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## *HOTEL DESIGN: A PATH FOR QUALITATIVE TOURISM*

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**ABSTRACT**

Greece, like many other countries in the past, was only interested in promoting tourism but lacked the equivalent interest in its quality. However, the era of “sea and sun” is now behind us. New trends and prospects of development are now focusing on the quality and alternative tourism rather than mass tourism. This development emerged in the international landscape, after the sociopolitical, environmental and economic changes that have occurred and continue to occur in recent years.

The transition from mass tourism to quality tourism is proven and necessary if tourism is to contribute to the development of Greece and the exit from the economic crisis. At this stage, however, facing the competition from neighboring countries, in terms of the product offered and target group, differentiation is a one-way road. Thus the Ministry of Tourism and the agencies involved in the tourist product are now in the process of establishing a framework which aims at

the transition from mass tourism to quality tourism. This will include, among other things, modern infrastructure and the modernization of the old one, i.e. the partial or total withdrawal of obsolete units, renewal and the reuse of important buildings or complexes.

It is a fact that quality upgrade cannot be conceptualized separately from spatial upgrade. How feasible is, however, the creation of large tourist facilities nowadays? Should priority be given to the “all inclusive” tourist model and the “ghettoization” of tourist accommodation? International studies predict that future visitors should be able to customize every aspect of their residence experience and the services offered. Is it possible to do so within the context of the large tourist units operation and what is going to happen if all small and medium-sized enterprises continue to operate causing thus aesthetic pollution to the environment?

Based on the principles of sustainability, diversity, development of small and medium-sized businesses and customized services required by the visitor of the future, modernization and refurbishment of the existing tourist infrastructure will promote alternative tourism models. This will be integrated into the residential complexes of each area, giving a personal style to any small unit, so that the visitor finds what he/she wants, tailored to his/her specific needs and requirements.

This tourist model, which is based on customization of services offered, leverages the existing infrastructure because it relies on personal relationships, promotes various types of tourism and enables the extension of the tourist season. The case studies that will be analysed are excerpts of student projects and demonstrate clearly how an existing tourist facility (specifically a city hotel), based on an interesting and strong key idea, can be transformed into a design or boutique hotel with all these quality characteristics listed above. The apparent benefit of this project is the utilization of the existing shell and the enhancement of the place and the services offered.

**Keywords:** Architectural design, tourist facilities, reconstruction, qualitative improvement, building preservation

## INTRODUCTION

It is a general assumption that tourism plays a vital role in Greek economy and is one of the major sources of wealth, making a positive contribution to solving the Balance of External Payments problem. Thus, tourism development in Greece has been established so far by the development laws which first placed emphasis on creating accommodation for tourists only. The uncontrolled tourism development, however, has created major problems. It is for this reason that the latest

development laws aim at the upgrade of tourism offer and the maintenance of the environment for the purpose of enhancing the quality of services offered and improving hotel infrastructure.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council<sup>21</sup>, Greek accommodation for the year 2006 consisted of 9,000 hotels with 600,000 beds and approximately the same number of rented rooms. Only 15 % of those were 4 and 5 stars hotels, while the largest part - about 43 % - were independent accommodation, i.e. rooms for rent of varying quality, apartments and private homes. Also, a large number of luxury hotels required upgrade and modernization. About 50% of total accommodation in the country fell under the low and medium cost options, which produce low efficiency and often unreliable<sup>22</sup> service, mainly due to the seasonality in the tourism industry which often employs seasonal staff.

It is noteworthy that the 4 & 5 stars hotels represent only 15.9% of total Greek hotel units and at the same time 39.2% of total accommodation in the Greek territory (because of their larger average size in relation to the small and medium-sized units). To conclude, we observe that 84.1% of the Greek hotels are up to 3 stars units, while over 60% of the rooms for rent belong to small and medium-sized units (SME).

The Greek hotel market is primarily based on SME units. These are often family businesses employing untrained staff in order to compete with the large units of the competing countries, which have the advantage of economies of scale and professional organization, operation, networking and promotion.

Also under the new Development Law 3908/2011<sup>23</sup>, the 1 and 2 stars hotel units may not receive any subsidy, while the 3 stars units can but in rare occasions. It is therefore understood that a way should be found to make the best possible use of the existing potential of the SME units.

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<sup>21</sup> World Travel and Tourism Council, *The Impact of Tourism on Jobs and the Economy*, London, 2006. Report available at <http://www.wttc.org> (access 01/09/2011).

