Dispersive Tourism and Camouflage

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**Abstract**

Departing from and elaborating on the argument that mass tourism is constituted by a series of paradoxes rather than inconsistencies, planning and architecture stand restricted in solving tourism’s detrimental effects to a full extent. Only a considerable decrease of its development can perhaps keep solely the undeniable prosperity brought by mass tourism without harm. This paper discusses the potentials behind the ‘instrumentalization of landscape design’ and the ‘conception of planning and architecture as one discipline’ to reduce the negative environmental performance often brought by the de-contextualized architecture of dispersive tourism, under the premise that such model is worth improving.

Keywords: tourism, dispersion, environmental typology, camouflage

**Introduction**

From Sun & Beach to war monuments, from natural splendor to wastelands, there is virtually nothing that escapes potential tourist exploitation. Tourism no longer provides just leisure based on rest and recreation; it produces and sells all kinds of experiences as a commodity. Yet tourism’s developmental force brings prosperity to many places in need of economic growth, especially mass tourism - a reality to acknowledge despite of its unintended consequences. Being a strong manifestation of mass tourism, dispersive or sprawl tourism poses a big challenge; to resolve its territorial performance and environmental appearance.

**Description and Origins of the Model**

Dispersive tourism is a repetitive construct scattered along many littorals. In the case of Croatia, it is plugged in and serviced by existing infrastructure (consolidated cities, settlements, vacation center services, etc.). It is a sprawl of objects constituted by free-standing villas, extended old villas, urban villas, multi-apartment buildings, apart-hotels, etc. These are typologies that suit small scale entrepreneurship goals of maximum land exploitation within strict regulations. It is a non-demanding middleclass tourist accommodation product for sale or rent, where the regional location, good weather, landscape and mobility are the main attractors. This model upholds around 40% of the accommodation capacities of Croatia.

In the 1960s, with the rise of living standards after Yugoslavia’s recovery from the WWII, citizens started to create their private retreats as a resistance to the collective system of social tourism. Cottages’ were built on the seaside or in other attractive locations for spending weekends and holidays outside the city. The policies and planning authorities at that time saw the private building efforts as a disorder leading to so called wild urbanizations. Despite the efforts to control the weekend house phenomenon, the legislation failed to categorize the difference between second homes and holiday houses, thus keeping their distinctions blurred. On the other hand, increasing dwelling demands of the local coastal population started to colonize the nearby areas of their cities. Sharing these dwellings and
weekend houses with friends or other family members unfolded into rentals and room rentals, which in turn not only became popular, but a vital business, especially for local dwellers. Soon enough, this became a modality of tourism: dispersive tourism and/or real-estate vacation rentals. The spatial imprint of this evolution is clearly visible: the urban patterns and morphologies behind the early weekend house developments differ from the various city housing expansions, just as they differ from real-estate vacation rentals. And yet, in the case of Croatia, the wild urbanism that increased after the 1990s war also had its imprint on the coast.

**Potentials and Handicaps of the Model**

The sprawl model has several qualities: 1| Sense of an affordable exclusivity for the guest - the feeling of not falling into the category of mass tourism since the contact with big clusters of tourists is not enforced, therefore avoidable; 2| Local comfort - the guests rarely outnumber local inhabitants in a particular place, which in turn helps keeping tourism’s intrusive atmosphere at minimum; 3| Mobile freedom and accessibility to a variety of localities - where guests can determine their own schedules of activities instead of following tours fixed by tour operators with all the implied shortcomings; 4| Close social interaction between hosts and users - the host becomes an immediate interface, often establishing a close relation with the guest and providing advices on what to experience and do; 5| Engaged target user - the model asks for an active guest, interested in meeting local natural and cultural features, with a mind set on consuming experiences rather than commodities. Less passive than, for example, hotel guests with comfort as the main objective and the expectations to have the entire holidays resolved quite literally in a single spot, where everybody can meet the promise of hedonism with one effortless move; 6| It is a transversal type of tourism where the participation of local people and the economic distribution of the generated wealth among the hosting communities are higher than in other modes of tourism. Since it gives solely accommodation, all the rest of the guests’ needs have to be outsourced, hence provided by an extensive milieu of local agents and actors. This condition is better understood when compared against other types of tourism such as big hotels or accommodation centers or resorts and marina/golf real estates, etc, where most of the accumulated revenue stays in the hands of hotel holders and tour operators.

