

New Holiday Towns As Non-Places. The Case Of Marina d'Or

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Abstract

■ Since the start of tourism as rewarding and massive activity in the mid-nineteenth century, new tourist destinations have appeared to satisfy mass tourism. Among the different urban developments that have taken place so far, the objective of this paper is to reflect on a model of tourist development that is spreading internationally, the New holiday towns. These urban settlements can reach large dimensions in size and population, so producing appreciable economic, political and environmental impacts in their environment. But, what about the social impact that these NHTs involve? Through the analysis of a specific case, Marina d'Or, social aspects were investigated with the help of a quantitative method, the Survey: prototype users; frequency by residents in town; relations with its neighbors; intensity of use that they make of public space and their satisfaction and valuation of urban space. And finally with a qualitative methodology, the Participant Observation, the diversity of its urban space and the ways of inhabiting it were analyzed.

Key words:

new towns, non-places, social impact of tourism, Marina d'Or

Introduction

■ Since the start of tourism as rewarding and massive activity in the mid-nineteenth century, new tourist destinations have appeared to satisfy a growing typology of tourist: mass tourism. Among the different urban developments that have taken place so far, this paper analyzes the New Holiday Towns. The paper is divided into three parts: First of all the concept of New holiday town (from now on "NHT") is explained, since it's important to distinguish them from other urban settlements such as tourist resorts, residential areas for holidays or even traditional tourist towns. Secondly a few cases of NHT are shown chronologically, noting the difference between the first and the current ones. And finally an urban and sociological study was carried out in a specific case of NHT: Marina d'Or, in Oropesa, Spain.

New holiday towns

■ Before explaining the concept of New holiday town, it's essential to define first the New towns, INTI (2010): "A New Town is planned and built, based on a large scale, integral master plan, on a site where no town was before. This is what set a New town apart from 'normal', gradually developed towns. The foundation of the New town is grounded in a clear (political) decree. Connected to this is the characteristic that the new settlement will grow into a town in a short time span. The New town will have a certain degree of political, governmental and/

or economic autonomy. This is what discriminates New towns from (large scale) town expansions that are not autonomous in any way, but have been attached to an existing town." INTI explains that they are characterized by: Design, Size and rapid growth, Life cycle and Starting situation and concept. "The problem of the new town lies in the starting situation of the town: the way how a New Town has been destined from the start, both by political goals and by the history of its creation." These factors individually are not specific only from the New towns, however, together they are critical to understand the logic and problems of this urban model. The NHTs are then New towns built with a single goal: to satisfy the demand of mass tourism. They are built thanks to strong business investment and the support and commitment from local government and, although all have the same objective, their starting situation and concept can be very different depending on the historical, political and economic context in which they are built. Question that affects their subsequent evolution, as we will see onwards.

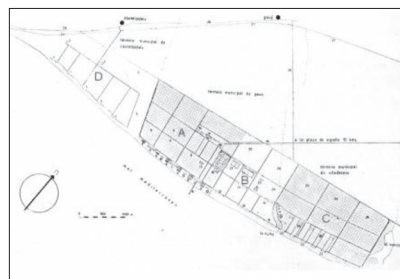
Cases of New holiday towns

The first NHT were born in the early twentieth century when holiday leave became a legal right for the working class, building the environment of a modern way of life based on leisure time, a healthy life based on sun and beach, far away from the city, the pollution, and work routine. Two examples of these NHT built with social purposes are "La Ciutat del Repós i les Vacances" in Spain and Prora, in Germany.