<sup>22</sup> Finding good and qualified staff is difficult, due to the prevailing low estimate of the career prospects in tourism and the notoriety that accompanies many hotel businesses (i.e. offering low wages, irregular working hours and difficult working conditions).

<sup>23</sup> "Strengthening of Private Investment for Economic Development, Entrepreneurship and Regional Cohesion", GG No. 8/01-02-2011.

A solution could be the transformation of many of these units into units of high aesthetics, quality infrastructure and high quality service, so as to turn a potential disadvantage to a strategic advantage<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the Greek hotel market faces the challenge of the extension of tourist season, since the hotel occupancy rate for the year 2006, throughout the Greek territory, is close to or exceeds 50% only for the months of June, July, August and September, while for the rest of the months the occupancy rate fluctuates from 25% to 44%. Survey results (Andriotis 2002b) show that the contribution of accommodation enterprises to the economic development of a place is not uniform.

More specifically, large units employ more outlandish executive staff in relation to the SME ones. Furthermore, larger units tend to buy fewer products from the local markets compared to SMEs, while small businesses employ more people from the familiar environment. Therefore, the smaller the company, the greater is contribution to the local development.

However, the contribution of small scale investments to maintaining control of tourism development of an area is also considerable, having less negative impact on society, leading thus to better integration into the existing socio-political and economic environment and the sustainable development of the area. So it would be appropriate if the development and design agencies were to identify their preferences for the small or large scale investments, depending on the types of tourists they want to attract.

### **3 PERSPECTIVES OF DEVELOPMENT**

According to a survey (Hotels 2020: Beyond Segmentation, Fast Future Research), which predicts tourism development by 2020, visitors should be able to customize every aspect of their residence experience. The traditional way of customer classification will be set aside and be replaced by a series of customized services within the context of creating an integrated customer service model/platform. This means that future guests will be able to adapt every aspect of their travel experience to their requirements, including technology, hotel services, accommodation, travel, expenses and communication. It is also worth noting that the aim should not be a reduction of costs and prices for competition purposes, but a rise in value and quality of the product offered and the hotel services for the consumers.

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<sup>24</sup> See Koutoulas, D., (2006), *The Market Influence of Tour Operators on the Hospitality Industry: The Case of Greek Resort Hotels*. In: Papatheodorou, A. (ed.). *Corporate Rivalry and Market Power: Competition Issues in the Tourism Industry*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers. 94-123

Characteristically, there are some factors advocating for the tourist facilities upgrade: A) The Earth's climate has changed and shall continue to change. Tourism is not only influenced by the environment, but it also significantly affects it. It is very likely that climate change can dramatically affect the future customer behavior in terms of traveling and travel choices in general. Nowadays, the citizens-consumers around the world are increasingly informed of the environmental issues and exhibit increasing environmental awareness. Many tourists are now taking into consideration the «ecological footprint»<sup>25</sup> caused by their journey to the destination• the time is not far-off when this footprint will determine the choice of destination, means of transport and accommodation. It is no coincidence that a constantly increasing number of hotel businesses promote environmentally friendly policies and express their environmentally friendly mindset. In this context, the adoption of a sustainable development model in all issues they face is a one-way road for the viability of these companies.

B) Socio-economic changes have been occurring rapidly in recent years, contributing to the differentiation of the consumerist behavior of tourists worldwide<sup>26</sup> ; consequently, the limited vacation time is replaced by a luxurious holiday, meaning customized, authentic holiday with respect to the local culture and environment.

The traveler is now embracing luxury in the sense of self-fulfillment, experience and “good living”. For these consumers, experience gain and the “exclusive” and customized services are more important than anything else. Moreover, the role of technological innovations in the hotel sector (e.g. “smart” systems for effective management of the department of Food, enhanced systems of personal data security, “smart” lighting systems, alarm clocks which instead of ringing, they gradually dissipate light into the room, etc.) will become increasingly more important for the traveler of tomorrow.

A large part of the potential tourists around the world seem indifferent to the mass tourism model and prefer to differentiate themselves, choosing to escape from the daily routine and enjoy authentic experiences in leisurely pace, away from the tourist hordes. «Slow travel»<sup>27</sup> holiday and

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.footprintstandards.org> (access 23/07/2011)

<sup>26</sup> SETE, 2010, Greek Tourism 2020: Proposal for a new development model, Tourism as Protagonist in the economic and social development of Greece, Athens, pp. 36-37.