However, it is one of the most controversial forms of mass tourism today, for this low density model lacks serious control over the execution of complementary infrastructure. This type of tourism poses a big threat: exhaustion of natural resources and failure to generate a coherent environmental image. Its physical appearance often installs a displaced imagery and lifestyle, detached from natural features and vernacular culture - a divergence between local identities and the particular tourist product in demand. (Fig. 1-3) The degree in which sprawl reaches the critical point when it gets out of control is in direct measure with the density of the network of existing services and infrastructure and the
development of the region. The more nurtured they are, the easier is to control sprawl’s impact and spatial organization. Such is the case of the Istrian Peninsula, northern part of Croatian littoral, as there is a significant quantity, diversity and proximity of competitive consolidated towns and cities coined by a history of regional development. (Fig. 4) The identity of the cities, their territorial appropriation and dialogue with the landscape represent an important vernacular patrimony. They give the guest or user a historical approach, knowledge and a strong atmospheric ambience apart from all the required services and amenities. On the other hand, the large amount of vacation centers also constitutes an important network of service hubs for the Istrian sprawl, for 95% of them were conceived during a post WWII Yugoslavia that had the motto to use tourism as one of the primary means to develop the country. In these circumstances and under the tradition of integral physical planning policies, the landscape approach, the distance among centers, proximity to consolidated areas, capacity, programmatic use, complementary services, logistical and infrastructural support were carefully laid out in long-term strategies. (Fig. 5-10) In other words, Yugoslav tourism was planned together with an urbanizing agenda, which made its recycle easier to meet updated product demands.

Tourism’s Paradoxes vs. the Limitations of Planning, Architecture and Landscape Design

A critical view towards the process of tourism today, requires addressing the shortcomings of tourism as a phenomenon separated from the spatial models hosting it. It is often forgotten to underline that however architecture would become contextual and at the same time fulfill its expected educational role, and, however regional planning would become ultimately instrumental and harmonious with the landscape, one cannot escape the true nature of mass tourism: it is to a great extent mainly seasonal and self referential, and in many ways vacations, rest and leisure are strong alienating agents. As a generic phenomenon, tourism always had its purpose in rest, leisure and traveling as a quest for new experiences\(^3\). In time, with leisure as a prime goal, the tendency of consuming unvisited places is becoming characterized and conditioned by a commodity for the familiar. Although destinations in general, especially remote or exotic, represent an ideal desire, it is often unconsciously expected from these places to operate within familiar codes and procedures - the paradox of escaping away from routine in order to find home, where home is a sign of safety and comfort as opposed to the apparent

Fig. 5-9 Consolidated cities

Fig. 10 The densest segment of Istriian littoral
risk and difficulty of performing unknown procedures and activities implied in world travel. Conversely, the increasing blend between leisure and daily life has brought traveling to a semi-quotidian state, in which tourists will mostly seek a comfortable sense of temporal belonging that would conveniently match their tight schedules - altogether emphasizing this sense of non deliberate hope for recognizable features. According to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (Franklin, 2003), everything can be made a “wish-prompting object or a brand.” This tendency has an impact on the life and structure of all the places tourists visit along their journey, dividing the world into places where tourists are directed into and places they are prevented from seeing. As tourists are restricted by time and “reduced to the consumption of limited and fast shrinking pleasurable sensations”, the effort to build up a frame of mutual rights, obligations and other binding rules of behavior presents a waste of time and energy. Since success or failure of the tourist industry hangs on the balance between “security of the familiar” and “adventure of the unknown”, it has taught and trained its users to expect the same kind of service in a sterile and “detoxicated” form. It is about supplying an “extraterritorial enclave” - neither permeable nor vulnerable, immune to local idiosyncrasies or allowing their strictly measured volume in a comfortable unobtrusive dose. According to historian Cord Pagenstecher (Pagenstecher, 2003), this increasingly governs not only tourists but also inhabitants: historical cities are “musealized,” modern cities are “festivalized,” and culture is “folklorized.”

