

## NEW! COASTAL ECOLOGIES : DESTINATION CROATIA

Sasha Zanko

Berlage Institute, Botersloot 25, 3011 HE Rotterdam, [szanko@berlage-institute.nl](mailto:szanko@berlage-institute.nl)

**ABSTRACT:** In the first decade of the 21st century Croatia enters international real estate market principally through offering its coastal territory to the tourism sector which, more than any other industry, proportionally with its success, destroys its basic substance. The paper addresses present conditions and trends in the Croatian coastal development, which is at the moment witnessing accelerated growth of Foreign direct investment (FDI) in tourism sector, response to it by Pilot projects best practices example(s) carried out under the umbrella of the Croatian Archipelago New Lighthouses (CANL) project, compared to reality scenarios of Pilot project's locations, and conclusively delineate set of guiding principles and strategies for the New! Coastal Ecologies as sights of conversation, debate and more effective moving around of locals and visitors to coastal landscapes.

**KEYWORDS:** Foreign direct investment, city (tourism branding), planning culture, bottom –up approach

### 1 ON THE NOTION OF TOURISM

#### 1.1 Why tourism?

Tourism has become one of the major international trade categories. Worldwide, tourism is one of the fastest growing economies; it has realized an average yearly growth of 8 % in the period 1950-2000 [Vereczi, WTO 2004], and despite the crisis, previous ones such as 9/11 and SARS as well as current global economic downturn, tourism shows a reduced but sustained growth [Figure 1]. It produces directly 5% of European GDP and indirectly 10% of European GDP [Mintel 2006].

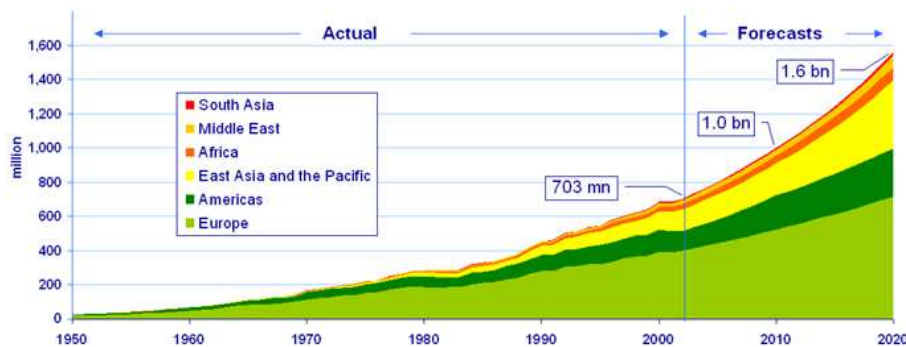


Figure 1 Tourism: Actual growth (1950-2004) and forecast

: <http://www.world-tourism.org/facts/menu.html>

Whilst the uncertain economic situation influences the spending affordable for travel, the desire to travel remains unchanged. To be a tourist is one of the characteristics of the 'modern' experience, travel is the marker of status. A tourist travels for pleasure or necessity to change his daily routine, with emphasized intention to get some new experience. As John Urry argues "tourism results from a basic binary division between the ordinary/everyday and extraordinary" [1]

First massive movement of organized groups of people facilitated by the revolution of easy accessible railway network in nineteenth century, have been further democratized in twentieth century with the car and the airplane. Nowadays, in the age of great mobility and commercial flights the world becomes smaller, and the farthest so far hidden places of undeveloped world, become easily accessible. Despite the desirability of

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tourism to be taken as a main strategy for economic development in so-called developing societies, effects of tourism are highly complex and contradictory, depending on the range of considerations. As much as it creates much needed employment, the economic benefits from tourism are often less than anticipated – much tourist investment in the developing world has in fact been undertaken by large scale companies based in north America or western Europe, and the bulk of such tourist expenditure is retained by the transnational companies involved. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rotterdam Architecture Biennale in Rotterdam Supersudaca group presented its research into the relation of cruisers and the local economy of the West Indies, showing that for each dollar spent by tourists, only 14 cents remained in Caribbean.