<sup>27</sup> This refers to holidays in serene locations with loose schedule, i.e. going for walks, enjoying local cuisine, exploring urban cities, etc.

the vertical rise of ecotourism are two illustrative examples. These two types of vacation facilitate the development of small units that enable travelers to savor everyday life and/or nature in the places they visit. This type of vacation can be provided by hotels characterized by a small number of rooms, a distinctive architecture and decoration, a provision of personal services and high quality food, as well as the benefits of new technologies.

#### **4 ALTERNATIVE TOURISM OR QUALITY TOURISM**

The alternative or quality tourism and mass tourism can be viewed as “polar opposites”, with the alternative appearing as good and the mass as bad (Lane 1989, 1991, Pearce 1992). As several researchers have noted (Andriot 2003a, Andriotis 2000, EC 1993, Romeril 1985b, Vanhove 1997), the majority of the negative effects of tourism development result from mass tourism, because this type of tourism attracts a large number of people and requires large scale investments and less participation of the local community in the developmental process (Andriotis 2002a, Doggart & Doggart 1996, Faulkner 1998). Mass tourism creates more negative impact on tourist destinations, as it is characterized by a concentration of infrastructure and tourists in space and time and appears less sensitive towards domestic wealth-producing resources, due to the intensive tourism development and the behavior of tourists attracted by cheaper options (Coccosis 1996, Coccosis & Parpairis 1996, Pearce 1989). On the other hand, the alternative tourist is more energetic and engaged in more environmentally friendly activities.

It is a fact that quality upgrade cannot be conceptualized separately from spatial upgrade. This means: a high-level architectural approach underlying both external appearance and interior fitting-out and decoration; a key concept of space design applying to all space as well as to the materials, the equipment and its individual functions; the selection of color and furniture pointing to the creation of a space with a holistic coherence; and, finally, the design focusing particularly on the detail and always taking into consideration the particular hotel location.

#### **5 CASE STUDIES**

##### **TOWARDS A HOLISTIC APPROACH**

##### **VARIATIOS ON THE SAME CENTRAL IDEA.**

The following examples confirm the previous data by applying the concept of central idea to an existing city hotel, altering thus the aesthetic and functional treatment of the areas with a holistic approach but also with respect to sustainability and its effect on the environmental balance. These are student studies of the 6<sup>th</sup> semester of the department of Interior Architecture, Decoration and Design, TEI of Athens, with supervising instructors Ms. Frangou Dionysia and Mr. Dimitris Marnellos.

The hotel to which the recommendations of redesign are applied, is the Hotel "Amalia". The hotel is located in Vass. Amalia Avenue no 10, near Syntagma Square and opposite the National Gardens. It was constructed in 1957-1959, architect N. Valsamakis<sup>28</sup>. It is one of the first modern hotels of the downtown postwar Athens, with discreet presence and remarkable durability, despite the subsequent changes mainly of its espace commun s). It began operating in 1960 and has been awarded the Green Key ecological distinction of the Greek Society for the Protection of Nature<sup>29</sup>.

It consists of two basements, a ground floor, six floors and a flat roof, with a capacity of 93 rooms. In the two basements there are the ancillary areas of the hotel, the ground floor and the first floor are the section of the espace commun and the two-storey entrance. The separation of the functions is also expressed in the tripartite arrangement of the facades in base-body-crown. The ground and first floor are the base with the prominent colonnade and the horizontal component of the balcony. The five floors of the rooms which form the body have front side on two levels: the level of wall with the glazing and the protruding surface with the balconies arranged into a square grid. On the side facing the Xenophon street, the facade is formed on one level with glazing and dark marble, partially revealing the skeleton of the building. The recessed roof is the crown. The

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<sup>28</sup> N. Valsamakis (1924 -) manages to combine his commercial success with the qualitative virtues of architecture. He is influenced by the international modernism integrating at the same time elements from the local Greek architecture. He is ranked in the postwar period, with clear influences from Mies Van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Richard Meier and Luis Barragan.

For the first apartment blocks he designs, he follows the principles of postwar architecture that was developed in Europe and America. These buildings presented *"the manufacturing-typological renewal and morphologically the diversity, asymmetry, the use of materials of different texture· in other words, they showed a concerted effort to overcome the previous indifference to the building type of the apartment block"*.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.amaliahotelathens.gr/about-the-hotel-gr>

front sides of the hotel are coated with white Pentelic marble<sup>30</sup> and have been declared as a listed building.

