between established categories of modernism.1
Tourism in Tito’s Yugoslavia, as well as in certain other countries was welcomed as a motor of modernization: a means to transform what had hitherto been a primarily agricultural society. The widespread belief that land and property belong to all and that everyone should have the right of access to the sea was arguably specifically socialist but the most distinctive feature of the Yugoslav economy was the ‘socialized company’, which is to say, any place of production under workers’ self-management. First established in the early 1950s, this economic model was then expanded step-by-step and adapted also for use by major tourism operators as well as by the planning and construction companies that designed and built their facilities.

The symbolic role of tourism was likewise of major importance in Tito’s Yugoslavia: large, strikingly designed modernist hotel complexes were flagship sites of tourism, a perfect means to showcase the success of ‘Third Way’ policies and radical internationalism. Yugoslavia faced fierce criticism from the Eastern bloc after its rift with Stalin in 1948 yet, in the eyes of much of the West at the time, it was still a bit of a mystery: a communist country that was unable to count on Soviet support until the mid 1950s. Neither Yugoslavia’s pioneering role as a co-founder of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM, 1961) nor its conviction that it ranked among the international political avant-garde was compatible with locking up its citizens in a ghetto, like states behind the Iron Curtain did. As the historian Igor Tchoukarine notes, ‘The international mobility of its own population and the visa-free entry of visitors from the greatest possible range of foreign countries was intended to prove that criticism from abroad was mere fiction and far removed from reality.’

Major modern tourism operations were therefore conceived as cosmopolitan meeting points where the success of Tito’s Third Way policies could be clearly communicated, both to domestic and international publics.

The aim of this book therefore, is to inquire firstly, whether or to what extent the socio-spatial solutions developed under these particular conditions for the ‘in-between’ form of international mass tourism were distinct from those elsewhere; and, secondly, whether or to what extent it proved possible to steer the post-socialist transformation of ex-Yugoslavia
Hotel Kristal in Poreč; architect: Julije De Luce, 1970.
route; yet not a single destination, from Mali Lošinj, Silba, Zadar, Šibenik, Split, Hvar, Korčula, Dubrovnik to the Austrian naval port of Kotor, could offer a decent hotel. It was only in 1884 that the Southern Railway Company linked Vienna and Rijeka and simultaneously launched the region's first real tourist accommodation, the Hotel Kvarner in Abbazia (now Opatija), which was gradually expanded and turned into an elegant spa. Hungarian investors opened the Hotel Therapia in Crikvenica in 1894 and Austrian Lloyd opened the Hotel Imperial in Dubrovnik in 1897. By then at the latest, staying in a grand hotel or owning a villa close to one of the booming bathing resorts was a status symbol for leading figures in finance and society. By the terms of the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye signed in 1919, the Istrian peninsula and the city of Rijeka—two northern locations that clearly bear the stamp of former Venetian rule and which at the time had the best developed tourism infrastructure—were ceded to Italy. Most of the Adriatic coast fell to the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and quickly became a popular destination for the new elites of the independent successor states to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Stately mansions and hotels sprang up, especially in the Dubrovnik region: either in the historicist style—the Grand Hotel in Kupari Bay, for example, which was built and operated by Czechoslovak entrepreneurs; or in an explicitly contemporary style, such as evidenced by the Grand Hotel Lopud, a masterpiece of early Modernism built in 1936, on the eponymous island, to the northwest of Dubrovnik, by the Serbian architect Nikola Dobrović.

When the SFRY was established in 1945, the private hotels, grand restaurants, magnificent villas, transport companies and travel agencies were nationalized, then merged to form new large enterprises.

**Domestic and social tourism**

Clearly, creating whatever it took to ensure the native population could go to the seaside was more of a priority for the new socialist government than opening up the land to foreigners was—at least in the rhetoric of its early years in power. A guide to Dalmatia published in 1950 states that 'every worker in our land enjoys the uncontrasted right to use beaches and hotels, parks and mountain resorts during his holidays —places that, before the Liberation, were reserved exclusively for the bourgeoisie and were therefore out of reach of any ordinary worker'.

along different paths than those pursued after the fall in the 'classic' Eastern bloc countries.