Next doubt about the benefits of tourism is related to the question *for whom* is that development? Many of the facilities that result from tourism (airports, golf courses, marinas, luxury hotels) will be of little benefit to the mass of the local population. There is growing awareness of the way tourism is affecting the physical environment and local culture. Concentration of services specifically organised for the provision of pleasure serves the needs of the tourist mass which seek the escape from established routines and behavioural codes that rule their daily lives, is shedding part of local's identity and behaviour. Coastal landscape is more and more privatized, thematized and "sliced" into the entertainment zones barely leaving the space for non commercial activities - causing fragmentation, segregation, and social exclusion.

However, it is to be asked whether the developing countries have much alternative to tourism as a development strategy, as it is the case in Croatia which enters international real estate market principally through offering its coastal territory to the tourism sector? By an additional pressure of the neo-liberal capital and real-estate market, the life costs are set at the level that is unreachable for the locals. Moreover, by the realization of large scale investments in tourism, the sector of small private apartments is vanishing. If the building prohibitions are added to the expulsion of decision-making, inability of additional income, overcharges of real estate and national actions of illegal building demolition, the new colonization of vast coastal zones is ready to start, and the local inhabitants could start emigrating.

### **1.1 Coast+mass tourism**

Throughout the centuries the relationship of mankind with its coastal landscapes was based on the apprehension of the sea which was perceived as a dark unfathomable force hosting the sea monsters, voracious whales and catastrophic floods, inspiring horror rather than attraction[2] Gradually, attitude towards the sea and a coast changed into the popular view of the shore resulting in a concept of beach as known today and rise of the coastal resort as place of recreation and rest.

One of the first places which offered the enjoyment of the seaside was English fishing village of Brighton. In the mid-nineteenth century Brighton developed from medical spa into recreational zone, a built-in escape from patterns and rhythms of everyday life– becoming the pattern for a development of numerous resorts where the beach became constructed as a site for pleasure, social mixing and status reversals. Organization of the coastal recreation in the form of gigantic seaside resort near Prora in Germany under the fascist regime in 1930s served as an example for new models of coastal recreation that were realized with varying levels of success in post-war Europe; an unbroken wall of apartment blocks, designed to host 20.000 holidaymakers extended for some kilometres along the coast. However, emergence, development and finally the "costs" of mass coast tourism at the Mediterranean is the best illustrated through the example is the Spanish coast [3] which started to expand in the late 50s and finally consolidated in 1970s and 1980s, whereas the transformation of the coasts from a desolate coastline dotted here and there with fishing villages nestling in sheltered harbours into a symbol of mass tourism came about without any government planning or interference. Speculators and private initiative had a free rein. The natural resources which have guaranteed the success of the leisure landscape in the past are now undergoing privatisation to intensively used "entertainment zones". Driven by the goals of short term profit, market is urbanising coastal landscape by the means of gated fragments inhabited for the limited periods.

Unlike its western counterparts Spain, Italy or Greece whereas expansion of mass tourism started to expand in 1950s and gradually colonized and exploited kilometre after kilometre of the coastline, developing densely built urban strips, for more than 40 years, during the socialism, Croatia was avoiding dramatic emergence and development of mass coastal tourism. However, the question is does Croatia still have a chance to avoid unwanted negative experiences or reality is already taking its course? Even though transformation of the

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territories colonized by tourism activities are products of specific local conditions, and it is not possible to understand them with a single concept, one can see similar phenomena in the coastal transformation processes. To understand a specific situation, it is necessary to understand the underlying processes that define a space.