It is a hotel in which the architect integrates all those characteristics which made his work stand out. The style of this hotel is characterized as radical for its time. With austere and balanced lines, the use of natural Greek materials and uniform front sides, the hotel draws meanings and values from the Greek tradition and the traditional architecture, combining the old with the new in a unique way. The building with austere and clean forms reveals the essence and qualities of space, without “babbling” with sophisticated components for sensational purposes.

Designed onto a grid in terms of the floor plan and the front sides, the hotel conforms to this orthonormality and in functional solution. The main entrance is located on Vass. Amalia Avenue with clear signage on the outside with a secondary entrance on Xenophon street. The ground floor consists of two levels that follow the slope of the street with the reception at the outer corner of the building. The central stairway lifts in the center of the floor plan leads to the ancillary areas of the basement and the mezzanine floor, where the restaurant used to operate, with expansion to the balconies and view to the National Gardens. The architect’s holistic approach to the design of both the shell and the interior is of great importance.

During the period 2005-2007, the reconstruction of the building took place and essentially only the supporting structure was kept as it was· the front sides were restored as they were, while special lighting was added to highlight them. In terms of the floor plans and spatial organization, it was completely redesigned and nothing refers to the initial organization and planning of the espace coummun. So with this intervention, the holistic approach of the building itself with the interior space was essentially split. The core of the central stairway lifts remained in the center of the floor plan of the ground floor integrated into a circular structure which “contains” it. The interior floor level became one unified space, on the ground floor and the mezzanine, where the breakfast area also operates. Two conference rooms were added with the possibility of unification, the reception was moved to the back-blind side of the floor plan, while the bar to the corner-facade of the ground floor.

The reconstruction obeys the logic of globalized continental style, with absence of localization and local characteristics and elements, the design, the architect’s intent for the use of the grid and orthonormality and ultimately the history of the building.

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<sup>30</sup> [http://www.culture2000.tee.gr/ATHENS/GREEK/BUILDINGS/BUILD\\_TEXTS/B114\\_t.html](http://www.culture2000.tee.gr/ATHENS/GREEK/BUILDINGS/BUILD_TEXTS/B114_t.html)



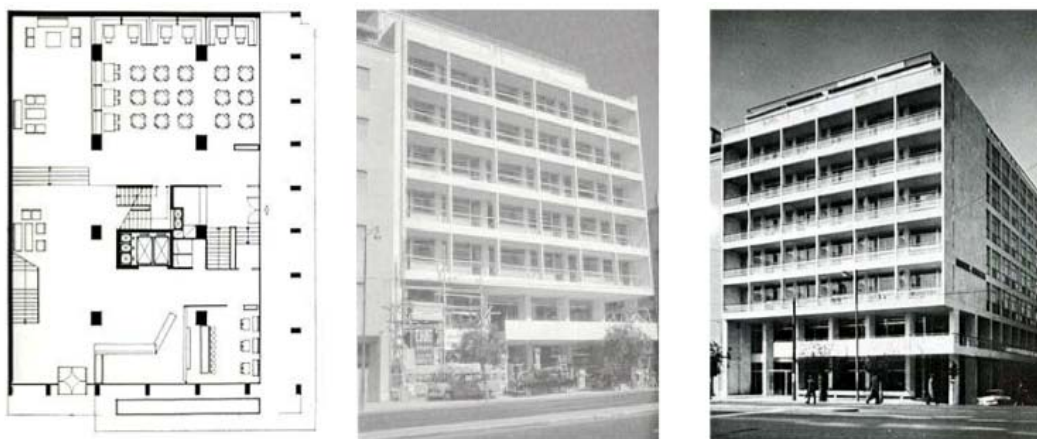


Image 1,2,3: Ground floor plan, Amalia Hotel in 1957 at the time of its completion, *source:* [http://www.culture2000.tee.gr/ATHENS/GREEK/BUILDINGS/BUILD\\_TEXTS/B114\\_t.html](http://www.culture2000.tee.gr/ATHENS/GREEK/BUILDINGS/BUILD_TEXTS/B114_t.html)

In the process of redesigning the interior of the afore-mentioned hotel, the new recommendations are based on the respect for the shell - symbol of modernity -, the spirit of space and place and the intention of the architect (N. Valsamakis), to design based on the grid in terms of the floor plan and the front sides, and orthonormality in terms of the functional resolution, without lacking inspiration and originality. Other factors taken into account are the continuity and consistency of the exterior and the interior, the identity of the building in relation to the time it was built and the architectural viewpoint it professes, the depiction of the architectural viewpoint of the architect who designed it and the continuity-transfer in the design of interior space, using the same or similar morphological tools.

