

Tourist Atlas on Spanish Costa del Sol: planning, landscape and architecture in the tourist metropolis, reflections for intervention

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Abstract

The Spanish Costa del Sol is one of the most important paradigms of sun-and-beach aged tourism in the world. This area has suffered intense and violent changes in recent years, and today faces an obsolescence process that requires a serious reflection to respond and redirect the present and future actions.

This is a specifically contemporary region, with complex and dynamic nature, which is hardly recognized by traditional mechanisms of knowledge. From AL>tour research group, the Costa del Sol has been understood as a working laboratory where to observe, analyze and depict this reality is possible. With different maps, the Atlas of tourism in the Costa del Sol project tries to make visible some of the specific realities from this region and its landscape.

Keywords: Mapping – Costa del Sol – Tourist atlas – Landscape of tourism .

Introduction

The Costa del Sol is one of the most important sun and beach mature tourism place in the world. This territory, as many other tourist areas of Spanish coastline, is now showing clear signs of exhaustion and obsolescence.

This overdeveloped urban space -with only 60 year old (1950-2010)- has an unprecedented complexity, hardly perceivable by the traditional tools of analysis and urban and regional planning.

The contemporary mapping –as a working methodology- provides mechanisms for representation and analysis ability to express complex and systemic realities. It allows articulating and relating the different dimensions and pieces that make up this puzzle: from land-use planning to architectonic design as well as linguistic, sensory, social, temporal dimension and even digital spatiality. As Dennis Cosgrove said: “*the map may be the only way through which contemporary urbanism can achieve visual consistency*”.

The results of this research¹ is presented as a collection of diverse maps that show some kinds of problems and values about the Costa del Sol: the phenomenon of coastal area sprawls, strong transformation and privatization of landscape, a rich and complex social mosaics without hybridization and go on.

The tourist Atlas proves the kaleidoscopic nature of this territory, and deeply researches about its specific characteristics. By the way, Urban planning's instruments have to be redefined forward a necessary landscape and holistic new discourse.

A new cartography to understand the complexity of The Costa del Sol

The Costa del Sol is a global territory which participates in the plastic nature of contemporary space. The architecture is dematerialized, no matter the buildings, only the message they convey and the ability to contain activities and promote relations, atmospheres and the landscape that look. This is an exploded land, articulated through discontinuities and fragments. This liquid and hybrid territory is a symbol of mass tourism. There are real leisure factories, inhabited by a continuous flow of temporary visitors.

There are two lines to understand this playful city:

The first one is based in the hygienic reforms and picturesque aesthetic of the "Climate and Malaga Beautification Propagandist Society", created in 1899 to convert Malaga in a "Winter Season" with the development of spa.

And the second corresponds to studies of the Situationist International. In the publication of "New Babylon: city for another life" (1958), Constant Nieuwenhuis studies the gipsy communities and the nomadism as new social and urban paradigm, with a strong affinity with the tourism.

New Babylon is the idea of total globalization: the elimination of borders in the economy, maximum accessibility through the development of transportation, the global village... where the concept of life is an endless journey around the world. The New Babylon Project as "Nomadic City" is the beginning of a new concept of city, mobility and society: "*the opposite of utilitarian society is ludic society (...)* but it is clear that a ludic society can only be a classless society"

In this new world, inside a society of consumer and spectacle, the *homo ludens* develops all its creativity, and the mass-tourism is only a natural manifestation. There are three important aspects:

- a) The "event" and the theory and practical activity of "constructing and creating situations"
- b) The playful city in opposition to utilitarian city
- c) The hypercity. The time as unit of measure.

The mapping is an important tool for analysing these three aspects. The term *mapping* refers to mapping contemporary action. Traditionally, maps have been made by cartographers, geographers and architects, who sought the physical representation of the territory in a purported exercise of

¹ The tourist Atlas on Spanish Costa del Sol is a research project funded by Innovation, Science and Business Department of Andalusia Government during 2008-10. The principal researches have been Ph. D. José Ramón Moreno Pérez and Carlos Rosa Jiménez (University of Málaga). The project has been advised by Ph. D. Ricard Pié Ninot (Polytechnic University of Barcelona).

objectivity and scientific rigor. Now, there is an expansion into a broader framework of knowledge. Mapping is a proactive form of knowledge and it is opened to the gaze of anyone (because anyone can do mapping). *The mapping has emerged in the information age as a way to do the complex accessible, the hidden visible, the non-mappable, mappable* (Abrams and Hall, 2008).

With the development of new information technologies and geographic information system (GIS), the mapping has emerged as a powerful tool for innovation, promoting the development of new regional and urban analysis. With programs as Google Earth or Maps, the access to cartography is quick and universal. Communication technologies allow new possibilities of interactions and offer a new tool to the tourism.