From the legacy of pre-socialist travel to mass tourism under state socialism

Established tourism infrastructures and architectures existed on the Croatian Adriatic before Tito's day, however. Dating from the time of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, they reflected the emergence of the holiday habit among aristocrats and the prosperous upper-middle class. In 1857 the opening of a railway line between the then Austrian port of Trieste and the capital city Vienna boosted business for the 'Steam Navigation Company' Austrian Lloyd (Lloyd Austriaco): the ferry links it had been providing between Trieste and several picturesque island or coastal locations since 1838 suddenly became a very popular sightseeing
In 1946, the Yugoslav government decided that all workers were entitled to fourteen days annual paid leave or up to thirty days, if engaged in heavy labour. In 1947, it was decided that union members—which de facto meant every employee plus his or her family—would be entitled to discounts when taking a holiday: 50 percent on travel costs (excluding air travel) and 25 percent on any accommodation booked for a minimum of five nights.7

Furthermore, a system of 'social tourism' was established both on existing nationalized sites and in new purpose-built facilities [*172, 226]: an extensive network of holiday homes and camps, each of which was reserved exclusively for the staff and/or members of one particular trade union, state administrative unit, youth organization or large 'socialized company', or for the Yugoslav National Army or the Red Cross, and so on. From the very start, there was a clear favourite when it came to holiday destinations: the 5,972 Croatian social tourism institutions in existence in 1954, no less than 5,901 were on the coast.8

By the 1960s, the system of social tourism was so well established that a week's holiday cost a worker less than a week's wage—and thus was on a par with the ideal promoted as early as the 1930s by Billy Butlin, a successful pioneer of British mass tourism: 'A week's holiday for a week's wage!'9

So whether for socio-political or commercial purposes, the main thing at the time was to teach the masses to travel. For holidays were a means not only for people to return refreshed to the workplace, but also to learn more about their country—or, in Yugoslavia's case, about their 'multi-ethnic federation of nations'.10 Domestic tourism was assigned a pivotal role in the creation of the 'New Yugoslav' who, regardless of his origins, was to demonstrate socialist consciousness, love his country, and consider every fellow citizen a 'brother'. Travel and holidays were intensively promoted at trade fairs and featured in a broad range of magazines and newspapers.11

The demand for holidays away from home did indeed grow exponentially. By the late 1960s, state provision could no longer meet the demand. Many citizens also found the booking formalities tiresome and the requisite reservation periods too long. When, in addition, the state cut its subsidies and the first Yugoslavian car—a Fiat franchise production—came on the market, demand for customized holidays soared, triggering a boom in the construction of camping sites and private apartments and rooms for rent along the coast. Domestic tourists at the time regarded the latter as the most authentic form of accommodation on the Croatian Adriatic.
The grey market in legal and illegal lets was grudgingly tolerated quasi from the start.12 Tourism incomes in the resorts allowed the construction of larger and more modern equipped homes.13 Clusters of villendica (holiday homes) therefore continued to mushroom in between the protected historical towns and the isolated, relatively self-contained new resorts.14

Foreign tourism

Development of domestic and social tourism in the early 1950s was paralleled by a resurgence of the Croatian Adriatic's popularity among tourists from East and West Europe. The monopoly on marketing and organizing incoming tourism was in the hands of Putnik, the state-owned successor agency to a joint stock company founded back in 1923. Putnik opened offices abroad and signed tourist agreements with foreign agencies, most successfully with the Czech national tourism agency Čedok.15 Initially, Putnik maintained headquarters in Belgrade as well as branches throughout the country but the latter became fully-fledged independent entities in the course of Yugoslavia's general decentralization process (1951–64): 'Putnik-Ljubljana became the agency Kompas, Putnik in Rijeka turned into Kvarner Express, Putnik in Split was transformed into Dalmatijaturist, and Putnik-Dubrovnik was renamed Atlas. Putnik-Zagreb merged with the tourism agency Centroturist and became Generalaturist in 1963, while Putnik-Belgrade retained the original name “Putnik”15.16 From the start of its rift with Stalin in 1948 until consolidation of its relations with the USSR in 1955, Yugoslavia mainly targeted Western markets. The liberalization of visa requirements in 1951 and devaluation of the dinar in 1952 put this extremely affordable holiday paradise within easy reach of West and Central European (particularly German, Austrian and Italian) middle-class tourists, who could travel there by car, bus or ferry or—later—even by plane, if they preferred.

