Landscape, Planning and Tourism

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Abstract

In town planning, to refer to the topics of tourism is, above all, to put the accent on landscape. A scenic landscape, related to the arcadian tradition, which is reflected on several realities.

But the landscape of tourism can also be born from a different point of view. It can be born from a journey or an open discovery in multiple directions, local and conceptual. A journey where the observer’s culture opens towards the discovery of a new world, the overlapping of realities and cultures, the intermediation and hybridization.

Our experience of a municipal development plan, L’Ampolla, and an initial diagnosis, Ciutadella de Menorca, highlights this last feature of landscape. The landscape of tourism’s territory is based on the intersection of different grammars. This clash of values is the basis of our town plans and projects.

Introduction

This text is a reflection on the space of tourism in the twenty-first century town planning. It starts with the introduction of several concepts that are important in the current conception of tourism’s town planning. The importance of images, not so much scenic or referred to an immutable substance of spaces, but open to cultural diversity. It also refers to the dynamic conception of space and to the attention of time and grammars of different sorts. It then highlights some aspects of our professional experience in the planning works on two coastal towns of historical interest and a characteristic landscape.

Some issues that have their origin in this experience are highlighted in the final part of this paper, which puts the attention on the need to develop a mapping information. A mapping not referred to global conditions of tissues, homogeneous spaces or zones, but to specific conditions of places. Spaces of intermediation where the point of view of tourist exploitation overlaps with the point of view of the everyday lives of inhabitants and of the environmental protection. Spaces where different rules of composition, also referred to several issues, overlap each other. Spaces of limit or spaces of border where different structuring grammars are contaminated with each other.

Its aim is to introduce a creative town planning, suitable for tourist uses, applications and for the innovation of some traditional spaces, nowadays not very dynamic, without denying themselves the qualities of place.

1. Typologies of reference in tourist town planning

In town planning, to refer to the topics of tourism is, above all, to put the accent on landscape. A scenic landscape, related to the arcadian tradition, which is reflected on several realities.
Generally, these images of tourism combine natural elements with artificial elements, which are too often hideous. These various kinds of typologies can be reduced to three of reference.

1.1 The resort

It is certainly the most widespread typology. From the standpoint of economic exploitation, it is usually a hotel, or a complex of hotel buildings, offering a wide range of services that generally include recreational and leisure activities. An establishment that provides several additional services to tourists, such as food, drinks, accommodation, sports, entertainment, shopping, etc.

From the standpoint of a program it is a clearly defined model. As a typology, it has some constants that characterize it. Generally, a group of buildings surrounding a pool or a lake, more or less natural or “naturalized”. As we know, this is a tourist model that has a close relationship with the model of the tour operator and air travel, mainly low-cost.

But beyond this program and economics, it is an image. For instance, the image of a natural terrain contrasted to an artificial construction, but also the image of luxury in the context of diversity. A diversity which has a lot to do with the contemplation of nature. Also the exotic, the introduction of another culture, and in general the image of a different culture of the everyday of travellers. Urbanistically, there is an interesting double relevance in the space of the global economy and the place where they settle. Behind a “Disneyland” image, the dream, a memory that removes the context of reality.

1.2 Urbanization and leisure

Another characteristic situation of tourist town planning is found in the combination of urbanization, leisure services and the beach (alternatively: the mountain). In principle, the urbanization is only a conventional “urbanization”. But it is interesting to note that, from the standpoint of town planning, it is much more complex than the previous model.

However, the origins of the matter are in the town planning of the sixties, mainly in France and Italy. Landscape fragmentation and land are the two essential elements of this situation. The image of nature, also in this case, becomes the connector element around the whole model.

1.3 The monument and historical heritage

Finally, we find the image of an old city core or a monument more or less restored, between historic and picturesque. Another situation where the image and the landscape becomes crucial. Needless to say, here the issue of tourism includes all the European cultural tradition of travel. From the Grand Tour to nowadays. In this case, the image is neither historical nor current. It is influenced by different concepts of “culture” such as: “Mediterraneanism” and “Orientalism”. A real space, “stones” with cultural values which move away from their original context and become unreal, or even surreal, scenery. In this space the territorial references are also dual. On one side the space of the city or the historical territory. On the other hand the set, often illuminated, which places the building on the site of dreams.