Neither the urban experience of a tourist visiting the Costa del Sol, or the native or immigrant who works as a waiter in a hotel, can be explained by the information extracted from the area of a satellite photo. That image itself tells us very little about the relationship established between things and people, connections and breaks, the speed and frequency to cover the space, the physic quality or the iconographic language. So, our goal is to give visibility to the complex urban reality in order to obtain useful scientific knowledge for planning and to promote a feedback between social and technical designers.

The primary motivation for tourist is the “event”. Possibly, the first tourist mapping is the “travel guide” as cartography-book that shows a map of “events”: monuments, great landscape, good restaurants, cultural festivities...

Figure 1. Primary concepts of mapping in tourist map (left above). The Costa del Sol as a line of tourist maps (left low), similar to Constant design (right).

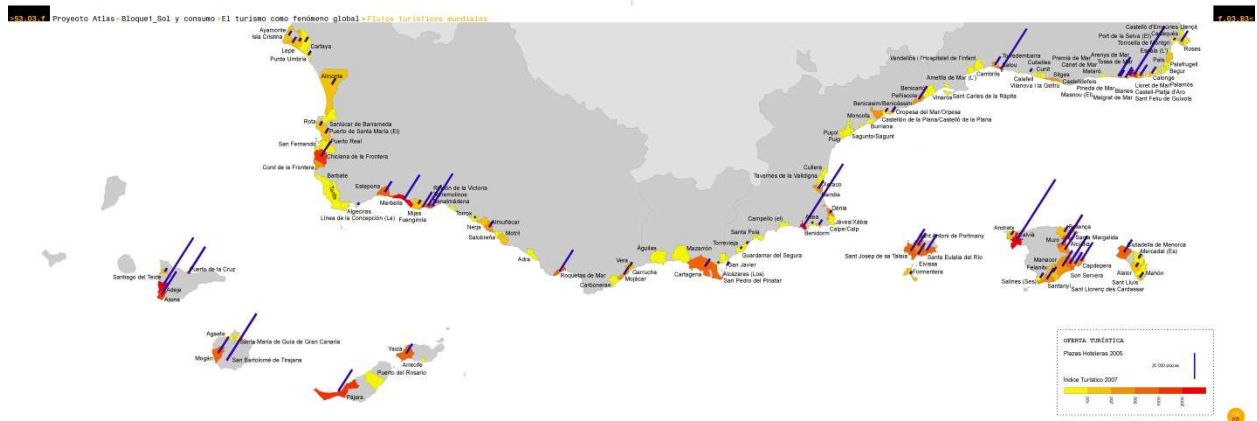


Source: AL>tour research group (2010) and Constant (2009)

The Atlas of tourism for understanding the Costa del Sol.

The Atlas has been organized in three scales that comprise the worldwide cartography to urban scale. In the first scale, two map series of “Tourism in the world” and “Sun and beach tourism world map” explains the location of main areas and the dynamic of tourism flow.

Figure 2. The sun and beach tourism in Spain. Activity and intensity areas



Source: AL>tour research group (2010)

In a second level, the Costa del Sol is part of a climate and cultural area around the Mediterranean sea which define a set of three series: the “Mediterranean marines”, “Sun and beach tourism in Spain” and “Tourism and landscape: projects of marines in Spain” (figure 2). And finally, the main cartography with ten themes about Costa del Sol’s sun and beach tourism (table 1).

Table 1. Selected thematic for the Sun and Beach Atlas on tourism

Scale	Thematic
Territory	I. The Costa del Sol territory II. Cartographies of time and mobility III. Approach to landscape. Test of perception in the N-340 IV. The explosion of the coastal landscape V. Paid-Paradises at coastline VI. Beach cartographies VII. Hotel regulated tourism VIII. Stop-territories IX. Social hybridity
Urban piece	X. Gated Communities

