



Second homes and urban landscape patterns in Mediterranean coastal tourism destinations



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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Tourism
Urban landscape
Second homes
Landscape ecology
Urban planning
Mediterranean

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses two recurring land use issues that are conventionally accepted when analyzing most of the Mediterranean mass coastal tourism destinations: the limited role of planning and the supposedly standardized nature of the resulting landscape. Based on a specific case study in the Catalan coastline, this paper presents analytical metrics and empirical data showing that, despite the controversial nature of the resulting urbanization and contrary to this common understanding, urban planning tools have been relevant in the shaping of the landscape of coastal settlements dominated by tourism and second homes. More precisely, the paper analyzes how, on the Catalan coast, partial planning tools have been able to create since the 1960s specific urban pieces with temporary residence uses that, beyond their actual limitations, shaped differentiated landscape structures with a particular landscape identity. To reach this conclusion, we have applied a set of spatial metrics at different scales to the analysis of the urban partial plans approved in the destination. Results allow the identification of the basic urban landscape patterns of the area, facilitate the understanding of the role of regulatory planning tools, and highlight the role of its evolution during the last 50 years in the process of the destination urban landscape shaping and transformation.

1. Introduction

Throughout the Mediterranean coastline, some specific urban structures have been identified as cities created by and for tourism (Équipe MIT, 2002, 2005, 2011). They are towns that—as analyzed in other geographical areas—configure and compose a spatially and socially different landscape (see the seminal work of Mullins, 1991, 1992). They use their landscapes as symbolic magnets to attract tourists but also new residents and, thus, they can be characterized by the rapid growth of population and workforce. This idea has been recently echoed strongly by Clivaz et al. (2014) when examining the conversion of resorts into urban places. Anton Clavé (2012) has also clearly defined transitive-type trajectories of destinations characterized by their path transformation from tourism-specialized areas toward complex multi-functional cities. Temporary residences play a major role in this evolutionary path (see Colaninno, 2012; Anton Clavé and Wilson, 2016).

This article interprets the inherent urbanization and urban transformation processes that underpin mass coastal tourism destinations with second homes developments in many regions, questioning two recurring aspects: first, the limited role of planning and, second, the supposedly standardized nature of their landscape.

The academic literature tends to argue that coastal tourism

destinations and especially temporary residential areas are often poorly planned and, thus, can be characterized as unfinished territories resulting from predatory, uncontrolled, improvised, dispersed, interrupted, and rushed development processes (Gausa, 1996; Quero, 2004; Vera Rebollo et al., 2011). We are not going to discuss in this paper the clear need to integrate the planning of land uses with the conservation of the environment, the valorization of the landscape, the urban restructuring, the reconfiguration of destinations, and the need to address the effects of past inefficient planning tools (Anton Clavé et al., 2011). All of these, in fact, can be observed in recent planning regulatory frameworks that are evolving toward a more balanced and environmentally protective vision of the role of urban development (Rullán Salamanca, 2011). In contrast, the aim of the paper is to highlight that, beyond controversies about the aesthetic and functional results derived from the process of urban development in coastal areas (see Blázquez Salom and Irigoy, 2016, for the Spanish case), the role of planning has been key in the shaping of the current coastal destination tourism landscapes (Sabaté Bel, 2014), as has been highlighted in, for instance, the Balearic Islands (Horrach, 2015). Detailed studies show, in this line, that different types of coastal tourism destination landscapes exist under the same development regulatory frame because, precisely, of the role of local plans in the process of development (see Toulhier,

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2010, for the analysis of coastal tourism destinations in France and Díaz Armeneiro (2013), in the case of Spain).

This is directly related with the second issue to be discussed in this paper: the supposedly standardized nature of the landscape of mass coastal tourism and second homes destinations. The landscape of this kind of destinations has been generally described as standardized, homogeneous, cloned, a-territorialized, decontextualized, and repetitive (Muñoz, 2007; Módenes and López-Colás, 2007; Hazbun, 2008; Brida et al., 2009). Tourism and second homes destinations are built from the concentration and aggregation of minimal architectural elements such as hotels, marinas, temporary houses, attractions, and other elementary components such as those listed and analyzed by Pié and Rosa (2013); obviously, these elements give destinations formal and functional similarities. This also occurs with other consumption and production landscapes. Nevertheless, it can be stated that the resulting landscape of each destination may be clearly distinguished from the landscape of other destinations at both local and regional levels. This has been studied, for instance, in the case of the Costa del Sol, where local processes of tourism development have created different types of tourism and second homes developments (Royo Naranjo, 2013). These differences can and should be measured and analyzed to go beyond common clichés and banalities about the characteristics, nature, and attractiveness of the landscape based only on aesthetic preferences of consumers, producers, and researchers.