The central idea behind the design of the space should also promote the idea of quality tourism as expressed through the interior design, to propose new ideas and concepts about design and provide solutions to specific problems identified through the preceding local investigation.

The studies presented were chosen for their originality, uniqueness and diversity. The same methodology can be followed in smaller or bigger tourist facilities or tourist accommodation building on existing structures and shells.

### **5.1. Redefining the orthonormal geometry:**

With the given geometry of the building being the central idea and guide, the interior of the building was redesigned, in order to obey the prominent features of the grid. So through this quest for orthonormality, the functional public spaces were created, which in combination with



Figure 4: Reception



Figure 5: Lobby



Figure 6: Bar



Figure 7: Restaurant



Figure 8: Roof



Figure 9: Room

aesthetics attached to them are compatible with the specific front side of the building (Team: A. Politarhou, S. Rezou, M. Kokinopoulou).

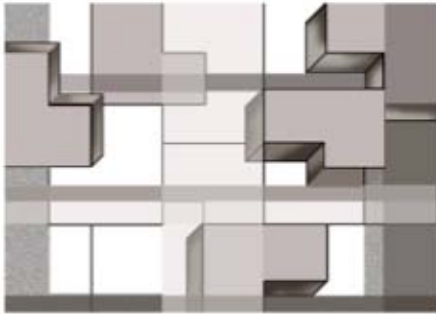


Figure 10: The idea

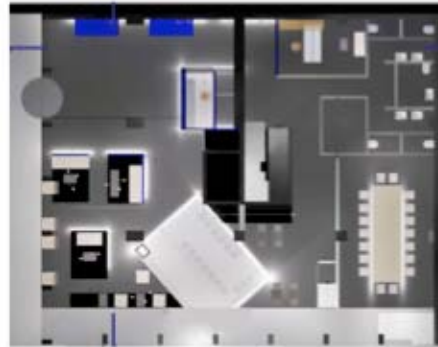


Figure 11: Ground floor



Figure 12: Reception



Figure 13: Lobby



Figure 14: Bar

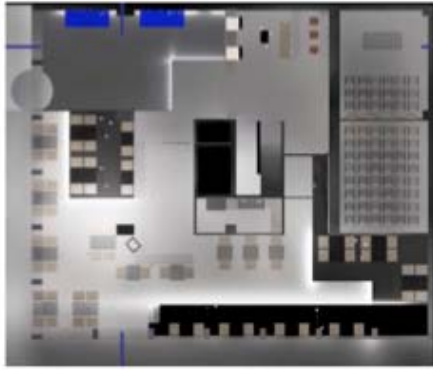


Figure 15: Floor plan first floor



Figure 16: Restaurant



Figure 17: Floor plan Room



Figure 18: Room



Figure 19: Floor plan Roof



Figure 20: Roof

## 2. Three-Dimensional Grid

The original intent of the study is the respect and drawing of the idea from the very architecture of the building, but also from the aesthetics governing the work of the architect of the building. So the central idea of the design and internal configuration of the spaces is the grid, an element with strict geometry and orthonormality. It contains simplicity and timelessness, provides a system of motions and design. The intention is also its deformation, without the orthonormal arrangement being lost, and the parallel lines of which it is consisted, being intersected only at regular intervals. The grid is erected in the three dimensions of space, creates conceivable and non-conceivable spaces, spatial sections one inside the other, extreme but interactive. The target is ergonomics that allows comfort in motion, with the central element of the staircase and the movement around and within it. Materials like the exposed concrete, in the structural elements of the space, the cement mortar on the floors and the cement boards in the constructions of the space, solid wood and black metal sheet give style and any color. Conscious is the differentiation from the established aesthetic of the hotel units with the absence of shiny materials, furniture as well as bold colors and decorative elements. (Team: A. Andreou, S. Kalagkias, A. Lefantzi).