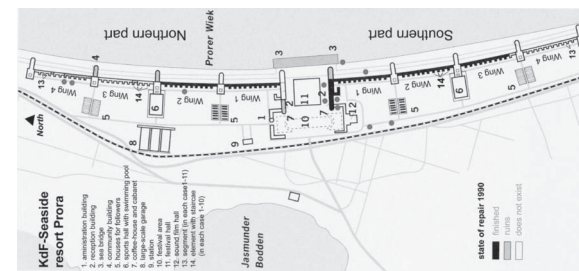
"La Ciutat del repós i les Vacances" (1933), in Castelldefells, Cataluña, was one of the first NHT planned in Spain. It was a project in which architects and politicians sought solutions to enable cheap holidays for the working-class. "It was a place to predominate the cultural work time, rest and intellectual education. Where there should be "rebuild and strengthen the forces of the workers through trips, exercise, and agricultural work." (ROVIRA, 2003). The Project belongs to GATEPAC and what characterizes it, is the function and rationality of the space, the definition of different areas with use of well defined activities (SAMBRICIO, 1987) as we can see at Figure 1. The project is specially thought for the holiday weekends of the citizens of Barcelona, so it is close to the city and easily accessible. The site would occupy 200ha approx and the works began, but unfortunately the Spanish civil war stopped the project.

Soon after, in Germany another NHT was emerging between 1936 and 1939, Prora. The Strength through Joy organization, constructed the mostly finished several kilometer long complex of buildings. (Figure 2) Its main objective was the extensive organization of leisure time for the Germans, especially the layout of holidays for 20,000 people. As an article of the BBC News (2008) says, "the Nazis planned mass murder and they also planned mass tourism, as part of their attempt to indoctrinate the entire German population." They constructed a 4.5 km long building strip, consisting of 5 blocks each with a length of 500m, the called "KdF Sea Bath Rügen. But "it is not only interesting from the architecture perspective, -implementation of modern architecture in National Socialism-, it was also an element of the National Socialists' labour and social policy, serving its aggressive military and racial policies." Documentation Center of Prora (2010). The Second World war stopped the project and authorities have tried to market Prora in a commercial manner, however Prora is nowadays in ruins, waiting for private investors who wish to install hotels, holiday homes, wellness centers and sport facilities in the new town to reactivate it.

Figure 1. Programm of "Ciutat del repós i les vacances".
Figure 2. Kdf-Seaside Prora



Source: PPG-AU FAUFBA and Catalan enciclopedia



Source: Documentation Zentrum Prora

International New Town Institute, Almere, Netherlands

Rest and Vacation Town

Group of Spanish Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture, that constituted one of the best legacies of the twentieth century avant-garde in Spain. It was composed provided five areas: (A) bathing area; (B) area weekend (with removable houses for rent, figure3); (C) area of residence (with hotels, houses and school colonies minimum); (D) zone for rest cures in sanatoriums; and (E) agricultural crop area with vegetable gardens for rent, figure2.

Catalan encyclopedia

"Strength through Joy" was a sub organization of the "German Labor Front" Dokumentation Zentrum Prora

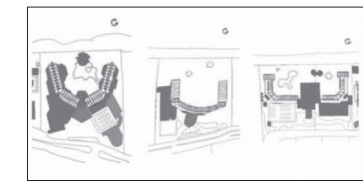
Meanwhile, another NHT that had nothing to do with the previous was emerging in EEUU, Las Vegas (1930). It started as a stopover on the pioneer trails to the west, and nowadays it is called "The Entertainment Capital of the World" with an estimated population of 583,756 inhabit and an area of 340km2. With Las Vegas the vacation concept related to leisure time, understood as a state of passivity and inactivity, not associated with work... changes moving towards entertainment. MUXI (2004) "The business of Las Vegas consist in the alterateration of cronological time, in the generation of identical and systematized sequences of time, so the tourist lose the sense os chronological time and begin to spend wildly" IRIBAS (2005)

Figure 3. Map of Las Vegas. Strip showing every written word seen from the road

Figure 4. All inclusive resorts in Cancun



"Las Vegas is to the Strip what Rome is to the Piazza" turístico de Cancun, 2010. p 63



Source: ALDAPE, La configuración del espacio Source: VENTURI (1978)