In its discussion of this, the paper lends additional empirical support to the largely unanswered question of the role of tourism as complex urban developer in the case of coastal destinations (Anton Clavé et al., 2011; Bosman et al., 2016). It also provides new and innovative empirical evidence for morphological studies such as those of Andriotis (2006) on the urban transformation of Mediterranean coastal destinations through a number of development stages. It allows discussion about how urban changes in tourism destinations can be useful to overcome classical assumptions derived from some Tourism Area Life Cycle model studies (Butler, 1980; Butler, 2006a,b). This is particularly relevant when analyzing the connection between market stagnation and the supposed loss of attractiveness of destinations because of, precisely and among other reasons, their messy and cloned nature (Papatheodorou, 2004, Butler, 2014).

The research shown here is based on a specific case in the Catalan coast. Tourist places analyzed in this study were developed using spatial planning tools derived from conventional urban planning (Anton Clavé, 1997). Interestingly, these planning tools included specific regulations allowing the development of temporary residences. As a result, a temporary residential landscape has been created in this area of the Catalan coastline and, thus, the temporary landscape patterns can be analyzed. Hence, we define the resulting temporary residential landscape patterns as “the discernible outcome” or signature (O’Sullivan and Perry, 2013, p. 30) of the operating process behind the development of the tourism destination.

Therefore, a discussion about the particular evolution, character, and identity of the coastal tourism destination landscape is introduced and particular landscape patterns related to temporary residential urbanization are distinguished, going beyond the generic idea of the standardization of temporary mass tourism landscapes with second homes all over the world. In this context, landscape patterns can be understood as fingerprints of the specific urban development process in a given area (O’Sullivan and Perry, 2013) and clearly differentiate its identity.

For this purpose, we have designed a methodological procedure that has some commonalities and analogies with landscape ecology approaches. This procedure has been specifically developed with the aim of modeling the basic landscape units of the temporary residential space. It helps to identify, characterize, and explain the urban mosaic resulting from its evolution. The proposed approach reveals itself as a useful tool because, in accordance with Reis et al. (2015, 2016), the use of spatial metrics helps elucidate the spatial-temporal patterns of urban

development and the resulting processes underpinning these patterns.

Partial urban plans are the primary source of information used to perform the analysis. These are local-scale planning documents that develop the prescriptions of general urban plans at municipal level and establish the guidelines for the development of new sections of the urban space of the city with both quantitative and qualitative information. These planning documents prefigure the real landscapes used by temporary residents. More precisely, in the case of Spain, partial urban plans often determine the structure of the final urban landscape.

In Section 2, we review current issues regarding the application of landscape metrics in urban environments and discuss their adaptability to the area of study. The source of information and the characteristics of the geographical area are introduced in Section 3. In Section 4 we explain the methodology, and results are showcased in Section 5. In Section 6 we discuss how results can transform the common understanding of the landscape of temporary residence areas. Finally, we summarize the major conclusions of this study in Section 7.

2. Background

Landscape metrics focusing on urban spaces are also generally known as spatial metrics or, more specifically, according to some urban planners and geographers, geospatial metrics (Reis et al., 2016). Spatial metrics are defined as “the quantitative measures used to assess the spatial characteristic of urban settlements and structures” (Reis et al., 2015, p. 330) and they should address the study of urban form and function (Herold et al., 2005). They help to identify “the spatial component in urban structure (both intra- and inter-city) and in the dynamics of change and growth processes” (Herold et al., 2005, p. 371). A number of studies review the use of spatial metrics for the study of urban patterns (Aguilera Benavente, 2010; Schwarz, 2010; Reis et al., 2015, 2016) including, specifically, tourism environments (Gkoltziou and Terkenli, 2008, 2012). Among them, Reis et al. (2015) deal with some authors’ use of spatial metrics to “represent particular spatial characteristics [...] to link economic processes to land use patterns [...] and also in combination with urban growth models” (p. 280). To be explanatory, results obtained from the analysis should be capable of capturing the characteristics of urban landscapes and enable the identification of their evolution in time (Geoghegan et al., 1997; Herold et al., 2005).

The application of spatial metrics in urban environments to identify landscape patterns and processes often raises questions about the value of the used indicators (Lausch and Herzog, 2002; Herold et al., 2002, 2003; Berling-Wolff and Wu, 2004; Alberti and Marzluff, 2004; Hobbs and Wu, 2007; Aguilera Benavente et al., 2011). Nevertheless, following Matteucci and Silva (2005), the most important challenge when using spatial metrics “is the consistency between what is sought and the method [used]” (p. 188).

This relates to the first question that is usually discussed when using spatial metrics (Reis et al., 2016). Spatial metrics tend to be specially defined for each case study and, then, they “can have different assumptions, methods of collecting/processing data, scales of analysis and variables used, even if they all measure the same specific spatial feature” (Reis et al., 2016, p. 257). As a consequence, in most cases spatial metrics have low transferability; therefore, the identification, characterization, and justification of each metric and its comparability with metrics used in other studies are critical when analyzing urban landscape patterns. This is partially addressed by Reis et al. (2016), who state that urban morphological features can be measured using geospatial metrics related to nine broad categories: fragmentation, density, land-use diversity, centrality, accessibility, connectivity, inequality, spatial network analysis, and other metrics.

Second, as Li and Wu (2004) explain, echoing Wiens (1989), qualitative changes in landscape are often not reflected by spatial metrics. Landscape indexes can also be insensitive to their functional attributes

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