1.4 Models and types in the space of tourism

In the schematic versions of tourism’s town planning, space is defined as an aggregation of buildings that make up differentiated tissues. It puts the focus on models of buildings and the connections are reduced to the roads.

Against this town planning, the mere consideration of the three situations above raises the idea to consider other factors of connection. For instance, to take into account the landscape implies the
attention to the dynamics of water, the permanence of fields structure, with their path networks, the retaining walls, the historical plantations, etc. Also the historic images suggest other levels of relationship, not materialized in space.

The attention is imposed to other ways of conceiving the territorial interrelations in the spaces of tourism, where the metaphor of travel applies.

2. The journey

Landscape in tourism, as a concept, can also arise from journey’s metaphor. It can be born from a journey or an open discovery in multiple directions, local and conceptual, as Claudio Magris describes in ‘L’infinito viaggiare’. A journey where the observer’s culture opens towards the discovery of a new world, the contact and overlapping of realities and cultures, the intermediation and hybridization. This space is not just an image, a dynamic space. Some concepts of this book by Magris help us to enter this dimension of the issue. First of all, the dynamics of space.

Because the journey - around the world and on paper - is itself a continuous preamble, a prelude to something yet to come and always behind the corner; to leave, to stop, to come back, to do and to undo suitcases, to note in a block the landscape which, while hiking, it flees and splits, and it recomposes as a film sequence, with its casts and rearrangements.

Then, the attention to the multiplicity of explanations or logics of aggregation. It crosses borders and discovers different logics or grammars.

There is no journey which does not cross borders - political, linguistic, social, cultural, psychological, even the invisible ones that separate city neighbourhoods from each other, the ones between people.

To travel does not mean just to go across the border, but to discover that we are always on the other side.

These differences does not exist only in space. They reflect different times. The historical time of the monument and the time of its image in the present world. Multiple times interwoven in the explanation.

The journey in space is both a journey through time and against time. Sometimes the layered and condensed complexity of a place emerges with violence as the seeds that break the skin. […] Not only the individual, a place is a condensed time, multiple times. Not only its present but a labyrinth of time and different periods which interwoven into a landscape and constitutes itself, in the same way that folds and wrinkles and expressions recorded by happiness or sadness do not even make a face, but are the face of that person.

Here's the essential question. The urban space of tourism is made up of several layers, as it is often explained through the metaphor of the palimpsest. But they are not always built in material layers, they are also image culture, memory, nature, architecture, etc. As Marc Augé points out in ‘Le temps en ruines’.

To contemplate a ruin is not to make a journey into history, but to live the experience of time, of pure time. In his past aspect, history is too rich, too manifold and too deep to be reduced to the sign of stone that has escaped from it. […] On the aspect of time present, the emotion is of an aesthetic order but the spectacle of nature combines itself in this aspect with that of the remains.

In a society such as the one of tourism, where there are no borders and many other references, André Corboz’s metaphor of the hypertext, model of multiple references, becomes fully operational.

Stratification of the land and of history. Not only nature and architecture, bays, forests and houses, grass and stone roads, but also and above all societies, people, gestures, customs, prejudices, passions, food, flags.

It is to find a new system to relate the diverse elements of tourism, which is not limited to the simple cohesion of road relations. A system that, as a grammar, would allow to put into relation, in a dynamic way, different references. Some of them coming from the culture of travel, other from the transportation industry or the settlement, or other products of relations and dynamics that exist in the environment, or the overlapping of stories.
A grammar that is not neutral. It has to do with the different modalities of space’s culture and scales of comprehension of the problems. For instance, George Steiner notes in ‘The idea of Europe’ that, unlike America, Europe always has been done, and can be done, on foot.