Cancun was born in the early 70's, when the Mexican government visualized the opportunity to reactivate the development of the peninsula of Yucatan thanks to the tourist activity. They planned a NHT that nowadays is the main source of income from tourism in Mexico. In just 40 years, it grew to 628,306 hab. The success of Cancun lies in the combination of the ingredients of the first NHTs, sun and beach, with the new paradigm born with Las Vegas, construction of time, embodied in their offer of "all inclusive resort" (Figure 4). As IRIBAS (2003) says, "the tourism success is produced by the accumulation of alternative time offers which satisfies and covers the needs and aspirations of tourists. We will have to fill the time of tourist with activities and offers all day, every time there will be more diversification, probably because, ever going to have more number of holidays, shorter in duration but more numerous throughout the year, and each time the products will be more defined and outlined to the market. Moreover, the new architecture that is required for tourism is not architecture about form. What is claimed now, is a new conception in which space is a tool, not an end. The real purpose of the construction is the construction of time."

"The Mediterranean basin loses strength as a world tourist destination" due to competition from new emerging tourism receptors and so the traditional destinations of the Mediterranean coastline began to show "stagnation" simptoms at the end of the twentieth century. MANERA and GARAU (2005). The offer based on sun and beach is not enough competitive in the international market, so the tourist system of the spanish coastline begins to show signs of a slow "process of change". Ex-novo settlements away from conventional tourist destinations are born with a high supply of entertainment (such as golf resorts, thematic parks...) VERA (2005). In line with this process of change, emerges a NHT on the mediterranean coastline, Marina d'Or, in the municipalities of Oropesa del Mar and Cabanes, Spain. The tourist development in Oropesa begins in the 60's when the first buildings and tourist complexes are built, transforming it into the traditional tourist destination for the residents of Castellón, capital of the region located 22km far away. Thus, tourism and real estate market become the main source of income for the municipality, which encourages the private company Marina d'Or Group in the late 80's to build the largest NHT in Spain: Marina d'Or. Marina d'Or spreads parallel to the coastline occupying 2,5km2 with a density of 11.000liv/km2 approx. It is also composed of approx. 1.170 hotel rooms and entertainment offerings such as spa, amusement and water parks, restaurants, shops... Its natural boundaries (the sea, the river and the nature reserve of Cabanes) together with the railway parallel to the coastline, prevent its continuous growth. Reason why Marina d'Or will continue its expansion 2km away with Marina d'Or Golf. A proyect that will occupy 18km2 approx., so exceeding the current size of the town of Oropesa and even reaching the size of Castellon. (Figure 5) The goal of this new project is to provide more differentiated entertainment in the market for deseasonalizing the tourism in Marina d'Or, currently based on sun and beach. As ve can see at Figure 6, Marina d'Or has a rigid urban structure

U.S. Census Bureau, 20010

Las Vegas Nevada.gov, 2010

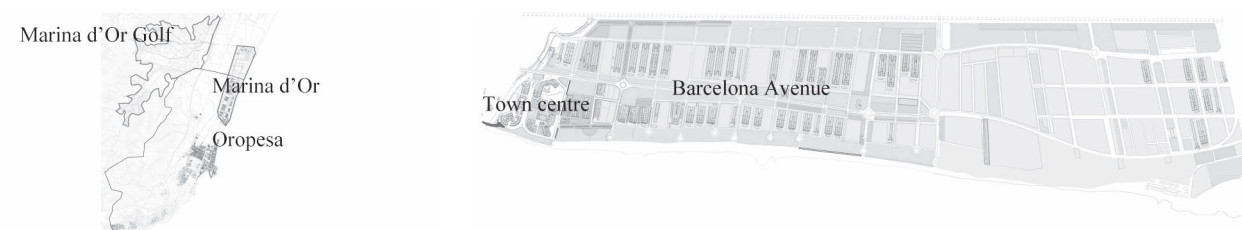
ITER, 2010

The Group has developed its own fully integrated business model, where full control of the business cycle allows them to keep costs to a minimum: Land Purchase, Land Plots Management, Construction, Trading and Selling and After-Sales service. The important increase that has been achieved in real state sales is due to: commercial strategy; a highly specialized product with added value; strong customer relationships; accost rationalization strategy and international expansion. (Marina d'Or Group, 2010)

with a functional organization. The tertiary services such as hotels, spa, restaurants, shopping, commercial centre... are concentrated in the town center, while the residential, green and recreational areas are located on horizontal strips parallel to the sea. Its main avenue, Barcelona Av., is the entrance to Marina d'Or and showcase of the entertainment supplied by the NHT, simulating the Strip from Las Vegas. There is a marked difference between the first sector built, the town centre, with a great diversity of architecture and public spaces and the remaining sectors, which are composed almost only of two building tipologies. It's composed of massive and serial architecture which leaves public space as a monotonous scenario.

