

Permanent Visitors

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Abstract

Tourism as a spatial and urban condition assumes arrival, visitation and departure. What happens when the tourist doesn't leave? What urbanity emerges when the visitor settles down and becomes a resident? Originally an enclave of foreigners, and now a village of expatriate inhabitants, do resort communities have a 3rd status – neither transient nor permanent, neither local nor global? From China, to India, to Spain, to the Cape Verde Islands, resort communities offer relief from the cold climates of “old Europe” or “troubled America”, offering convenient lifestyles at lower prices. Seen as vacation resorts, with mild weather, abundant facilities and amenable exchange rates, many of these projects are now marketed as alternative homes for those who seek retirement to an easier life, or who relish the more open, more ‘tropical’ lifestyle, a home truly away from home.

LAB architecture studio is currently engaged in the design of a new resort community on Sao Vicente, Cape Verde Islands.

1 Enclave Tourism

In search of ever newer locations, untouched and unspoilt (or at least, not yet inundated), tourist resorts have spread across the world – from the first world to the second world to the third world. In a particular iteration, and as currently evidenced at sites across the third world, resorts act as exclusive and segregated enclave compounds for tourists who desire a tropical or exotic vacation, but without the inconvenience of actually having to encounter the local population. These controlled experiences seek to provide safety, certainty and no unpleasant confrontations with the day-to-day life in countries often beset by depressing poverty and unemployment, minimal infrastructure, basic hygiene and dysfunctional governments.

The combination of plentiful sun, beaches (or interesting landscapes and architectures), new foods and music, all provided at a low cost or with an exceptional array of pampered services or both, has led to the widespread development of these enclave resorts, where a visitor is both there and not ‘there’ at the same time. In many of these locations, there are varying degrees to which these cultural and social separations are enforced or are seen as acceptable. They present the promise and paradox of interaction and exclusion. The extent to which the visit can be controlled for maximum enjoyment and minimal disruption is a part of the guarantee of resort tourism.



Figure 1: Hotel Le Palais des Roses, Agadir, Morocco

Within the phenomena of global tourism, it is clear that such operations do indeed inject significant foreign revenues into the local economies, provide for an enhanced job market and offer developments that at least on the surface, are part of an industry that is not 'dirty' or overtly polluting or degrading to the environment. However, the ever-expanding field of tourism and its compounding effects suggests that this calculation be rendered somewhat differently, as the connective consequences and secondary impacts of mass tourism go far beyond the immediate development of resorts, hotels and visitor facilities.

2 Resort Community

Classic tourism implies an intrusion that holds clear the difference between the visitor and the local. Enclave tourism is a more exaggerated example, in which complete difference is maintained and well delineated. This delineation begins to blur not just when the visitors go 'native', - getting into the spirit of things - but even more so when the visitor never leaves. The search for a more 'authentic' experience, of an immersive encounter (often in reaction to the packaged deal) is still defined by the relationship and duration of visitation and then departure, of the tourist and the local, no matter how in-depth or affective. The progression from tourist, to repeat-visitor, to expatriate, and on to resident, defines a rather new condition.

Within the last three decades, a very substantial market has developed for those who not only want to experience foreign adventures, but who see resort living as a new or alternative lifestyle. It is clear that to a very large degree, the existence of these new resort communities is marked by good weather and a temperate or tropical climate above all else. Marketed extensively (if not exclusively) for northern Europeans, resorts in Spain, Portugal, Morocco, Tunisia, Canary Islands, Turkey, South Africa, Dubai, and now the Cape Verde Islands have been or are becoming part of a large development scenario based around second-home ownership.



Figure 2: resort beach in Morocco

The transformation of large sections of the Spanish and Portuguese coastlines, first into resort developments and now into resort communities, is being repeated again and again across the Mediterranean basin, into Africa, the Caribbean, the Persian Gulf, India, South-east Asia and China. These changes are bringing significant development impacts, far beyond the mere addition of the resorts themselves and the supporting tourist facilities. Expanded airports, new transportation links, hospitality services and support are all part of the package necessary to sustain these holiday resorts. Their transformation into communities of long-term residency also changes their nature and status, replacing one type of uncertain integration with another. The migration of *necessity* from the third world to the first, is being countered (at a reduced extent) with a migration of *choice* from the first to the third.

Established on a model of leisure, relaxation and retreat, but based on a presumption of temporary or short-term habitation, the evolution of these resorts from tourist destination to settled community leads to a new set of impacts and consequences. The financial impetus for this new model of expatriate living is the extent to which local governments have made ownership available to overseas investors. Whereas previously, ownership by non-locals or non-nationals was impossible or very convoluted, the relaxation, or indeed, the promotion of the right of ownership to foreign visitors has dramatically changed the equation. Parallel to legal ownership has been the economic lure of substantially reduced housing costs, giving buyers a large and premium residence well below the market rate back home. If tourism in its many variants has generally been seen as a valuable development tool for emerging economies (particularly those without heavy industry options), the promotion of investment opportunities based around resort communities now assumes an important position.