Men and women have toured Europe by walking their maps. In large part, the distances are of human scale, the traveller can make them by foot. This fact determines a fundamental relationship between Europeans and their landscape. In a metaphorical way, but also in a material way, this landscape has been molded, humanized by the feet and the hands. [...] As anywhere else in the globe, the coast, fields, forests, (...) have been shaped not so much by geological time but by the time of human history. [...] Its beauties are inseparable from humanized time (...) the European landscapes are manicured like gardens.

3. Two case studies: L’Ampolla and Ciutadella de Menorca

Here fits our recent experience of study and intervention on two spaces of tourism in the case of a municipal planning – L’Ampolla – and of an initial diagnosis – Ciutadella de Menorca. Two cases which highlights this feature of the landscape of tourism. Above the absolute and abstract order of urban development models, which have only one objective: to optimize the relationship between urban grids and building volumes. And which they only make indirect references to a general and nostalgic “spirit of place” or landscape. It has been demonstrated the need to use methodologies that encourage the intersections between urban elements, concepts, dynamics, overlays, etc. Methodologies that do not presuppose any "mechanical" order of territorial and urban spaces and that do open in multiple directions, guided by grammars of multiple cultural references.

3.1 The case of L’Ampolla

The case of L’Ampolla town plan is clear. It is essentially a tourist town which has value in relation to its location in the delta of the Ebre River and its landscape. At the same time, a municipality where the pass-through of infrastructures, of regional and even intercontinental scale, has had a strong impact in its development.

The landscape contains two agroforestry systems or two grammars that structure various elements of its territory and landscape. The first consists of a succession of gullies that have shaped furrows relatively deep and full of vegetation, with terraced terrains with stone walls and characteristic lines of olive trees; the second belongs to the irrigation system of the river delta. A flat landscape gridded by the agricultural colonization. Two grammars with lots of history and cultural references that come into contact in breakpoints, strategically important for tourist development.

On this landscape are nested different cross roads, highways, a railroad, etc. which run parallel to the coast and several packages of urbanization. At the same time, it fits a fragmented urban core and weak residential and tourist uses.

The town plan has a clear framework: Law 8/2005 on landscape protection, management and planning in Catalonia. A law which introduced in Catalonia the idea of landscape planning and methods of the ‘European Landscape Convention’. A law that is important in a territory, like L’Ampolla, where the source “landscape”, closely related to tourism, is essential.

In this law, landscape is defined relating it to the human facts or the perception of space. It talks about the interrelation between territorial and human factors or of “a part of the territory, as perceived by the population”. Apparently, it is based on a conception of space and landscape opened to all previous considerations. But, in the rules for intervention, it refers to the formation of “landscape units” conceived as an integrated whole. That is, units equivalent to zones, where the interrelations, overlaps and contradictions between different concepts have little place.

Our work, in fact, has been thought to overcome this contradiction between the complexity of the landscape and the schematic division of land into “units” or zones. According to the content of this
law and with the objective to protect tourist landscape, the first idea that emerges is the need to identify the landscape and its values. Because without image there is no landscape, it is important to identify them prior to urban development. That is the point where our work includes everything mentioned above on the image in spaces of tourism. The main objective of planning is the permanence of the image of the two groups that constitute the landscape of L’Ampolla. The tourist implementations must adapt to this characteristic permanence of the landscape.

There is a priority to build an inventory of the images and constructions which shape the places and their memory. The image of the landscape is important in the collective memory and the perception of the place for tourists. Mapping is the most immediate consequence of this issue of the image’s permanence. The Plan has made a territorial map which depicts and locates geographically the defining elements of the landscape. Simultaneously, it also draws the aggressions, particularly the illegal buildings scattered throughout the territory. The map places the permanences, but without falling into the immediatism of drawing a plot organizer, immaterial and abstract, as a principal permanence. Probably, the main defect of plans, which are based on the methodology of typology-morphology, is to be based on such concepts and not to emphasize the real images or references of the landscape.