Figure 5. Oropesa and Cabanes

Figure 6. Marina d'Or



Source: Own elaboration from plans of Oropesa and Cabanes city council (2009)

Objective

■ The NHT explained here are just a few examples of an urban phenomenon that gradually is expanding internationally. As we have seen, some of them were only theoretical projects, others failed and try to survive nowadays thanks to private investors, while others have become the “Capital of entertainment” and the highest source of income from tourism in its country. Marina d'Or is still young, but it has ambitions to turn into the “largest holiday town of Europe for all the family”, Marina d'Or Group (2010). So they are not only tourist destinations, but urban developments that can reach larger dimensions in size and population than the own capital of the regions they occupy, so producing appreciable economic, political and environmental impacts in their environment. But, what about the social impact that these NHTs involve? Are these new towns qualified to support such a big load of population for only some months per year? Are they able to survive active the rest of the year? Are they urban systems in which contacts, regulations, interchanges and communication take place among its neighbors for the necessary coexistence? RUEDA (1996) Is their public space designed for collective life? An finally, are these NHTs a place for their inhabitants? The objective of this paper is to study the social impact that these urban developments involved through the analysis of the following variables:

- User profile. The purpose of this variable is to know the kind of users who inhabit these towns. Are they tourist and vacationers or also residents? Is it a national or international tourism? Is it a family, elderly or young tourism? How many years ago do they live the NHT?
- Frequency of use of the NHT by neighbors. How many days and months per year do the inhabitants frequent the town? Do they spend short or long periods of holidays there? Is there a part of the population who live in the town all the year? What average of frequency of use has the NHT?
- Relationships between neighbors. The purpose of this variable is to know which kind of contacts, relations... the neighbors establish in the town.
- Diversity of public space. How is the public space of a town for holidays built just for one actor? Is it a public space designed for collective life?
- Intensity of use and Ways of inhabiting urban space in day life by neighbors. Is it a space of representation where the community is visible? BORJA (2001) Is it a place for its neighborhood?
- Valoration and satisfaction of urban space by users. ROCA, BURNS and GARCÍA (2003) To know the reasons of the users to choose Marina d'Or as tourist destination.

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“The ‘place’ is ... the ‘living space’ in depth by personal subjectivity of each, a space in which one notes that is part (sort of) of his own being (ie, with which you feel identified), a space that you have a long relationship (ie, part of his own biography or personal history), an area abounding with relationships or personal items (relationship with the environment).” (SILVESTRO, J.M. y ROCA, J., 2007)

*In these weeks the municipality of Oropesa del Mar reaches the highest occupancy. Tourist Info Oropesa del Mar, 2009
INFOTUR Oropesa del Mar, 2009*

Methodology

■ It was choosed a specific case of NHT, Marina d'or, and the previous variables were analyzed through the following methods:

The survey. 150 surveys were made to users of Marina d'Or between the 1st and the 15th of August, 2010. Participant Observation. It was choosed one of the days with more occupation of the year, Saturday August 14, 2010. The same route was repeated in three different time slots doing a photo tour: from 11:30 to 14h, from 17.30h to 20h and from 21h to 23h. PEREZ (2009) The objective of this methodology was also to provide a more global view of Marina d'Or from this sequence of photos enumerated and continuous in terms of location.