Is it possible to change the paradigms of tourism - or at least decrease the cultural and iconographic imagery predetermined by travel expectations in favor of symbols more routed in local cultures, landscape features and social idiosyncrasies? One cannot look back to the tourism development of Yugoslavia and Croatia, and in this case dispersive tourism, and hold most of its architecture and planning policies accountable for failing to achieve emancipated environments of rich and culturally engaged social interaction, nor for its seasonal and mono-programmatic performance. From a critical perspective, the problematic of mass tourism is more about a series of paradoxes than inconsistencies. It is rather about the capacity to choose and reduce its development or monitor carefully the measure in which the various models of tourism are to be implemented. Unfortunately only a mature political environment with a sound socio-economical platform could substantially decrease our dependency on the tourism economy and bring the opportunity to conceive regional and local development in favor of permanent productive and cultural agendas, territorial consumption control, etc. In other words, without the arrival of such state of development, mass tourism’s unintended consequences will prevail as well as the way it capitalizes. With a role mostly oriented to provide leisure environments, promote the country, showcase crossover of trends, generate employment, foster related economic sectors and, at most, provide a potential alibi for furthering public infrastructure. In the meantime, the same could be expected for the architecture and planning of tourism in Croatia, at its best playing a critical role mostly limited to provide fair and measured guidelines to host the machine of tourism. Of course with exceptional moments of genius now and then, in a similar way than it has been done so far.

But with intelligent planning and moments of great architecture and landscape design, the negative effects of dispersive tourism can become less problematic, almost autonomously overcoming the paradoxes of tourism itself. Such is the case of the following examples, for, although of different nature and situated in different parts of the world, they provide instrumental value and inspiration to address the phenomenon of dispersive tourism.

**Mareda Complex - a compact approach**

As an answer to the emergence of Yugoslavia’s latest leisure demands, many real-estate weekend house settlements were developed on the Croatian coast by the official planning bodies during late 1970s and 80s. The first developments were based on simple regulation plans, with orderly dimensioned and organized building lots (Dajla, Borik/Rovinj, Jadrija/Šibenik, etc.). Later on, these were followed by more sophisticated and complex schemes such as Červar, Mareda and Gajac. In time some developments became more successful than others, but Mareda still stands out as remarkable effort in combining planning, architecture and particular tourist trends. Planned and designed from 1981 till 1984 by architects Juraj Matijević and Dinko Milas from the Croatian Planning Institute, the scheme followed the basic principles already for long used in the conception of Croatian mass tourism.
resorts - a minimum 100 m withdrawal from the coastline and a sustainable dense tourist city formation. The entire complex is constituted by two main parts. On one hand a rather usual tourist compound with camping, lodging facilities and a small tourist club offering gastronomic and recreational services, and on the other, the real-estate weekend house settlement. Being the subject of this paper, the later will be referred simply as Mareda in order to avoid confusion. (Fig. 11, 12)

Mareda has altogether 18 ha, with one third of this area belonging to common green space, one third destined to pedestrian communication, traffic and parking and one third constituting the footprint of dwelling capacity, from which four main structural typologies together with their permutations are distinctively the carriers of an increased number of dwelling variations. The units vary from 35 to 100 m^2, some of them being duplexes. The complementary program is modestly constituted, basically by grocery stores and cafés/bistros, allocated in the central axis and the off centered main park. Mareda is 150 m withdrawn from the shore, where tennis courts and a beach bar were allocated later on.