But we must also bear in mind that in a tourist urbanization of complex structure, as in the case of L’Ampolla, the landscape is variable and full of nuances. Here the traditional instrument of town planning, zoning, has little impact. The territory of L’Ampolla is a paradigmatic case of non-convenience of the division into homogenous zones. The intersections between the different natural systems, infrastructures and buildings is constant. This is a clear case of hybrid landscape, based on the crossing of systems.

Landscape is a space of plurality. As such, it is difficult to reduce it into synthetic images. Therefore, the mapping has been elaborated with great detail, with drawings and graphics close to the image of the elements, and a set of wires or structure lines that may overlap each other. The detail allows to put into attention variations and overlays. Its starting point are photos, most of them panoramic, which reveal various configurations of the landscape. Then we evaluate the presence of various elements and draw the maps. On those maps we draw different systems. First of all, the system of streams, gullies and mountain’s drainage lines in general. Secondly, the masses of vegetation associated with these waterways. In the third place, the system of fields, especially old fences and retaining stone walls that delimit these fields and are the most defining element of the landscape. Fourth, the system of rural and livestock roads, locally called iligallos, which have a characteristic shape and interrelate with the waterways. And, finally, historic buildings, houses and farmhouses, that give cultural thickness to the whole.

No tissue and polygon delineation is ever done. As mentioned, the agroforestry systems are considered grammars or ways of relating concepts of landscape, which are to be treated as if they were gardens and not zones.

One of the interesting themes in this way of mapping the landscape is that overlaps of elements and concepts of landscape planning are allowed. A circumstance which is clear on the edge or transition spaces. In those themes and aspects of the two grammars overlap. This is the case of El Roquer, an area which relates the Delta and the mountain, the cliffs overlooking the sea or the water lines that make up “bays” or coves of tourist interest.

When setting the conditions of buildings and spaces of tourist use, this way of understanding the landscape is very interesting. Development projects, whether residential or resorts, are conditioned by a series of concepts that relate to the surrounding landscape. They are concepts which form an open system. These guidelines of state, or form, relate to various elements which are already mapped. Guidelines that the application of computer cartography will allow to individualize, to study in depth the structure of various configurations, rules and themes.
In this way, the architectural project dialogues with site conditions through the information contained in the map. Thus, the structuring map is not a drawing but a reference to spaces of information or facts which must guide the intervention projects. The information map becomes sort of structuring, supplemented by the attention to several rules of composition. That is what is generally called “narrative town planning”.

The character of the place and its links with other elements and concepts of its environs becomes the focus theme of the integration of new tourist buildings in the landscape. Thus, the image becomes the main theme. But this is not an image of a stage set but an image linked to components of the territory. Neither are global and static images, but images that open the journey towards unknown dimensions of space.

3.2 The case of Ciutadella de Menorca

The second case is a preliminary study on the revision of Ciutadella de Menorca’s General Plan. A town with an important historical tradition that is reflected in the weight of its buildings and spaces with character and cultural heritage, in a unique landscape with a strong identity. Here the landscape is combined with constructions of high value and interest, both in its city centre and in its rural areas.

It is a polinuclear town, which occupies the western part of the island of Menorca. An island that was declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1993. This polinuclearity derives from its traditional dispersed settlements and also from the tourist exploitation located in many of its coves, some urbanized and others still virgins. The relationship between the natural environment, landscape and urban spaces are more complex than in the previous case.

In this case, our work has focused on the protection of the landscape, its main tourist resource, and on improving the quality of everyday life: strengthening the social fabric, making sustainable growth possible and introducing new activities. In other words, the aim was to combine tourism and local activities, in a city more relevant than L’Ampolla. The theme of the intersection of values was the key point of our town planning.

The main topic is the adaptation of the municipality into a sustainable tourism that respects the environment and landscape, the protection of coastal and rural areas, linking the new urban settlements and the new infrastructures to the protection of its environmental conditions. It included both the protection of the historic centre and the protection of the territory and its landscape. Whether in this case as in the other, the initial theme has been the mapping study of permanences that give character to the town. As in the case of L’Ampolla, the study was based on a mapping of information or a detailed inventory mapping.