**Image 001** Airport Ho – Yeol, 2005

## 2 CROATIAN TOURISM: BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1 Socialist Legacy

The comparison of Croatia with western European coastal countries could result with a conclusion that Croatia has a chance to steer its coastal development avoiding some of the of the mistakes that are shown as inevitable consequence of progress that comes with application of market orientated principles, what Stefano Boeri recognizes as a “fertile delay”. [4] Similar views are expressed in the concept of “double erasure” by Boris Groys [5] who explains communist experience as the Utopian: *now we have a knowledge of how to get into and then come out from Utopia that should actually be understood as completing the communist experience. We have to ask how we can preserve a memory and re-use the knowledge accumulated at that time, related primarily to positive possibility to “create public and aesthetic spaces out of objects circulating in our civilisation and media.”*

Coinciding with the appearance of first sea side resorts in England, Austro-Hungarian monarchy builds first luxuries hotels in northern Adriatic for high class travellers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that were discovering the peaceful, unknown region of Croatia. Most famous and often mentioned was the occasion in which Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson went skinny dipping off the coast of Rab Island in 1936. However, the actual extensive development appeared in the turn from the 1960s to 1970s, a period that was marked by the construction of large structuralist hotel complexes.

Centrally planned economy regulated the coastal landscape designating the coastal strips into industrial and recreational zones, forming large tourist and architectural ensembles in the vicinity of big cities. The concepts of these buildings principally remain on the level of fragmentation and recomposition of large construction masses, but the stringing together of residential micro cells created complexes whose configuration follows the topography, adapting to the ground and turning it into unique terrace-like-mega forms. Brutalist architectural expression and the scale of these hotel buildings created an authentic iconography of the collectivistic tourism arcadia intended for the working class and lower middle class of Western Europe. In the most fruitful era of Yugoslavian coastal tourism, in 70s and 80s hotel complexes would accommodate numerous mostly German tourists that flock to the beaches for their single holidays of the year. Workers and their families from all Yugoslavian republics had an opportunity to have a holiday by the sea using state controlled and financed recreation resorts. At the same time, local population from coastal cities and villages would profit hosting the guests on a “room and board” scheme.

Such a development of tourism infrastructure and construction resulted in controlled density and location at the coast, supervising and preventing metastasis-alike expansion ,almost accidentally preserving the coastal territory as a valuable natural resource for the decades to come when the resources once known as common would become unreachable and serve to singular private-profit.



**Image 002**  
Village of Mimice in 1960s



**Image 003**  
Village of Mimice in 1990s

## 2.2 Unrevealed Reality

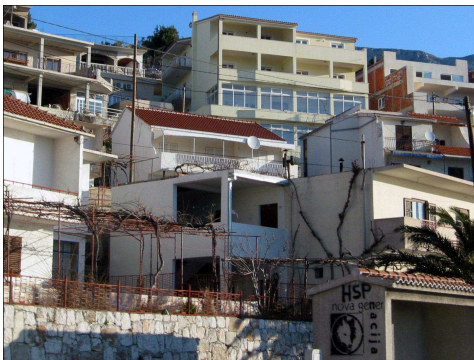
The relatively non-exciting exploitation of the Croatian coast during the socialist era resulted in preservation the landscape: for the time being around 80% of the coast remains non-built. However, recent figures reveal new trends in the occupation of the coastal territory: until 1960s about 120 to 150 km of 6000km long coast was urbanised; as a consequence of more intensive building year 2000 marks 837 km of occupied territory and a forecasts , according to existing development plans envisage further expansion of cities and villages to additional 716km, in total leaving 30% of the un-built territory [6].

“Virginal” costal landscape becomes a main “trade value” when the country enters turbulent decade of the 90s. Government as well as the new forces entering the Croatian economic and social realm when country entered a transition from the socialist, one-party, state-controlled market system, into a capitalist, parliamentary democracy, free-market system, recognize the economic potentials of the coastal strip. Although the Adriatic and the coastal policy moves into the centre of the Croatian government’s policies, as “ *the starting point in the consideration of development, the economy, culture, tourism and other areas*” , as stated in “The Program of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the 2003-2007 Mandate”, there is an absolute lack of long-term development strategies that would gear the counter in the time of the unstable conditions of new market economy. Coastal space which came under the marked strain of building, shows the clearest manifestation of all the problems of space management. There are numerous of questions to be answered without reliance on previous experiences to which the country can look: How to protect the coast while at the same time direct, curb, and occasionally redefine it so as not to lose the financial benefits accompanying large projects which are being spurred by foreign capital? How to prevent the islands from becoming tourist theme parks and retain the complex diversity of their functioning and way of life? How to accept offered investment plans in a way that the development coming together with investment brings to an