But, as mentioned and more importantly as a difference from earlier real-estate weekend house settlements, Mareda included a diverse repertory of dwelling variations able to provide different living standards and ambiances: five to six storey multi-apartment buildings with loggias, balconies and wide covered outdoor communication - with units on each level; two to three storey multi-apartment buildings, with balconies or small gardens on the ground floor - with units on each level; one or two storey semidetached houses with balconies and small gardens and one storey semidetached houses with bigger gardens. The rich diversity of the whole environment is brought by a meticulous work that oscillates from architectural and horticultural details such as walls, beams, pillars, pots, jardinières, Green fences, parapets, pavement levels, etc, to ambient elements such as pergolas, terraces, porches, front yards, patios, balconies, loggias, communication galleries, pedestrian circulations and passages, parks, etc. The whole treatment is also orchestrated to define different buffer zones as tools to provide collective and private distinction, indoor and outdoor relations, etc. (Fig. 13-15) The entire initiative was governmentally financed and the dwellings were sold to people of different origins and lifestyles.
The status of *property owners* gave the community a shared interest: to look after the environment and keep the real-estate value. In the beginning there were no permanent residents and the place was lively only during the summer season. Yet in the course of time, its liveliness has been prolonged throughout the year with community members becoming retirees willing to spend more time in their second homes, others using their apartments as rentals and new residents from nearby towns that came to live on permanent basis. All in all, becoming increasingly mixed as a community.

*The Sea Ranch - a clustered approach*

Founded in 1965 close to San Francisco, the Sea Ranch is one of the first eco-communities. It is a rare case of sustainable and sensitive merge between planning, architecture and landscape design. Today it has around 500 permanent and 1,500 nonpermanent residents, situated in 930,776 (2300) out of total of 1618,742 ha (4000 acres) of common land. It has around 1600 houses, a Lodge to accommodate visitors, several recreation and community buildings and three commercial structures. Around 600 house sites are yet to be developed and the Lodge is to be expanded. (Lyndon and Alinder, 2004: 13) As a managed landscape, it relies on the talents and skills of its supervisors: the staff of the Sea Ranch Association which oversees its comprehensive maintenance and development; the individual house owners who invest in its evolution and the architects and contractors who build there.

![Natural Conditions with Overlaid Landscape Design Approach](image1.png)

![Principle of Lot Division, Typological Clustering and Horticultural Design](image2.png)

Fig. 16 Layout of the Sea Ranch Community

![Fig. 17 Detail of the Settlement](image3.png)

![Fig. 18 Vegetation principles: hedge rows and new clusters](image4.png)

![Fig. 19 Athletic Club 1, MLTW, 1965](image5.png)

Landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, hired by the developer, not only recommended the architects, but assembled a multidisciplinary team, unprecedented until then. Under Halprin’s leadership the planning was not based on areas of a map, but on ideas about how buildings situated on the land could become part of the larger place that the maps could only dimly represent. The studies started in 1961 and comprised topography, vegetation, impact of natural forces (wind, waves) on the site, native culture production/other habits, creature’s (birds, seals) behavior, and local ways of inhabitation (barns and sheep sheds which inhabited landscape like rocks and landforms). The conventional planning documentation was replaced by diagrammatic freehand sketches and a statement of principles called *the basic Sea Ranch idea*, for the belief these would reassure emphasizing the essential characteristics of the site, make all of the community intentions possible, and yet allow for future growth. The land was to remain...
primary, while groups of building sites were thought to match the ecology, scope and scale of the landscape - placed within the landscape folds to gain vistas from each position within it. Half of the land was to remain open space in common ownership of the residents to insure keeping the coastal ecology, and not to wall the views - houses withdrawn at least 30,48 m (100 feet) from the ocean cliffs, roads in the meadows perpendicular to the coast. Roads followed the natural contours of the land with no curbs or sidewalks, not to interrupt the visual flow of the meadows. Materials which would automatically weather well and merge into the natural colors of the site were specified, requirements of height and roof slopes which would deal with local winds were established, plantings and tree types were limited to indigenous species - all to allow the existing ecosystems to dominate the aesthetic language. (Halprin, 2003) (Fig. 16-20)