The first theme is the old town of Ciutadella. Here, both the analysis and intervention depend on the concept of type. The historic urban centres, generally based on the definition and drawing of building types and configurations of the morphology of the streets. A type that, too often, is assimilated to models, while the morphologies are classified into tissues that include streets, plots and buildings together. Against this point of view, type is not seen as a picture or model to copy. Type must be assimilated to an image or concept that serves as a rule for projects. It is a scheme or set of invariants. For instance, in some cases, as in the old town of Ciutadella, type refers primarily to a generator element (such as the courtyard, stairs, etc.) that has been built historically (where economic, social, etc. rules converge) and technical concepts that have different cultural and professional backgrounds. That is, a core model and multiple factors in which their relationship with the environment is summarized. For instance, the shape of the facade, its conservation and changing uses of the ground floor. Surrounding the core, material or conceptual, a landscape or a “forest” of rules of composition is formed.

In this context, contradictions between form and function or use, one of the characteristic themes of the historical tourist town planning, have an explanation. Between form and function there is never a
harmonious agreement, but many tensions. Types derived from the tourist exploitation, general or particular in Menorca (such as bars, shops, leisure spaces, etc. as well as the distribution of building types and uses in several places, in the old core and also in the coves and tourist urbanizations) should have a special attention in this part. The plan must consider and resolve all these tensions and contradictions.

Moreover, the mapping of information is important to identify values. Values that are not homogeneous. Values that are: architectural, archaeological, natural, environmental, landscaping, cultural, etc. They have relation with areas of knowledge and culture or different thematic laws.

That forces heritage catalogues to facilitate the incorporation of new data, information and studies on these various values. It is also possible that different places have different rating patterns or different point of views on these values simultaneously. The overlapping of criteria, sometimes contradictory, is one of the clearest characteristics of the current town planning and this should be reflected here as well. Gradually, the identification of the space in journey, which reveals different topics, becomes more evident.

The second theme is the study and mapping of the defining and permanent elements of the landscape and its territory. A map detailing: rural roads, fields, stone walls, natural shapes, cliffs, vegetation of interest, waterways and scattered buildings, soils of natural interest and affected by natural hazards or by the water cycle, inadequate for a sustainable urban development of cultural interest; the environs of historical, architectural and cultural elements, and, more generally, spaces and landscapes of a valuable identity that are interesting for a balance between man and nature and quality of people’s life. It takes into account both the characteristics of natural land, geology, hydrology, etc. as the detail of its humanization (roads, fields, buildings, additional constructions etc.) considering, at the same time, the historic structure, the morphological qualities and the definition of landscape rules.

The map whose is derived becomes a useful inventory of territorial elements that affect in territorial planning. It is the basis of structuring determinations, of landscape protection and of the insertion of characteristic typologies of tourist exploitation. In this case, the application of a computer mapping/cartography allows us to decompose the map into different thematic layers and to elaborate schemes that synthesize the characteristics of each theme and that allow the overlapping of issues between them.

A third theme connects the previous two. One of the most interesting cases of Ciutadella’s town planning is the configuration of the space around the land’s old drain lines towards the sea. Drainage lines, streams, gullies, etc. that when they arrive at sea form coves, coves and sometimes natural harbours. That is, places of historic and tourist interest.

Much history has focused on these spaces. Many episodes of collective memory refer to these spaces. Sometimes they are traditions, myths and cultural facts. There are also historical buildings that have given them shape. The most interesting is the area around the old harbour and Pla de Sant Joan.

From a tourist point of view, nature issues, characteristic buildings and memory are mixed and that is what makes them very attractive. At the same time, they are very sensitive about its compatibility with the transformations and integration of new uses.