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end dull season which lasts for 10 months, increases quality of an urban life in coastal communities without devastating cultural landscape values and tradition and at the same time evenly distributes incomes from tourism?

In addressing these issues there is a significant lack of sound concepts for spatial planning and management. The key aspects of such unstable conditions are manifested in the absence of a long-term role by the state and by towns within a wider geo-political environment; the absence of long-term development strategies for individual sectors of the economy with an essential influence on urban changes (industry, tourism, transport, agriculture, etc.); the poorly defined public sector role in the policy of urban development (public standards and public services); the unreliability of the legal system and political responsibility; lack of knowledge with regard to the way the instruments of planning function in conditions of market economy, combined with weak political will, in inferior training in professional institutions in acting in conditions of instability, and uncertainty and rapidly changing situations (inability to comprehend a situation, a lack of preparedness to adjust, and the uncritical adoption of models).



**Image 004**

Expansion of family houses in the 90s



**Image 005**

New resorts – Skipper residence in Istria

The first extremely negative spatial phenomena emerging in 90s was a process of wild building along the coast: local population is rapidly enlarging existing and building new objects, which accommodate “apartments” for low-income tourists. In order to prevent the further spread government launches the act of building, which imposes regulations for the building in a zone of 1000m from coast. Extremely strict implementation of the regulation indeed stopped the process of wild building and preserves the coast from further degradation caused by building. However, at the same time whilst governmental actions are targeted more to the domain of preservation than the planning of actual development of the coastal space, new forces are shaping the coastal space which is being transformed according to the requests of new travellers, shoppers and investors; the question of public and local interest has been erased from all operations in which private capital is involved. Regardless of the volume of investment, private capital is, paradoxically, being serviced by public institutions – as if public services exist only to meet the demands of private interest. Endless and complex legal procedures and documents would finally end up in a monodimensional understanding of urbanism with a tourism-only notion of program, resulting in a creation of hotels, resorts and other exclusively tourist facilities.

In the first phase the foreign capital would first explore the potentials of the social tourism mega - structures and its transformation into new tourism facilities as a profitable real-estate investments by the means of adaptation to european standards and improvement of organization service. However, the transactions and transformation processes are not presented to the public and there are often exposed by media which seek to reveal the setting of the “game”: Who buys? Who plans? What kind of building is going to happen? Are the new typologies foreseen by the investor’s plans offering something else than the second housing for foreigners? Where are the revenues from new build tourism infrastructure going?

### **2.3 The Development of a Tourist Image for Croatia**

How did the tourist get the idea to go to Croatia? Croatian National Tourist Board sells the image of virgin landscapes, summarized by the slogan “Croatia – the Mediterranean as it once was”. These branding

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and marketing strategies present an Image of Croatia's as a traditional, summer-only so called "sun and sea" destination for the mass market. At the same time, global capital is entering the country and Croatian tourism industry market is developing rapidly: according to WTO<sup>1</sup> market share of the Croatian tourism industry in the region of Southern/ Mediterranean Europe has doubled in a first five years of 21 century. The destination countries along the Mediterranean littoral have been quick to capitalise on the changing trends in the tourist behaviours. Targeting a new customer, they are expanding the promotion of their historical and natural assets, often located far from traditional seaside tourist territories; developing new promotional brochures for inland itineraries, rural retreats, winter tourism, and nature parks and are building heritage parks and golf courses. By offering more varied destinations and activities, national tourist organisations all hope to attract more 'quality tourists'.