The 1st buildings from 1964, the 10 units Condominium designed by MLTW® and the 6 Hedgerow Demonstration Houses’ designed by Joseph Esherick, were built to didactically demonstrate the basic principles. This was a sort of idiosyncratic architecture, built upon the formulation not to be married to the site but to enter into a limited partnership with it - agreed to by the architects. (Figure 21, 22) In 1965, the Declaration of Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs) was delivered and the Sea Ranch Association was established - an NGO of all property owners to be responsible for common properties, maintain the Ranch, protect the members and enforce CC&Rs. The restrictions, among other, contain the stricture that all structures, utilities and vehicles blend to nature. Concerning the specificities of design and landscaping, restrictions are to be implemented by a three person Design Committee, always with at least one architect appointed by the Association. The building regulations were sought to be rather loose compared to landscape treatments, which were very strict. The pioneer buyers were drawn by the beauty and isolation of the place, impressed with the publicity and architectural awards given to the demonstration buildings. The restrictions were not seen as an obstacle. Further on, the planning principles proved surprisingly fragile - by 1969 houses were scattered on the meadows rather than clustered, houses were built in the front rows of the shoreline and forest (areas forbidden by the plan), and new roads parallel to the shore had to be done for their supply. Departures from the plan were the result of a revolt by real estate agents, objecting not being able to market the most desirable home sites. The developer concentrated on premium lots, subdividing them in a typical suburban fashion - side by side along curving streets and cul-de-sacs - applying financial parameters instead of land planning policy. Consequently, the relationship to nature in the subdivision plans became less respectful and more competitive: lots getting smaller and houses bigger, parcels for condominiums subdivided for single-family houses, altogether contributing to the decline of architectural quality. Change of the physical character of the place was followed by a change of nature of its population - from academicks and professionals to retired executives and others of similar wealth. Land speculation became the main goal as values raised - houses were bought, left empty and sold again in a matter of months. Since 1985 independent firms took over the real estate sales - while some still emphasize the history and aspiration of the place, others are more inclined not to complicate sales with notions of architectural standards. A comprehensive environmental plan, including a program of educating realtors and prospective buyers by providing packages of
design information, was drafted in 1990 to help the situation. (Lyndon and Alinder, 2004: 23-32)

However, the place still remains special - the developer credits the autonomy of the design committee, while Halprin believed that saving the grace has to do with landscaping rules. The Sea Ranch is a successful example of an integral process of physical planning, landscape and architectural design. It takes in consideration a complex set of parameters, both fixing a certain number of them and letting others be variable as the process develops. It is effective in setting long term goals to be achieved through negotiations and feedback loops, only possible through tactical interventions. The most important parameters are derived from a clever sensitive understanding of existing conditions with the capacity to be instrumentalized as a design approach: 1| Existing hedge rows and the addition of new ones to give measure to the landscape and create environmental clusters; 2| Cypress conditioned/shaped by wind patterns; 3| Local typologies of barns in terms of material and their relation with the landscape. The most important set of design tools is based on the following: 1| Invisibility of the road network; 2| Hybridization of the dwelling with the cypress to be perceived as unitary gradation of clusters in the landscape; 3| Combination of land and topographic manipulation for the purpose of wind protection, sinking and therefore minimizing the presence of bigger communal objects, while at the same time giving them a unique appearance; 4| Sloppy green roofs creating an effect of continuity between the land and the object, diminishing the object’s presence in the landscape (Figure 23, 24); 5| Material finishing of the object based on wood treated in the way that it bleaches in time and absorbs the surrounding colors just like the typical barns of the area blend through color and material; 6| All the plantations strictly regulated and bound to indigenous species; 7| Natural appearance of the vegetation symbiotically maintained by sheep herds.

