The Tourist Recycling of Malaga in the context of the maturity of the Costa del Sol

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Abstract

Malaga achieved its greatest tourist splendor at the beginning of the 20th century, coinciding with the establishment of a significant British industrial settlement. It was inspired in the South England seaside resort model and it supposed a complete renewal of the surrounding landscape of the old city.

While tourism in the city was declining, the Costa del Sol region consolidated as a mass sun and sand tourism destination. Nowadays, this region has become less competitive regarding new areas and Malaga is reemerging as a tourist city based in culture, urban life and cruise tourism.

This paper focuses on the remodelling of the old urban tourist structures and on the features that make possible to attract a significant group of visitors, such as the port, the airport and other transport means. The public administrations, private groups and associations that have been involved in the creation of a renovated tourist resource are analyzed throughout the text.

Keywords: urban tourism, seaside resort, heritage assets, Malaga, Costa del Sol.

Introduction

The tourist phenomenon is Malaga's city life since the late nineteenth century, in its origins it was related to the creation of the symbolic spaces that constitute nowadays the representative image of the city. Three stages have been distinguished depending on the main tourist segment: beach resort, sun and sand tourism and urban tourism.

The beach resort

The mildness of Malaga’s weather and its landscape was collected in the work of historical travelers that passed through it, as Ibn Battuta, who described the city as "one of the capitals of al-Andalus and the most beautiful one, it combines the advantages of sea and land and it is abundant in fruits and products”. However, the rise of a tourism culture in the city does not come until the late nineteenth century, with the help of the booming British colony that was settled in Malaga. The newly arrived not only helped to the development of the industrial and commercial sectors, but they also left behind an important cultural heritage and the first stage of Malaga tourism: the beach resort in the style of the English models of Blackpool, Torquay, Scarborough, Weymouth, Sidmouth, Tenby or Bournemouth.

Rubén Darío described the atmosphere of that period as follows: "I write by the seaside, on a terrace where noise comes from foam. In spite of the season, it is a bright and clear day, the sky is clean, mineral clarity caresses the air. This is the sweet Malaga, called Bella, where the famous raisins are, famous
women and the preferred wine for consecration. It is just a part of the land of Virgin Mary with two parts of the land of Muhammad. But the local color is lost, as universal civilization advances destroying poetry and making business. There is, indeed, much of the typical, unique neighborhoods, such as Perchel, the Trinidad and the Alcazaba, but the city will not offer much to satisfy your imagination, especially if you imagine the French way and do not seek but tambourine, knife, shawl and calanes hat. There is another one, the grille sung in verses, and the gorgeous women eyes, and softness, and ambience of love. There are narrow and old streets, and windows decorated with pots of basil and carnations, as in picture cards, there is very moorish and not a little medieval. But by the sea side, comes a new cosmopolitan Malaga, and more than cosmopolitan, English, during the "season", because needless to say, since Mr. Richard Ford wrote in his "Hand-Bock for Travelers in Spain" that the weather of Malaga is better than the one of whole Italy and Spain for chest diseases and that winter here is unknown, the British invasion was ordered”.

1897 is a key year for the beach resort development because of the opening of the central park and the birth of the Malaga Beautification Society, it was created to guide urban planning decisions ever since.

Tourism chose the eastern shore for several reasons: the west coast was consolidated as an industrial and working-class area due to its accessibility to the port, rail and the natural communications corridor of the Guadalhorce river valley. The east coast was more attractive because of its rugged landscape and the location of a bourgeois residential neighbourhood, with landmarks like Palacio de la Tinta, designed by O'Brien in 1908, or Houses of Félix Sáenz, designed by Fernando Guerrero Strachan in 1922. Thanks to the opening of the central park, the east shore was easily linked with the new central scenarios: Alcazaba, Gibralfaro, Larios Street, Alameda and the Port.

The idea of the beach resort was reflected in various urban projects, including those of the esplanade and the Gibralfaro mountain promenade. Tourism related land uses were first settled on the esplanade, the Paseo de Sancha and the tram to El Palo.

