



Seaside Architecture and Urbanism
in Bulgaria and Croatia

Edited by Elke Beyer, Anke Hagemann and Michael Zinganel

On Architecture, Tourism and Politics on the Seaside

Michael Zinganel, Elke Beyer, Anke Hagemann (editors)

Holidays After the Fall.

Seaside Architecture and Urbanism in Bulgaria and Croatia

Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2013, 272 pages, ISBN 978-386-859-226-9

Irina Băncescu

Teaching Assistant, PhD, "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest
bancescuirina@gmail.com

Post-war Europe has seen an increase in leisure time which, together with the emergence of mass culture, led to the consolidation of modern mass tourism in both capitalist and socialist-driven economies. In the communist states, these holiday structures also embodied the ideological doctrine, as the showcase of leisure architecture meant to represent, both on a national and international level, the capability of the régimes to pursue a better life for their citizens. In particular, the large scale resorts on the seaside appear to be some of the most interesting case studies and the apices of this special conjuncture. Once on the free market after 1989, the majority of the former state-run bathing resorts went through turbulent transformations that altered their initial image.

A complex research that brings together attractive topics like seaside holidays, mass tourism, modernism and its legacy and the practice of architecture during Communism was sure to bring forth an appealing story. Focusing on the Bulgarian and Croatian coastlines, *Holidays After The Fall. Seaside Architecture and Urbanism in Bulgaria and Croatia* builds up a well documented, detailed and objective picture of the evolution of the modern leisure resorts from their planning and usage conditions during Communism through to their partial or total transformation in the period after the fall of the totalitarian structures. The book is a key contribution to this emerging field of study and it is one of the very few publications that propose a comparative analysis of touristic developments in the Eastern bloc, discussing also the larger European context. This study of cultural history is vital to scholars of Eastern Europe and is to be continued, for this is a topic of extreme actuality and in need of additional research; furthermore, it constitutes an important reference for the study of the Romanian seaside, especially for the similarity of the Bulgarian case with the Romanian situation.

As its editors point out, "in international architectural circles, the legacy of Modernism and particularly, of 'Socialist Modernism' (aka 'Ostmoderne'), is a trendy topic these days".¹ But, as the authors themselves underline in the introduction, "[...] the current physical and economic restructuring of erstwhile state socialism tourism architectures and leisure landscapes is only rarely addressed in urban research [...]".² Among the already numerous studies on architecture and urbanism under communism, *Holidays After The Fall* clearly bears a distinctive note, as it is one of the very few which follow a specific architectural programme from its very beginning until the present moment, both on a general level and on specific case studies. Not imposing the historical threshold of the régimes' fall to the studied period, but overlapping it might be in fact one of the key features of this volume.

Although its title apparently suggests a perspective focused mainly on how the coastal development is configured and is developing at the present moment, the communist built

¹ Michael Zinganel, Elke Beyer and Anke Hagemann, "Introduction", *Holidays After The Fall. Seaside Architecture and Urbanism in Bulgaria and Croatia* (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2013), 30.

² Ibid.

heritage is constantly evoked and thoroughly described, making it the permanent topic of all chapters. In fact, a constant concern appears to be the tracing of the connections and the cause-effect phenomena between these two periods, underscoring the lines of continuity or rupture regarding building policies and architectural and urbanistic approaches.

Edited by Michael Zinganel, Elke Beyer and Anke Hagemann, *Holidays After The Fall* is based on a research project conducted at the Graz University of Technology and was published in August 2013 by Jovis Verlag, Berlin. The book is organised in two main sections containing general surveys on the seaside's evolution in Bulgaria and in Croatia, respectively. Each section is backed up by several suggestive case studies; each of them is presented with the political and economic background of the initial planning and construction as well as the transformation process in the post-socialist period. The contributions also inquire into how similar to other countries were the "socio-spatial solutions" developed under Communism and to what extent they influenced the manner in which post-socialist seaside tourism went on its path towards democratization. The chapters' content ranges frequently from the general level of state politics or free market conditions to fine details of architecture and back, in a continuously restrained and enlarged study frame that zooms in and out in order to provide an image as complete as possible.