Transforming existing sea-links to modern car ferry routes and the hairpin bends of the coastal road into the ‘Jadranska magistrala’ highway opened up hitherto untouched territory for tourism. The islands and pine-forests near to the old port cities were fertile ground for new operations offering a broad range of accommodation, from private guestrooms and holiday apartments to camping sites to major hotels and apartment complexes under workers' management, each category of which supplied roughly one third of the overall over-night capacity. The specific urban and typological development of such larger facilities is described in detail in Maroje Mrduljaš's contribution to this volume [-117]. A boom in yachting either on private or chartered vessels was also assured by the introduction of remarkably generous mooring fees in Yugoslav marinas and an easily obtainable seaman's licence for coastal waters: the impact of this on the coastal landscape can still be felt today.

West European tourists were successfully encouraged to part with hard currency and thus reduce the foreign trade deficit, and they also took home photos and happy memories of their holidays. Both factors helped bolster Yugoslavia's international standing. Paying court to potential guests and offering them familiar surroundings became top priority during the 1960s. Brands hitherto disdained as symbols of 'decadent capitalism' suddenly cropped up in the socialist service industry: in 1967/68, both Pepsi and Coca Cola opened bottling plants in Yugoslavia and the government authorized credit card systems; in 1969, the Croatian travel agency, Generalaturist became an official partner of Diners Club; in 1972, the Dalmatian agency, Atlas teamed up with American Express...17 And this ideological thaw also gave rise to other joint ventures, such as one with the French ClubMed in 1960, close to the Dalmatian village of Pakoštane, and another with the US-American Penthouse magazine in 1972, on the island of Krk. Ten of the twenty-six casinos in existence in 1972 were in foreign hands.18 In 1972, the 13th World Congress of the International Naturist Federation took place in the Croatian resort of Vrsar. The Croatian tourism authorities hoped this would create a new target market and hence an additional rise in overnights.19 By 1974 there were no less than thirty Naturisticki Kampovi on the Croatian Adriatic: camping sites, bungalow parks or hotels for naturist holidaymakers.20

However, this phase of exponential growth in the tourism sector coincided with the flowering of youth movements and sexual liberation, which meant practices and conflict potential were imported each season into regions whose agrarian populations were still somewhat conservative. On the other hand, the frequent impossibility of finding sufficient local personnel to staff resorts in high season meant seasonal
workers had to be recruited elsewhere, predominantly in the federal republics of Slovenia and Bosnia and the province of Vojvodina. This ensured not only that the conflict potential but also the benefits of modernization made themselves felt, far beyond the borders of any actual holiday destination.

As early as 1970, non-Yugoslavians accounted for some 60 percent of the 28.6 million registered overnights22 and, in the 1980s, at the height of the tourism development shortly before the socio-political turnaround, Yugoslavia ranked among the top five most popular European destinations.23

From incomplete modernization to incomplete privatization. Delayed post-war transition on the Croatian Adriatic

After Tito's death in 1980, conflicts between the country's federal republics and various ethnic groups intensified increasingly, primarily owing to the unequal distribution of tax revenue between the rich and poor among them, which was almost universally considered unjust. The relatively high tax revenue levied in coastal tourism regions—most of which lay in Croatia—considerably exacerbated this imbalance.24 From the mid to the end of the 1980s, the more the economy floundered, the more blatant the expression of nationalist tendencies became, on all fronts.25 The Croatian government under President Franjo Tudman began to prepare for privatization of the tourism industry even before signing its Declaration of Independence. To this end it seized possession, by decree, of all coastal tourism operations under workers' management—regardless of which federal republic they were allocated to—and put them under the management of the Croatian Privatization Fund (CPF) but it could not yet countenance privatization per se.

After both Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence in June 1991, ex-Yugoslavia slithered into a period of relentless hostilities that was to drag on for years and have fatal consequences for economic development in all the successor states. The tourism sector was
particularly badly hit. The Serbian-Croatian war that broke out in the summer season of 1991 caused huge damage in the coastal region: both directly, as the infrastructure around Dubrovnik was destroyed, and indirectly, in that numerous hotels were requisitioned as emergency accommodation for refugees. Except in Istria and on Kvarner Bay, the incoming tourism market collapsed completely, so many holiday camps were forced to close down temporarily; and hostilities between the successor states also put a long-term end to the previously flourishing domestic tourism sector. Privatization took a while to get underway however, even after the war ended. The many reasons for this and the at times extremely arbitrary decision-making processes it involved are spelled out in detail in Norbert Mappes-Niedieck’s chapter of this volume (p. 209).