The Malaga Beautification Society’s first regulation was commanded by Alexander Finn, British Consul in the city. The task was to beautify the town, to attract tourists and to organize events and cultural activities. This institution was the forerunner of the entities responsible for creating and promoting tourist products today. Some of its operations were tree planting and public fountains placement throughout the city. The Society also projected the Gibralfaro, Colorado and Victoria mountains promenade and it was for the demolition of the Alcazaba Castle and its substitution with new housing estates. It created a new representative central area with the most important visitors attractions, following the ideas of City Beautiful and Baron Haussmann's interventions in Paris.

In addition to new promenades, the project needed to create tourist assets such as spas and hotels. The first spas arose from the mid-nineteenth century as a hygienic measure, they were for the healthy class. Some examples were Delicias 1844-1907, Salon Roma 1891-1950 or Baños de Ortiz, demolished in 1893. The second generation of spas was implanted close to the shore, particularly in Cortina del Muelle were Baños de Diana, since 1843 in front of the Aduana Palace, Baños de la Estrella and Baños de Apolo, since 1879 in Postigo de los Abades. Due to the constant sewage dumping and the new projects of for the port, the spas finally settled in La Malagueta neighbourhood, out of the city centre.

Spas soon joined ancilliary amenities such as cafês, restaurants, cinemas and sports facilities that favored property developments around them and many houses for rent arose in nearby places. These installations were ephemeral until the mid-20's, when the Baños del Carmen inaugurated a new model, they were designed by Fernando Guerrero Strachan and opened in 1918. They were the first to incorporate sea bathing and hosted horse racing tracks, dance halls and an aquarium. In Baños del Carmen the first tennis tournament of the city took place and it was the first location of the Malaga Football Club. In 1933 the
architect Daniel Rubio designed the restaurant. The complex has currently undergone a slow process of neglect and there have been numerous remodeling projects that are still undeveloped.

![Figure 1: Baños del Carmen in 1922. Source: http://www.guateque.net/balneario_el_carmen.htm.](image)

After the spas, the first luxury hotels soon arrived: Caleta Palace Hotel, 1920, and Príncipe de Asturias Hotel, opened in 1926, now disused and immersed in a restoration project to restore its original activity. Both hotels were designed by Fernando Guerrero Strachan.

**Fixation on the coast period**

After the Spanish Civil War and until the 50’s spa culture and foreign visitors arrivals declined. At that time the context was completely different than the above mentioned, tourism became a mass phenomenon and the sun and sand segment took center stage. The transition to this model was progressive in the international arena but in Malaga it occurred in a short time and without being prepared. The city gave up its role as premier destination on the Costa del Sol.

Two administrative factors were related to tourism development in the Costa del Sol: the Stabilization Plan of 1959 and the management and development projects for the region which resulted in widespread economic recovery. Thus, the area became a major tourist destination. Malaga joined the process due to two main factors: one was the presence of the beach resort Torremolinos that was still within the municipality, the other was being the gateway for tourists arriving by any mean, especially by plane.

In 1967 the Tourism Promotion Plan for the Costa del Sol was born. The plan highlighted the precarious access to the city: the narrow N-340 road, the difficult connection with the inland and an airport that did not have any passengers terminal.

Tourism development was favored by the large manpower mass available due to immigration from the countryside and it coincided with the years of greatest growth of the city (from 301,048 inhabitants in 1960 to 503,251 in 1980) and in the province (from 775,167 in 1960 to 1,036,261 in 1980).

Several listed buildings were created in that period, such as Pez Espada Hotel, Stella Polaris Hotel, Nogalera neighbourhood, Playamar estate, Eurosol-Euromar estate and Alay Hotel, among others.

**The revival of interest in the city**

Nowadays, the Costa del Sol has consolidated as the largest resort in Andalusia. Within it, Malaga specializes in the urban cultural segment thanks to several reasons.
Malaga is the gateway for international travelers to the Costa del Sol and Andalusia, this brings an opportunity for the city to attract tourists whose final destination are the beach resorts around. Malaga is also the starting point of the main Andalusian heritage tourism route: Seville-Cordoba-Granada, the efforts of the city gather in the creation of attractions to strengthen its position.