Figure 3: Hotel Sofitel Thalassa

The benefits of communities over resorts, of ownership versus packaged tours, are suggestive, if not yet measurable. What is worth noting and speculating on, is the shift in context and relationship implied by these changes. On the whole, these new communities remain differentiated from local communities not just by their placement (often at picturesque beach or prime waterfront locations), nor by their real estate valuation. They are most often still conceived as segregated (or at least separated) enclaves. They are focused on features and “lifestyle” attributes that are marked by leisure and recreational pursuits, with golf courses, pools, spas, water-sports, clubs and restaurants as central features and attractions. As such, they have an intentional and programmatic ethos that sees them not as an extension of the local housing or urbanism, but rather as a distinct and exclusive (and therefore excluding) settlement.

The programmatic profile is significant because it illustrates the degree to which these new communities are a hybrid form of urbanism, devoid of many of the more comprehensive features and facilities that might define a complete community (no schools, no hospitals, few social services), while over-abundant with leisure and entertainment features. The demographic of ownership also reveals a limited, condensed base of residents, which sets the tenor for the social constitution of the development. As attenuated and selected groupings, these communities tend to reinforce similarity and dissuade difference or diversity.

And yet for all of their delineation and exclusivity, there remains an interesting circumstance by which residents of these resort communities do become part of the local culture, part of the local social network. By repeat visitation, by extended durations, by engaging in local communal activities (shopping, socialising, interaction with trades-people and local services) residents become exactly that – residents and not visitors. Rarely are they full-time, but they nonetheless take on the role of ‘provisional locals’, knowledgeable enough to know the ins and outs of daily life. Their stake is substantial if only because of their ongoing investment in property, furnishings and the maintenance of support facilities. For many, these clearly are *investment opportunities*. But much like homes back home, this financial concern is not disengaged from the life and friendships that develop within any communal gathering. The hybrid, enclave and expatriate nature of these resort communities is not yet fixed and static. There still exists the opportunity for a progressive transformation to a model that sees a more integrated, more essential character emerging.

3 Cesaria Resort

The Cesaria Resort on the island of Sao Vicente, in the Cape Verde Islands, will be forced by natural circumstances to be environmentally sustainable. Volcanic in origin, Sao Vicente is largely without natural vegetation (the consequence of over-grazing), without a permanent water supply (with inconsistent annual rainfall), without intrinsic fuel sources for energy or power generation and dependent on imported food and resources. Located on an isolated and totally undeveloped site on the southern side of the island, the Cesaria Resort is too remote and too substantial to depend on the inadequate sewerage, electricity, and water services that currently supply the local population.

The island is gifted however, by one of the highest rated wind indexes available. There is a steady and substantial wind from the north-east, offering the opportunity for a expansion to the small, existing wind-farm. Current proposals are to construct and operate an expanded series of new wind turbines, not only supplying the resort, but also providing surplus power back to the island's distribution grid. The power generated will also operate a network of desalination plants, as no wells or fresh water reservoirs are planned.

Within the arid and volcanic conditions of the site, landscaping will be based on a utilisation of treated waste water for irrigation, with salt-tolerant and hardy plants being sparsely planted in limited vegetation zones. There is no intent to turn this dry landscape into a plush and green garden. There are a range of ESD initiatives being developed and tested by Atelier Ten and ARUP for implementation within the project.

Of more direct concern will be the analysis and the policy pertaining to the larger issue of how such a development (with over 5,000 planned residences, plus hotels) can be sustainable in its development phases, not just in operation. Sao Vicente specifically, and Cape Verde in general, lacks a sophisticated or well-trained construction industry, and this will likely necessitate an influx of foreign workers or at least intra-island workers. Part of the design of the resort demands a strategic plan for the accommodation of temporary workers, who may eventually become more permanent workers and residents, who become (or are replaced by) service personnel for the completed resort. This debate runs parallel and in conjunction with questions of integration, assimilation and community that are also attached to the very concept of the resort. The management of both sets of introduced outsiders – who may go on to become residents and locals – will underwrite the sustainable credentials and success of the Cesaria Resort project.

Some of these issues are being addressed by means of consultation with the local municipality. The current development plan includes within it the design and construction of worker housing that can be readily converted into family housing at the end of the main construction phase. Rather than being placed directly on the site of the Cesaria Resort and being isolated, the workers housing is some 8 kilometers away, near the main town of Mindelo. Working in concert with the local government, a site for this housing has been chosen that will allow for its eventual integration into the existing fabric of Mindelo, and will from the out-set, provide the workers with access to local shops, laundries, and entertainment. The management of the social interfaces of the new development with the existing community is seen as a fundamental responsibility of the project.



Figure 4: view of Cesaria Resort site, Sao Vicente, from the south.



Figure 5: view to Cesaria Resort site (Pahla Carga) from main track



Figure 6: beach at Praia de Calheta Grande – Cesaria Resort