Results

User Profile

The tourism of Marina d'Or is mostly national, so 93% of those polled were Spanish tourists who came mainly from the interior and north of Spain. Although Oropesa is the traditional tourist destination for the castellonenses, a small percentage of tourists come from Comunidad Valenciana (14%). The distances between the principal residence of those surveyed and MD are min. 22km (Castellón) and max. 500km (Córdoba), so the average distance is 310km. This is one of the reasons why the frequency of use of the NHT is so low and seasonalized, as we will see onwards. MD has mainly a family tourism composed by inhabitants between 30 and 50 years old with children. Despite one of the initiatives of the PGOU 2009 of Oropesa, is to attract the Elderly, a low percentage of them (22%) frequent MD.

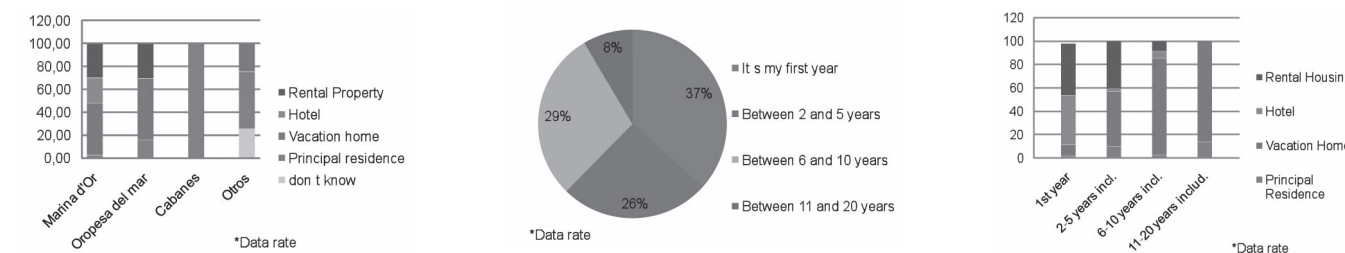


Figure 7. Where do you sleep and in which kind of accommodation?

Figure 8. How many years ago do you frequent MD?

Figure 9. How many years ago do you come to MD and in which kind of accommodation do you sleep?

Source: own elaboration

84.6% of the users polled stay in MD, while the rest in other nearby tourist destinations such as Oropesa (2km away), Cabanes, (10km away) or Castellon (22km away). (These come to MD for shopping, entertainment or daily to work) 45.30% of them had a vacation home, 29% stayed in a rental property, 19% in a hotel and only 6% had a principal residence in MD. As we can see in the Figure 7, the principal residence owns to users who live mainly in Cabanes, Castellón or Oropesa, while vacation home is the typical accommodation for MD, followed by hotel and rental property. Only 8% of those polled frequente MD since its foundation (between 11 and 20 years ago), as the Figure 8 shows, who have a principal residence out of MD. The users who visit MD between 6 and 10 years ago (29%) have a vacation home bought during the real-state boom in Spain, and 37% came by first time to the town, who spend holidays at hotels and rental housing. We can see in Figure 9, by comparing accommodation and how many years ago users visit the town, as the percentage of vacation home decreases to the present and increases the percentage of hotels and rental housing.

Frequency of use

The average of frequency of use of MD is 0 to 1 day per month, except July and August. In July amounts to one day and in August the average is between 8 and 15 days. (Figure 10). The total average is one day/month, which means that MD is used 12 days/year. Noting that the half of them have a vacation home, this low frequency of use is quite surprising. The busiest periods apart from August and July are April (Easter), September, June and October from 3 to 7 days. The period of 1 to 2 days a month (weekends) have also a minimum percentage, and 75% of users don't visit MD except in July and August. (Figure 11) Relating the frequency of use with accommodation, we can observe as the seasonality increases from principal residence to vacation home, rental housing and finally hotel. (Figure 12).

*General Urban Plan of Oropesa del Mar 2009
Remember that the surveys are made in the month of August (2010)*

Figure 10. How many days per month do you come to Marina d'Or?
Figure 11. How many days per month do you frequent Marina d'Or?