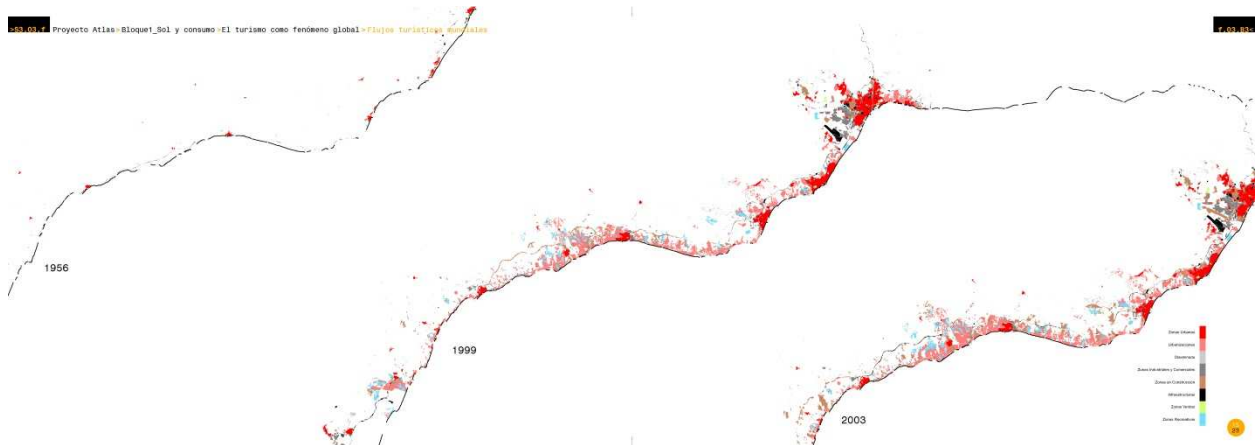
Source: by authors

The territory of the Costa del Sol

The Costa del Sol as tourist city is a place for perception and enjoying. It is a contemporary place that has been built since 1950. The architecture disappears, is not the main piece. It’s a message, a container of activities. And leisure activity is the more important: sun, beach... because tourist only looks for grateful experiences.

The Costa del Sol is formed along the west coast of Málaga (Southern of Spain) including the towns of Torremolinos, Benalmádena, Fuengirola, Mijas, Marbella, Estepona, Casares and Manilva; covers a coastline length about 140 km and a population registered in 2010 of 498.307 inhabitants, which become around 1 million people if we consider the actual population residing (with minimum stays of one to six month per year), and about 1.4 million people if we count floating resident mainly in tourism.

Figure 3. Evolution and transformation of the Costa del Sol (1956-2003).



Source: AL>tour research group (2010)

The old settlement system consists of fishing-farming villages (figure 3) have been incorporated as parts of the urban corridor of estates (pink color) with an important system of recreational areas (blue color). The great airport infrastructure (black color) split two urban realities: “functional” or Malaga city with a concentric pattern, and the playful city or Costa del Sol in a linear structure articulated by the A-7 highway.

Two levels can be differentiated:

- a) Costa del Sol as touristic city. This level is defined by the lodgement capacity and the tourist “event”. The tourist is the perfect “liquid man” of Bauman (2002), because there is not social and political relationship with the visited place, only a recent ecological awareness.
- b) Costa del Sol as metropolis (metapolis perhaps). This level is defined by the new model of global-community. When the tourist becomes neighbourhood appears the problem of identity. In this sense, multiculturalism is the new base of identity.

Cartographies of space-time and mobility: The hypercity and the global village

In the Costa del Sol the movement is time not displacement. Time develops the ability to transform and pervert the physic and spatial reality of map when transportation and communication are developed. The distance is no longer the only parameter.

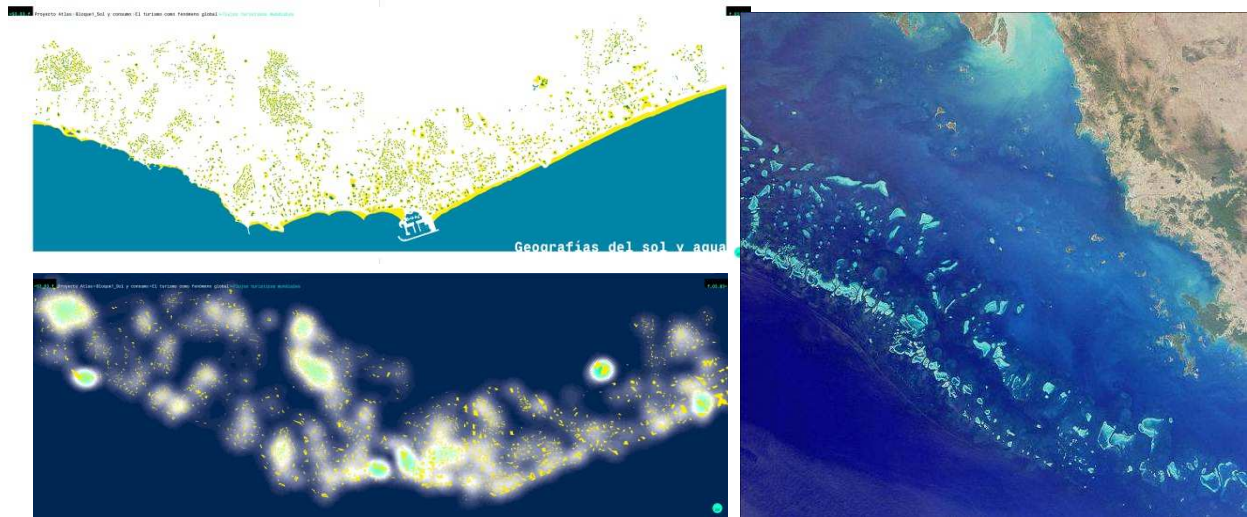
The tourist city expands around the world in terms of the possibilities of air transport. The airlines (and recently the “low cost” company) have opened a new level of transportation net in the urban geography of the city (figure 4). Above the physic corridors (highway, street, railway line), companies define intangible air routes that connect the Costa del Sol with different cities in equal times. But this new net is changing and depends of economic profitability.