**Image 006**

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**Image 007**

New all-inclusive typology in Croatia: Falkensteiner resort at the island of Krk

In the case of Croatia, development of the tourist image still does not address this "mythical visitor", whom planners think of as more affluent and cultured person. While Croatian tourism lobby is still busy with a definition of a clear profile for the tourism industry, international tourist agencies are carrying out international sale and marketing of Croatian coast via internet, offering more customized, diversified, and flexible forms that reflect new consumer profiles and behaviors. International tour operators are creating a new image for a destination that would become attractive for foreign urban population, exercising strong and conflicting pressures on local socio-economic development viewed as the key to liberating destination communities from enervating dependence on hordes of low-spending package tourists. Mass tourism is coming to Croatian coast in a new form, developing new typologies for a global traveller - not any more attracted by the sun, sea, good fish and wine – he is pursuing a different kind of lifestyle, wishing to be a discrete owner of the up market residence, and meet his friends and business partners in clubs situated within proximity of gulf clubs, marinas, and leisure parks – secured and entertained in monofunctional and gated community, inhabited for the limited periods.

### 3 TESTING REALITY

#### 3.1 Mediterranean as it could be

Responding to the conditions in which architecture and urban practise in Croatia demonstrate its incapacity to act under the new conditions dictated by the neo-liberalism Berlage Institute launches the project Croatian Archipelago New Lighthouses(CANL)<sup>2</sup>. The project had an objective to introduce a strategy the coastal development capable to articulate concepts of new urban spaces in the times of social transition, anticipating the potentials of participating processes in urban management. Seven paradigmatic examples located from Northern to Southern Adriatic presented different strategies of interventions imagining Croatia as *Mediterranean as it could be*.

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<sup>1</sup> World Trade Organization, Tourism Market Trends, 2006 Edition - [www.unwto.org](http://www.unwto.org)

<sup>2</sup> Croatian Archipelago New lighthouses project is collaborative project of Berlage Institute and Croatian Architects Association, funded by the Matra Program for the Social Transformation of the Countries of Central and Eastern European of the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs, [www.croatianarchipelago.com](http://www.croatianarchipelago.com), PhD thesis basis some of its conclusions in the experiences from a project, since Sasha Zanko (author) was involved in a project design and management



**Image 008**  
Abandoned factory in Dugi rat



**Image 009**  
Site in Dugi rat after demolition of the factory

Probably the most obvious choice, considering the transitional context of Croatia is the example of small village Dugi rat in the middle Adriatic, where the local community for decades is trying to find a solution for the reconstruction of abandoned heavily polluted industrial complex situated in the most attractive natural area. How architecture and urban design can participate in transitional processes and how much they can affect those processes – was the focus of the research undertaken under the umbrella of CANL project at the location of Dugi rat. Dugi rat looks like the ideal laboratory for testing different scenarios and valuating them in relation to economic, ecological and social contexts. In fact, the potential of architecture lies in the possibility to show a vision of development that can motivate imaginations of the political or economic kind.

Pilot project for the abandoned factory in Dugi rat illustrates two substantial weaknesses of the Croatian coastal development policy that found itself under the first blow of the neoliberal economy and real estate market. It epitomizes all the environmental stigmas of the Croatian industrial age and witness the main weaknesses of the insufficiency of the system to react with appropriate approach to territorial and spatial regulation in the planning of space which is rapidly being privatized, frequently changing its ownership structure, and involving more and more actors along with their particular interest.