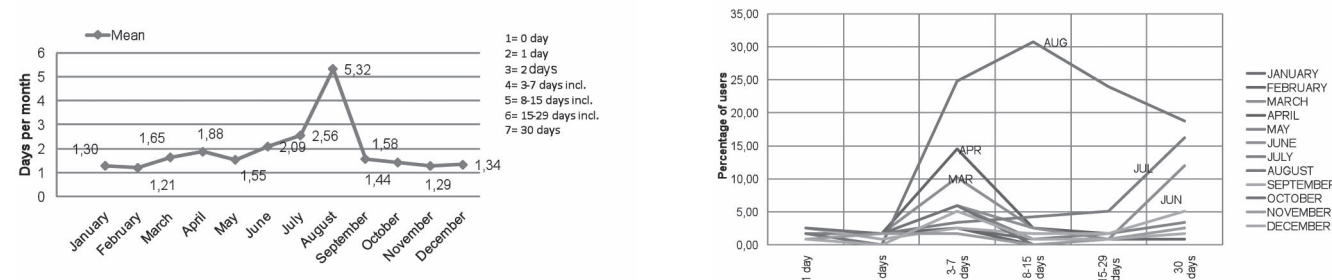
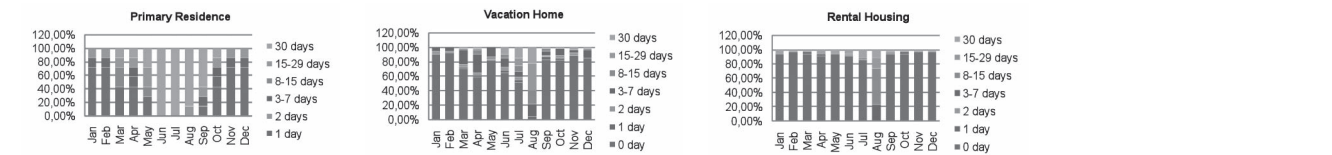


Figure 12. Frequency of use of Marina d'Or/kind of accommodation



Source: own elaboration

Relationships

It has been asked to users if they recognize on the street their neighbors and employees of MD (66% say yes); if they know their names (only 24% say yes); and if they have made friends in MD (just 17% say yes). It has been checked by comparing relationships with other variables, as relationships of users are closer as more years ago neighbors they frequent the town and the less seasonally is its frequency of use.

Diversity of public space

Figure 13. Images of Marina d'Or streets
Figure 14. Symbolism on Barcelona Av., MD Strip



To analyze the diversity of the urban space of MD, all the streets, squares, green areas, architecture ... have been photographed and compared. The participation of few actors (basically Marina d'Or Group) to build the new town is one of the main reasons that have made possible its rapid growth, but is also one of the causes of the lack of diversity of its urban space. Looking at the Figure 13, where some streets of MD are compared, we realise that they all look the same. This is only an example of a situation that is repeated equally with the green areas, architecture, squares...of MD. But it is also consequence of the policy of the Group, who seeks the economic efficiency as one of their most important strategies through mass production of architecture and public spaces. Another important question for the company is to satisfy their "clients", who are looking for relax and security for their holidays. This issue is also reflected on the private enclosures of all the buildings, which leave the streets wall-to-wall as residual spaces, just to pass. The lack of complexity of its urban space, turns the urban space of MD into a space devoid of identity and so unrecognized by its users, as we will see in the variable Intensity of use. Just because the advertising used by the Group on the public space to promote itself, it's possible to get one's bearing, Figure 14.

Intensity of use and Ways of inhabiting urban space in day life by users

Private and public spaces of MD have been listed and users have answered the intensity of use they make of them: several times a day, once a day, several times a week, once a week, less than once a month, never, I don't recognize it. ROCA, BURNS and GARCÍA(2003) The Figure 15 shows that except the beach, bars, restaurants... and MD Gardens (spaces offering entertainment by MD), the remaining spaces are visited only once a week, less than once a month, never or simply they are not recognized by users. Looking at the underlined rates in colour red, it's showed that the two higher rates are always contiguous in the intensity scale, which means that a great percentage of users do the same intensity of use in each space. Mapping these intensities of use on the map of MD, Figure 16, it's observed that the highest intensities are located obviously close to the beach and at the town center, where are all the activities concentrated. The public space of MD (green areas, squares, streets) have a insignificant intensity of use, despite the large surface they occupy.