Urbanistically, they still have more interest. They are the result of the superposition of different systems. Natural systems which have much to do with water flows, rocks and associated forms of vegetation. Here the historical buildings are not merely buildings, and its settlement modalities, but also stone walls, walls, piers, etc. They are uses related with the harbour, and also with tourism and recreation. So they are the keystone of treatment of tourist landscapes. Also applicable to newly created spaces where there are sediments of the most ancient memory.
They are spaces of intermedation. Spaces where the point of view of tourist exploitation and the point of view of residents everyday life, and environmental protection are overlapped. But even more, they are spaces where different rules of composition, also referred to several issues, overlap each other. They are limit spaces. They border spaces, as defined by Claudio Magris.

From our point of view of professional experience, they are the key point of tourist spaces’ methodology of treatment, through the overlapping of criteria; apart from town planning’s polygonization, zones and global models.

Along these lines of intermedation there are numerous structuring landscape routes and promenades, of historical tradition, linked to a field structure that is rooted in the landscape, of qualified landscape where tourist interest is made compatible with agriculture, forestry and leisure activities.

This is another type of territorial spaces in which different types of activities, spatial and logical constructions are crisscrossed. Paths that usually begin in the old core and develop to the sea and coves, pristine and urbanized, along different realities. That is, other types of intermedation guidelines which overlap each other.

4. Essential aspects of town planning in tourist spaces

Based on routes or spaces of transition like these, a different view of historical and tourist landscape can be built. You can not build a mapping of information not referred to global conditions of tissues, homogeneous spaces or zones, but to specific conditions of sites. Based on this mapping information transformation project can be built where the characteristics of places, routes and different values are present.

Thus, the analysis methodology introduced in the previous two case studies, based on the detail, attention to local characteristics and the potential overlapping of themes, will intervene decisively in the design of project and intervention tools of planning. In these projects, the value of the essential aspects of town planning in tourist spaces should be enhanced.

The permanence of the natural, cultural and historical values of the territory. In current town planning the issues of landscape and identity of urban spaces and territories are increasingly weighing. Today, in town planning, the working horizon is directed primarily to welfare of everyday life. So the cultural, historical values and the landscape come to the foreground.

The environmental values. These values combine perfectly with the values of the population, many urban areas and, particularly, the old core. The case of the spaces of transition based in water lines in Ciutadella explains it quite well.

The complexity of the territory or, more precisely, the increasing process of complexity in which are dumped the tourist spaces. Spaces formed, increasingly, in combination, sometimes unstable, of urban fabric and, above all, of infrastructures of territorial scope that disrupt the local living conditions.

All these considerations allow us to evaluate the concepts which have been introduced previously. For instance, the role of the images in the definition of the typologies in the space of tourism. Images which have the background of the different cultures that affect the space of tourism.

Also the metaphor of the journey, which introduces a concept of landscape dynamic and opened to the introduction of new themes, not initially intended in mind. Also that crosses borders, or limit spaces, such as those described in the case of Ciutadella, and especially taking into account the different layers and times of the territory.

A new way of thinking the territory, of its own time and current issues. According to which the landscape of tourism, will be based on the intersection of different grammars. In the first place, culture
and the traveller values, mostly “European”, mediated by the logic of the business exploitation. A global phenomenon with its own modes of transportation, housing, leisure, etc. Secondly, local cultures and the characteristics of some complex places: landscape, memories, history, etc. which are difficult to combine with the previous values.

This clash of values should be the basis of town plans and urban projects, not of the future but of the present. A contraposition that is relevant both in the reading of the territory and in the structuring of the project. A project, moreover, can not be based on closed traditional zones and systems. It requires the decomposition of urban elements and the discovery of new forms of relationships. Reflection of material bonds such as, for example, water and erosion lines between landscape and coves, etc. or otherwise reflection of their own values and memories of places. Contraposition means pollution. Contraposition is not to replace traditional planning by a collage of thematic layers. But to relate the various topics and discovery lines or territory reading. Thus the “global” becomes an innovation factor, providing viewpoints that enrich local identities. The world is dynamic and town planning is often too static.

The tourist planning can not be limited to forms of “business” exploitation. Neither it has to close to the overall conservation of the native landscape. The tourist town planning can be more creative. The mixture phenomenon between global and local cultures, as explained above, should encourage innovation and revaluation of the territory.

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