**Image 010**

URBOTANSCAPE© project at the 2<sup>nd</sup> IABR as part of Croatian Archipelago New Lighthouses



**Image 011**

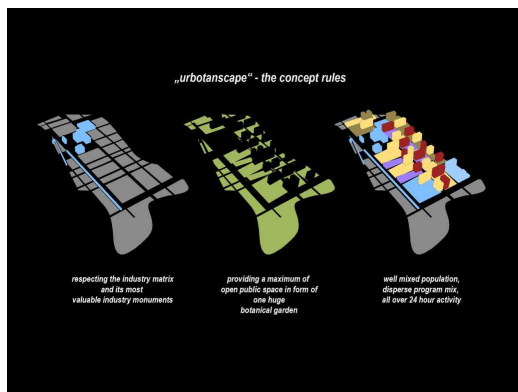
URBOTANSCAPE© integrates the botanical landscape and the urban structure

In the inception period of the CANL project development, in year 2004, specific site of Dugi rat was burdened with all the complexities of the space management in transitional Croatia. Factory that was for more than 50 years main provider of employment for the whole region proclaimed a bankruptcy in 1995 leaving behind unclear and unsolved ownership situation. Since that moment local authorities were captured in a loop of unsuccessful attempts to realize area's potentials for further development and ensure the

desperate need for the creation of employment. Alongside with the appearance of numerous foreign investments in the newly liberated Croatian market, the peninsula of Dugi rat records a series of potential buyers, demonstrating great speculative value of the site. Finally, in 2006, the buyer prepared to undertake the risks of the investment the development of property ambiguous in the terms of ownership appeared and the factory was sold to international investment fund Landmark property Management.

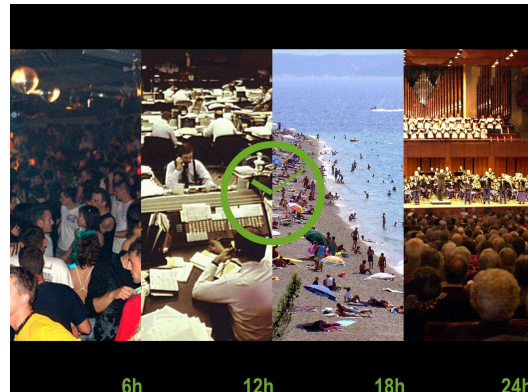
Spatial setting of Dugi rat evokes the rapid change of physical condition of the Croatian coast: in the densely urbanised narrow coastal strip of middle Adriatic pine trees crowns are exchanging with concrete blocks. Powerful image of the landscape is formed in a relation between the two strong borders; on one side is the mountain of Kozjak which streams with a steep incline towards the seashore bordered by the sand beaches of the extreme natural beauty. Though territory is occupied by non ending linear growth of settlements whereas areas between the old villages and the coastline are encountering the process of rapid building and the space between the sea and the road is formed as the area of high density which ignores public services and infrastructure, tourism still recognize the value of landscape as an attraction.

Within the objectives of CANL project, Architectural office Ante Kuzmanic from Split develops a strategy named URBOTANSCAPE© which anticipates development of a tourist-urban leisure field incorporated in the contrast of nature and urbanization along the „Split-Riviera“. Concept “mellows” or defines more precisely the urban planning rules in some parts, stressing and preserving the main concept rules: Respecting the industry matrix and its most valuable industry monuments; Providing a maximum of open public space in form of one huge botanical garden; Achieving well mixed population, disperse program mix, all over 24 hour activity. Proposed model anticipate the uncertainties of the future programmes, whereas the network of streets and division of fields generate the potentials for the variations of urban tissue within open model matrix. The density is determined by the relation between the horizontal botanical element and the dense urban structure revealing the inherited industrial character. The program of the local quarter has to be able to function from within has been complemented with elements of great gravitational power (business, entertainment, culture etc.) of the regional level, avoiding the creation of an island of social exclusion caused by fragmented land speculation with little infrastructure investment beyond the immediate project area.