Figure 4. Low cost connections from Malaga



Source: AL>tour research group (2010)

Figure 5. Cartography of water and private paradises (right). Urban structures very similar to “Great Coral Reef” in Australia (left)



Source: AL>tour research group (2010). The great coral reef is courtesy of NASA (Wikipedia, http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gran_barrera_de_coral)

The explosion of the coastal landscape. The ludic city in opposition to functional city

The Costa del Sol is a non-functional city. It is colonized by the second residence, and its principal morphological pattern is the low-density with private pool. The continuous growth has transformed the initial conception of sun-and-beach tourism into sun-and-water tourism. Now is a new residential habitat where water has colonized the territory. Currently, there are more miles of border-pool than

coastline beach. This ludic city is half natural structure and half land use, reminiscent of the “Great coral reef”

Hotel regulated tourism

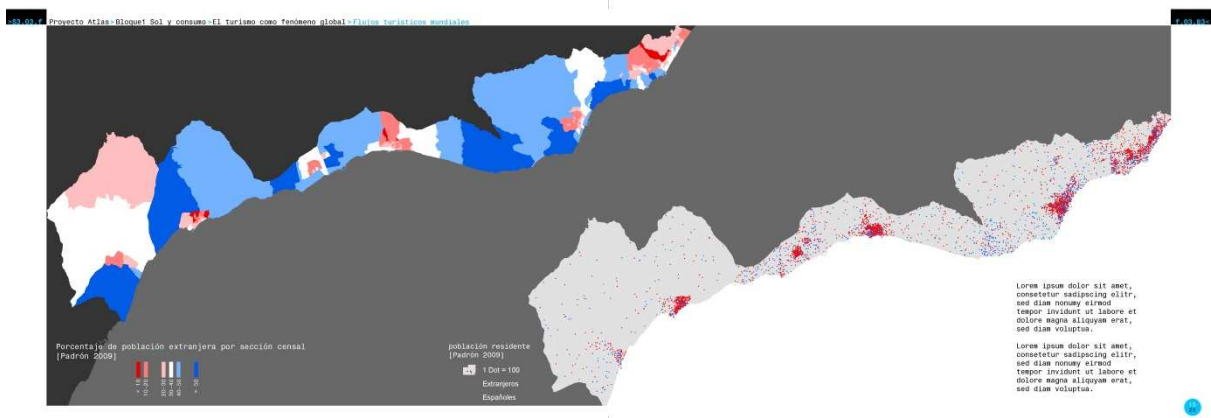
The hosted system is one of the key issues in the construction of tourist environments. The combination of permanent residence and temporary stay weaves a complex web of residential components. We conducted a series of maps taking the typology of the different pieces: short term accommodation (hotels, hostels, hostels, etc.), medium term accommodation (apartments or second homes) and permanent residence. The map reveals the fragmented and disjointed social fabric, the resort town residence aggregates the standalone package, and to some extent-autistic-, forming an archipelago of housing developments and hotel rooms. As a New Babylon, the urban design has characteristics of a labyrinthine space. This form is the direct expression of social independence. And it is an opposition to the utilitarian society and an optimal orientation in space.

Figure 6. The hotel (red colour) and the archipelago of housing in Puerto Banus



Source: AL>tour research group (2010).

Figure 7. Social hybridization



Source: AL>tour research group (2010).

Social hybridity and gated communities

We propose the analysis of urban dynamics of communities living on the Costa del Sol from the study and representation of relational networks in the territory. We were able to recognize a deep-rooted social phenomenon of hybridization, that under the tourism and property development has led to the early emergence of new and changing paradigms.

The treatment of this information will allow the development of conceptual maps of interaction in space, and extraction of the trend lines that anticipate the emergence of new modes and residential mobility, and outline the evolution of these communities

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