Things were not made particularly easy for any interested parties. Given the long tradition of workers’ self-management and the towns’ considerable political leverage, local populations and local authorities identified strongly with the tourist enterprises that had once been ‘theirs’. They therefore tried to maintain as much control as possible and showed a healthy distrust of investors of any type—protégés of the Zagreb government and foreigners alike—as well as of proposals and schemes floated by the Croatian Privatization Fund that had formally expropriated them.

By the time privatization finally got underway around 2000, the lack of recent investment in tourism facilities was starting to show. Moreover, their revenue was very modest on account of the brevity of the season and their profit margin very low owing to the very high cost of maintaining a full staff out of season. Ownership was in the meantime in the hands of various state and private trusts, former employees and privatized regional banks: too complex a mix for decisions to be easily reached. The major problem, however, was the lack of legal certainty regarding the current ownership of land and property that had been declared common property in the socialist era. Property relations in many cases had not yet been clarified or indeed could not be clarified, owing to ill-maintained or missing Registers of Deeds. And to acquire only a building permit or a limited lease for property not in their legal possession evidently often seemed too risky to potential buyers. Around the same time, major tourism developments became subject to strict regulation and monitoring. Zoning plans and designated development schemes dating from the socialist era were declared invalid and so had to be drawn up anew, for each site under review. Also, the width of the protected shoreline zone along the coast was first reduced then extended to one hundred metres, with the result that virtually every coastal tourism project had to undergo a complex environmental compatibility test—at the respective investor’s expense. Permits for new developments on hitherto un-built land were issued only in exceptional cases. Investors were instead required either to work within the contours of existing buildings or to extend them in such a way that interventions remained largely invisible and did not detract from the original’s appearance. The vast majority of tourism facilities on the Adriatic Coast have therefore been renovated on very limited budgets. Melancholy ruins still outnumber significant new developments.

In 2000, given the aforementioned complex ownership structures in the tourism sector, investors began increasingly to assign management to ostensibly separate companies, so as to be able to push through unwelcome measures such as a reduction of personnel costs. But it was only in 2004, when substantial tax incentives for investors were anchored by new legislation, that the first really significant wave of investment set in, in the wake of which came expensive, ambitious, luxury developments, equipped moreover with wellness and conference facilities: the means to lengthen the short high season. Yet on account of the economic crisis, no further new developments have been launched since 2005. Most of the projects discussed here as Case Studies [p. 233] were started beforehand. In addition, it has since become clear that the market for many luxury facilities is extremely limited and that few guests are interested in special offers guaranteeing all-year-round use. Some of the most prominent investors were unable to service their credit—and some of those who assured credit likewise found they had seriously overstretched their capacity.

The delayed introduction of investment-friendly policies may be put down to a number of factors, from the government’s perfectly...
understandable fear of losing control over the country's most important economic sector, to obligations ensuing from war-time, from rivalries between Zagreb and local stakeholders to corruption, from on-going legal uncertainty to over-regulation of the market. But whatever role all these may have played, in the opinion of many critical liberal economic experts, the main reason for the delay is the over long period of maladministration—to which Croatia's EU accession in 2013 will hopefully put an end.

From another angle, however, the delays may be read as a historical happy turn of fate: unlike Spain, Bulgaria and Montenegro, where a fully deregulated property market and a lack of the political will to impose planning regulations have left large parts of the coast disastrously disfigured by random sprawl, Croatia's natural resources and landscape are still largely intact. By the time construction picked up there again, local architects were proud to draw on what they see as a specifically Croatian modernist tradition, and were ready to reinterpret it in innovative ways (1242). Croatian managers, for their part, had time enough to convince new owners that it would be well worth their while to respect the special features and traditions of each specific destination: the hotels' and resorts' semi-public zones and leisure facilities were originally intended to be open to all and—despite the shifts in ownership—they are used like common property today. The local population thus enjoys unhindered access to them—as well as unhindered access to the sea, which is still a right guaranteed by law.