**Image 012**

Concept rules of Dugi rat's plan



**Image 013**

Project generates a 24hours/365 days vivid urban – botanic - landscape

Referring to the incapacity of the local municipality to stand up to the pressure of the development it has been exposed, URBOTANSCAPE© argues that a model that will ensure that the revenues from the new economic activities would stay in a local community and not to be displaced to multinational funds, could be achieved with a precondition of existence of the political will of the state to actively involves in a management of the site. On a first glance complicated ownership structure could be taken as an advantage since the owner of the every lot of the peninsula space is the state in some form (local government, county, state-owned company for real estate, companies in majority state ownership, etc.) Prior to entering the real estate trade procedure government and municipality should agree on a concept which develops the site. Next



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step would be the preparation of the land (infrastructure, improvement, cleaning) to determine the real estate price. The joint investment into infrastructure should be prepared and added to the price. Only after all those steps the borders of intervention of the new location according to the new plan could be determined and sale to the interested parties could start.

Instead of the route delineated by this action plan presented by URBOTANSCAPE© reality scenario undertook opposite direction in which state is instead of governing selling its territory. For the moment it is known that Landmark Property Management will build the high quality tourism resort – “Korenat Point Resort” – which includes Five star hotel and spa, 50 berth international marina, the Peninsula Club – members only Retail, leisure and entertainment facilities, offering to its guests “second homes under the warm climate”. Is this a kind of autonomous tourism development that will create ghettoization and isolation, as proved in developed tourist countries that practise the model for longer period, instead of openness and dynamism, as argued by CANL and URBOTANSCAPE will be revealed in a very near future. Slow down of the global market has big influence on the flow of foreign investment in Croatia, which are significantly reduced, causing the structural changes within the Landmark Property group too and postponing the further development of the resort. For the moment only factory is demolished, but for the rest local population remains in a resignation and disbelief that positive change is ever going to happen. Apart from commercial slogans, detailed plans are not visible, and in legal spatial planning documents that are in the procedures, the issue of public programmes and interests of the local population is not high at the agenda. Municipality still see its chance to advocate the public interest only through its role of the (hypothetic) owner of the maritime property which is still in the property of state that, so far is not willing to transfer that right to the Municipality. Local population of Dugi rat live in a territory that appears to be more and more far away from them, a territory on which the “others”, the “outers”, or an “unknown transcendental force” is in control.

#### **4 ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS / NEW! COASTAL ECOLOGIES**

Croatian Archipelago New Lighthouses put forward a set of strategic directions, but real implementation is depended on a set of factors and powers that influence the process of decision-making. The project was completed with the conclusion that rudimentary development of civic society and not transformed institutions characterized Croatian transitional society today. Politics and market are two dominant forces that decide upon the future of the territory in an interchange, which is not based, on developed long-term strategies but more as an immediate response to the market requests.

However, overlapping of the conclusions generated by the implementation of hypothetical models for chosen sites, additionally tested through real developments, breeds a new kind of knowledge which illustrates some main characteristics of the social, cultural and spatial practices related to (Croatian) coastal development. This knowledge is a starting point for a further exploration on a range on themes and observations that are waiting to be developed. In one way or another, all coastal destination communities are affected by some general features of tourism; the transient nature of tourism and the unequal relations between tourists and locals is causing economical and political fragmentation as well as social alienation. How then do individuals and communities dependent on the presence of tourists cope with the commoditisation of their culture and the constant attention of outsiders? This question is positioned in a focus of a research that brings in a parameters and logic that will determine intelligent use of our main resource, the coast – resulting in a development of strategies for the New! Coastal Ecologies as sights of conversation, debate and more effective moving around of locals and visitors to coastal landscapes. This strategy proposes an opposite approach with a capacity to negotiate and develop inclusive conditions where tourists and inhabitants can co-exist. In this inclusive condition, the tourist no longer consumes the place as a pure leisure condition, but becomes part of the place for the time of its stay – a temporary local.

New! Coastal Ecologies refer to alternative typologies and new social reality which seeks for more productive relationship between locals and visitors, developing a new kind of landscapes that would spatially and conceptually overlap with the vision of new urban life in the Mediterranean. Instead of sightless run after the market rules that results in a creation of autonomous resorts only for tourists, it introduces new typologies for daily life of both citizens and tourists. New programs in the cities would form additional tourism offer, whereas city (life) represent a tourist attraction.

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