Figure 15. Intensity of use

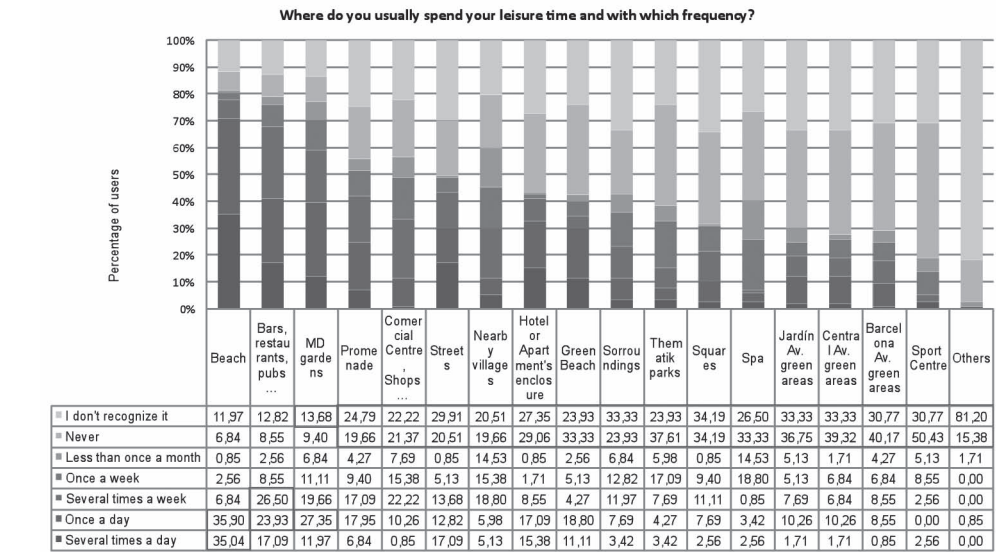
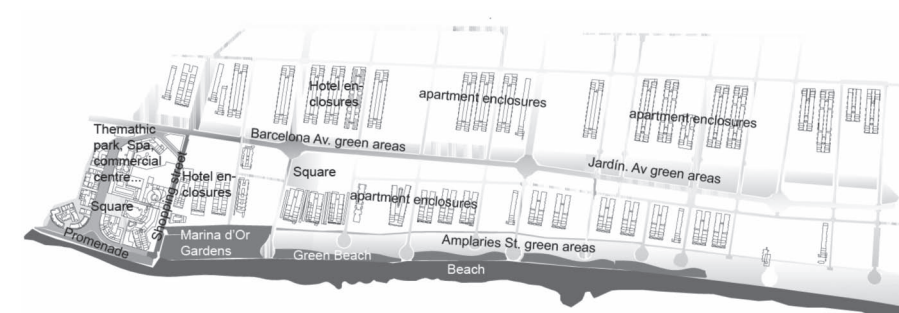


Figure 16. Map of intensity of use of Marina d'Or



Source: Own elaborated. Scale 1/8.000

When the method of participant observation was carried out in the morning, afternoon and evening, the intensity of use extracted from the surveys was reaffirmed. All green areas and places were almost empty all the day. Marina d'Or Gardens, where the company offers activities like a resort (concerts, karaoke, aerobics ...) was the only space used by users. This lack of relationships between users of MD do'nt help to use collectively the public space. Except for the beach, which was overcrowded, the other living spaces are used individually and the ways of inhabiting public space in day life by users are equal at the same times of day, predictable, which is probably consequence of the lack of diversity of user profiles in the new town. As discovered exception through this method, the illegal sale by "top-blankets" at night at Amplaries Street. During two hours approx. this street and adjacent green areas had a maximum intensity of use.