In the introductory chapter, Michael Zinganel and Elke Beyer briefly situate the book's topic and the authors' endeavours in the larger context of global post-war architecture, setting up some general references regarding the evolution of mass tourism structures. Having initially relied on the functionalist principles featuring the International Style, tourism typologies varied later according to the diverse infusions of Western architectural ideas, including structuralism, brutalism or critical regionalism. The part dedicated to Bulgarian Black Sea coast is organised in six chapters, followed by ten stories of individual hotels or resorts. Displaying fascinating plans, sections and photographs of six particular cases, Elke Beyer and Anke Hagemann build up the general history of the Bulgarian coast's evolution in the socialist era. The critical examination of post-socialist restructuring processes appears to be particularly important for its emergency. The "short-sighted sell-off of the Black Sea coast [...] adversely affects the quality of its tourist product" and is characterised by "excessive development", as "spatial and architectural resources created over several decades have been sacrificed [...] parts of the landscape have been irreparably disfigured"³. Three surveys and eight study cases organise the Croatian Adriatic section. Michael Zinganel's chapter offers insights into the transition from a state-controlled to a capitalist tourism economy and critically analyses the way touristic models and products, hence the leisure architecture, have changed. He concludes his study by noting that the "incomplete modernisation" enacted during socialism was followed by the "incomplete privatisation" after the fall, which is regarded as a "happy turn of fate: [...] Croatia's natural resources and landscape are still largely intact" and people enjoy "unhindered access to the sea"⁴. Maroje Mrduljaš's contribution is an excellent and comprehensive architectural history of the Croatian socialist seaside. Based on suggestive drawings and numerous examples, his study outlines the extraordinary typological diversity of these late modern resorts by appealing to general models, but always considering the local conditions. The author also investigates the public performance of the socialist leisure milieu; he points out that tourism "certainly boosted modernisation throughout socialist Yugoslavia" and "generated active, interesting and accessible environments" that "maintained the continuity of public space" and "were spontaneously connected to the dynamics of local life", thus influencing it and gradually becoming its "social condensers"⁵. Written in a fluent and witty language, Norbert Mappes-Niediek's text paints vividly how the "socialized companies" under "workers' self-management" which were running the seaside tourism in Croatia were privatized after 1991. The chapter presents with efficacy and accuracy the political and socioeconomic conjuncture and the interaction between the main actors involved in the transformation of the Adriatic coast before and after the fall.

3 Ibid., 113.

4 Ibid., 170.

5 Ibid., 206.

Although the comparative approach announced in the book's title is basically structured in separate chapters, the authors underline in the foreword the main similarities and differences between the two countries' seaside. They both "represent late-modern tourism landscapes par excellence. In many respects they resembled the commercial tourism machines of the West, yet insofar as they synthesized aspects of that consumer culture with basic socialist premises, [...] they were also a typical instance of European Late Socialism".⁶ The most important difference seems to be the chance of building up a sustainably built landscape on a less urbanised and still naturally appealing Adriatic coast versus the problematic future of the "[...] disastrously disfigured by overdevelopment and architectural monstrosities"⁷ Bulgarian seaside.

Building up a highly significant visual message, the book begins and ends with two photographic essays that efficiently back up the studies gathered amid them. The opening is reserved for the glamorous, seductive and almost sensual images of the tourist infrastructure on the communist Croatian seaside, envisaged as locations for perfect holidays by Turistkomerc agency in the 1970s. In stark contrast, the second group of images done by Nikola Mihov show the almost deserted amusement park atmosphere of the Bulgarian tourist waterfront at the end of the 2012 summer season.

This critical discussion about the various architectural and urban planning strategies applied on the seaside during the second half of the 20th century is based on meticulously researched archives and documents, but also on the *in situ* exploration of the mere reality, pragmatically delivered in texts, drawings and numbers. Based on an interdisciplinary approach, the surveys are noteworthy for blending in the most recent bibliographical references on the topic, precise data and fresh facts and interviews from various fields that overlap on the seashore and influence its built landscape: politics, economy, sociology, tourism, culture, geography, ecology etc. The actuality of the subject is in fact another important feature of this book: it synthesizes the present situation of Bulgarian and Croatian built coastlines and resumes the main problems that these waterfronts face today during intense economic change. For many case studies, mostly Bulgarian, it also sounds the alarm, as the chaotic, dense and aggressive development has depleted the coast's natural resources and has made uncertain its very future.

Last but not least, it seems mandatory to relate the book to this sITA issue's topic, *Indigenous Aliens. Mediators of Architectural Modernity*. Considering the two proposed thematic hypotheses, one might argue that the parts of the book that discuss architecture under communism can be good examples for asserting them. On the one hand, the volume successfully illustrates some so-called *receiver-areas*, namely Bulgarian and Croatian coastlines, where the alluring Western modern concepts of mass tourism architecture were skillfully adapted to some particular political and geo-morphological contexts. On the other hand, it brings into the spotlight a series of names of local architects that might be called, as the theme suggests, 'indigenous aliens'. Impelled by the political situation, these professionals operated and were known only inside the national borders. Nevertheless, they embraced the contemporary Western ideas on architectural modernity and attempted to apply them in their work, aiming at the same time at local specificity. In Bulgaria and Croatia, but also in Romania and other socialist countries from Eastern Europe, the seaside architecture built before the fall was both the testing ground and the showcase of this Western modernity shifted to a communist background.

6 *Ibid.*, 29.

7 *Ibid.*, 32.