**Conclusion**

On one hand, The Sea Ranch uses a wide range of horticultural and architectural tools which can be interpreted as *camouflage* effects. These effects are used to blend manmade environment with nature and create a fine mutual dialogue - a landscape and create a fine mutual dialogue - a landscape in itself where architecture and landscape design have equal status in a time based process. It is rarely possible to foresee such an integral approach, for it requires a level of management tied up to articulated communities able to selectively incorporate market and real estate pressures. Nevertheless, it is possible to redefine and apply many of the Sea Ranch tools in urban design - especially if the particular project task would deal with a limited programmatic agenda. But if the initial attraction for propagation of dispersive tourism rises mainly from extraordinary natural features and cultural patrimony, what comes clear is that its development - however carried out in splendor - should avoid becoming more architectonic or evident, for the critical demand behind it would eventually reduce the very presence of such attraction. The Sea Ranch showcases the capacity of landscape and horticultural manipulation to partly *camouflage* the appearance of architecture and to recover landscape presence; an approach that would prove valuable in the treatment of dispersive tourism. Furthermore, landscape design has progressive performative
faculties which appeal to the general public without having to introduce motifs, as it often happens in architecture, where progressive design finds more resistance to get accepted.

On the other hand, Mareda, by carefully balancing high rise, low rise, collective and private gardens, elaborated system of passages and streets with perspectives, a central park and necessary service support, managed to subordinate its architectural presence to environmental and horticultural qualities - making a dense, but sinuous green carpet, almost invisible from the outside. It could be even said that Mareda is an environmental typology rather than a collection of architectural typologies with horticultural arrangements fitting in an urban layout. Ultimately, the scheme showcases an emerging tradition that got lost after the split of Yugoslavia. A know-how that proves that a compact approach to dispersive tourism can be dealt better with proper planning, architectural and landscape design.

Notes:

1 “Behind the modern cottage was a modern idea: the transformation of picturesque wilderness into a manageable landscape for individualist escape from the pressures and responsibilities of urban life.” (Taylor, 2011)
2 The participation of individuals of a particular community in the economic development of their area is crucial to build a healthy sense of integration. And this has direct impact in keeping a positive social atmosphere towards the exploitation of the particular economic activities - in this case related to tourism. In turn, a better relation between the hosting community and tourists is established - less social resentment towards overall progress.
3 Sociologist John Urry explains how tourism is traditionally based in offering new experiences to its consumers, predominantly through visual stimuli by capturing the gaze of the specific tourist sight. The other services are in a sense peripheral to this fundamental process of consumption. (Urry, 1990)
4 “Although landscape architecture and architecture maintain a disciplinary affiliation in schools and in the profession, until recently comprehensive collaborations between the disciplines were rare. Projects in both fields were carried out within their respective disciplinary boundaries, conceived as either architecture or landscape architecture, as building or as park. In cases when architects and landscape architects did collaborate, one typically served as a consultant to the other, retaining a clear hierarchy. Occasionally, architects and landscape architects achieved true collaboration - as was the case with Charles Moore and Lawrence Halprin on the Sea Ranch development in northern California - but this type of partnership was isolated and infrequent.” (Schafer and Reeser, 2002)
5 Halprin believed that this design methodology would avoid traditional compositional strategies, and instead would propose a means of constructing tactically. (Halprin, 2003)
6 MLTW was established in Berkley, California in1962 by architects Charles Moore, Donlyn Lyndon, William Turnbull and Richard Whitaker. They first gained prominence in 1964 with the design of the Sea Ranch Condominium. They ended collaborations in 1970.
7 Later on, Donlyn Lyndon came up with names for the dwellings - “Houses that Suit their Place; Houses that Connect, Houses that Settle, Houses that Enfold and Houses that Inhabit”. (Lyndon and Alinder, 2004)

References:

Illustrations:

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