Valuation and satisfaction of users

■ To the question "What level of attractiveness do you think Marina d'Or has?" (scale from 1 to 100), the user's opinions are very dispersed, but the average is 53.40 so the conclusion is that their level of satisfaction with the NHT is not very high. Relating this valuation of users with the question "How Many years ago do you visit Marina d'Or?" is observed as the level of valuation decreases, as more years users frequent the New Town.

The users have also evaluated some aspects of Marina d'Or. It's surprising that despite of the low intensity of use of the green areas, however they have a very high appraisal. Unlike the beach for example, with high intensity of use and very low valuation. The variables show the users' ignorance about issues as public transport (48,7% of those polled didn't know about it); public facilities (34%); employment (42%); health and culture equipments (37%). A large percentage complained about the bad quality of waste management in MD and the lack of parking places (85% have come by car to MD), consequences of the excessive population load. Users responded freely over positive and negative aspects. Quietness, rest and relax was the top rated positive aspects of MD, followed by family vacation, entertainment, fun, green areas, sea, climate, sun, and all the aspects involved in comfort: hotel facilities and easy accessibility to the beach. The negative aspects were the beach, with a large percentage of dissatisfied users, as well as the lack of shops, facilities, services, culture, cleaning, maintenance and the promenade. Only two polled complained about the Marina d'Or Neighborhood Association, which does not work since 2 or 3 years ago because the neighbors don't want on holidays to get into issues related to the organization of MD. Moreover, there is a feeling of reproach to Marina d'Or by their neighbors, making the Group responsible for all the evils of town, sometimes saying they feel "cheated" because the Group promised them anything else, when they bought their flat. As for the slogans: "In Marina d'Or, Holidays all year", 56% of those polled were not agree; "Buy an apartment in Marina d'Or is the best inversion you can do", 66% of those polled were not agree; and "Marina d'Or is the best city for holidays to enjoy the whole family", 49% of those polled were not agree.

Conclusion

■ It's obvious that seasonality affects the frequency of use of any tourism destination based on sun and beach, an issue that will inevitably impact on other social variables. However, there is a very significant difference between the social impact that involve a New holiday town as Marina d'Or and other tourist destinations. Marina d'Or is not comparable to those tourist models developed gradually from an preexisting old town, with history, with another traditional activities developed through years besides tourism, with an significant percentage of population apart from tourists who live and work there all the year and with an own identity created by this community. Important aspects to keep active the tourist destination all the year and to assure the social cohesion between at least a portion of the population. Marina d'Or is a New town, created just for tourism and so composed only of tourists. On the other hand, Marina d'Or is also not equivalent to other NHTs such as Cancun or Las Vegas, tourist models based on an international tourism who spend short periods of holidays at hotels. The tourism of MD is mostly based on vacation homes and is a family and national tourism, a fact that causes a perverse effect so the rotation of tourists is very low. All this issues are responsible of the so low intensity of use of Marina d'Or, a question that turns this urban development into an entirely unsustainable model. The lack of social cohesion surely in a tourist resort is not a big deal, but when it takes place in a town as Marina d'Or that could reach in a future the size and population of the capital of its region, Castellon, this lack of coexistence between neighbors could involve significant hampering the progress of the town. The participation of few actors to build a new town, is one of the main reasons that have made possible its rapid growth. But it is also one of the causes of the lack of diversity of its urban space, of the mass production of a public spaces without identity, dehumanized. A public space which consequently most neighbors don't recognize; with a very low intensity of use in daily life and inhabited individually by users, as the methods used have shown.

Maybe when these issues happen independently the impact is not significant, but when all coexist together in a single location as Marina d'Or, the repercussions are so strong as to turn it into a non-place.

"If a place can be a place of identity, relational and historical, a place that is neither identificatory or relational, or historical, define a " non-place "... a world where the scores of transit and temporary occupations, promised a world of solitary individuality, to provisionally ephemeral, to the passage." AUGÉ (2004) Is it a precedent for future stagnation, that tourist destinations become non-places? Is there a panacea for them? Which? On what basis should settle the future New holiday towns?"

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