The importance of Malaga in attracting long distance tourists is due to the concentration of transport facilities, with a special mention to the port and the airport. The port is currently undergoing an adaptation process to facilitate the arrival of cruise ships. The airport is under extension works that include the opening of a new terminal and the construction of a second landing strip. The airport received in 2003 72% of travelers to Andalusia and in 2005 it was ranked 22 among European airports in terms of number of arrivals. New transport links have been added recently such as the new railway station and high-speed trains to Madrid, Barcelona, Cordoba and Seville and the new highways to Algeciras, Cordoba and Almeria.

Figure 2: 60, 75 and 90 minutes isochrons from Malaga by motorways and high speed train. Source: FUNDACIÓN CIEDES: El Aeropuerto de Málaga. Un proyecto para un territorio. Malaga: Fundacion CIEDES, 2004. pp 56.

Malaga lost its main beach resort when Torremolinos segregated in 1988. Since then the possibility of developing a new resort has been limited by the complete saturation of the local coastline but two areas: Arraijanal and La Araña. The former is a narrow strip between a golf course and the Guadalhorce river mouth, surrounded by the airport, industrial areas and motorways. The latter belongs to a protected Natural Park.

The city's west coast has been traditionally an unattractive area for tourism due to the presence of industries. The historic city is not adapted to the san and sand tourist segment because the port separates this area from the sea. The east coast retains some traditional hotels but it is almost completely occupied by constructions, it as also the most rugged terrain.

Malaga is not able to compete on attracting sun and sand tourism so it has to specialize in other segments. Three main aspects favor specialization in the segment of urban tourism: the greater presence of heritage assets compared to other nearby destinations, the possibility of docking cruise ships and the link between urban tourism development and city marketing strategies.

In order to analyze the ancillary offer to the sun and sand segment the studies performed by the Tourism Observatory of the Costa del Sol can be taken. This document considers those facilities that have a control of the entrance of visitors.

The Observatory considers the following resources: golf courses, marinas, leisure and culture. Regarding golf courses, the city has four of the 63 fields and 63 of the 981 holes of the region, well behind the
The city has a significant number of listed monuments compared to the rest of coastal or nearby towns. The concentration of this kind of attractions is a necessary condition for the creation of pedestrian routes. The Tourist Observatory of the Costa del Sol considers as additional values cultural heritage properties, museums, visitor centres, exhibition halls, botanical gardens, science centres and tourist coaches. Malaga has 11 of the 29 resources and the most popular ones: the Contemporary Art Center and the Roman Theatre. Apart from those, several museums are running and a significant number have been opened in recent years. The city also has three visitor centres.

Cruise tourism attraction means longer stay visitors, increased demand for other means of transport and establishment of ancillary services. The port of Malaga occupied the eleventh place on arrival of cruise passengers between European ports of call in 2008.

Finally, the relation between city marketing and urban tourism needs to be pointed out. As Marchena Gomez states, a city that offers itself as attractive to visitors has an advantageous position when competing with other cities in getting investments. Thus, traditional tour operators have joined culture entities, film offices, R+D related agencies and advanced economy involved administrations like the University or the Technology Park, among others. Several projects that combine tourism adequacy, heritage and city branding have been displayed in recent years, such as Malaga Valley and Open for Business Malaga, the reservation of Pier 4 for a Business Center or the Incubators for Cultural Enterprises program, among others.

To sum up, the city of Malaga had an early connection with tourism, it was promoted by the British colony and the industrial bourgeoisie of the eastern neighborhoods and it was focused around the spa culture. We have inherited from this early stage public spaces promoted by the Malaga Beautification Society and the first hotels in the city.

The sun and sand segment had a very limited impact in the city due to its own urban settings and now when it has reached maturity the city has experienced a revival thanks to cultural and urban tourism. The factors that make Malaga competitive in this segment regarding other locations nearby are to be the gateway of visitors to Andalusia, virtually monopolizing the plane and cruise arrivals, the presence of heritage assets and the ability to provide urban and cultural activities, conferences, events and shopping, among others.

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