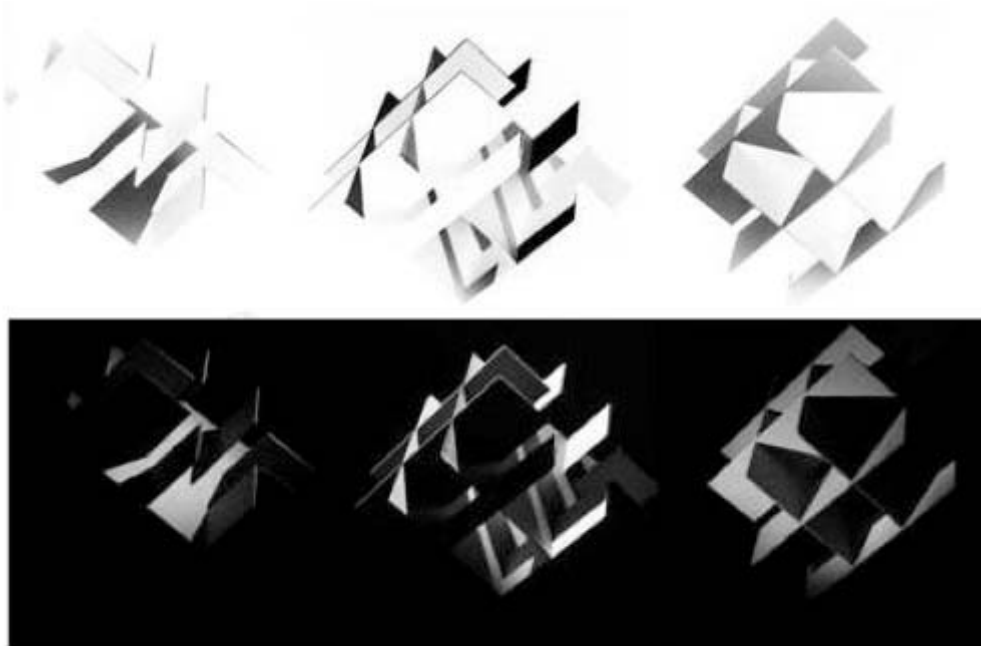


Figure 21: The idea





Figure 22: Ground floor



Figure 23: Reception



Figure 24: Lobby



Figure 25: Bar

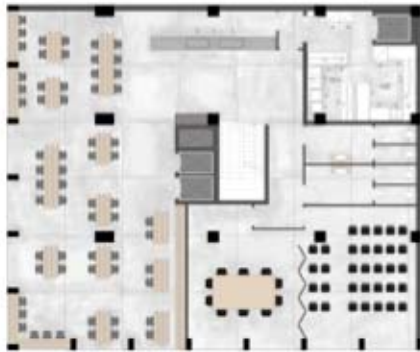


Figure 26: Floor plan first floor



Figure 27: Restaurant



Figure 28: Room



Figure 29: Room

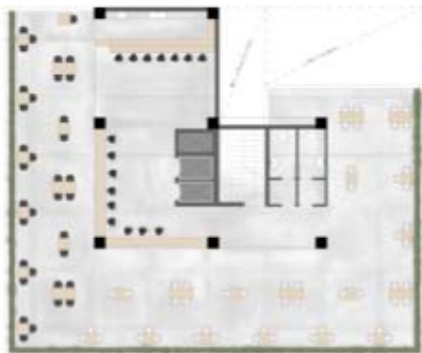


Figure 30: Floor plan Roof



Figure 31: Roof

### 5.3. Space within space

The idea for the design of the space comes from the orthonormality and the geometry of the existing building which is the dominant element. Through the interpretation of this came the need to create “space within space” following its orthonormal floor plan. Through this analysis-processing, the intention of “construction” and “deconstruction” of the dominant material i.e. wood was born, a characteristic feature throughout the space. The other materials that complement the space are essentially the shell itself in neutral tones of gray, the choice of color intensities being the sole exception, using the yellow color in the furniture.

(Team: K. Kina, E. Sofianidou).



Figure 32: The idea



Figure 33: Ground floor



Figure 34: Reception

#### 5.4. Transparent correlations

The project concerns a building located in the city center which is full of life and movement: a central element of the design was the city and its image. The orthonormal shapes, dominant in a city like Athens, the colors and strong motion were important elements for the central idea.





Figure 35: Floor plan first floor



Figure 36: Restaurant



Figure 37: Room



Figure38: Room

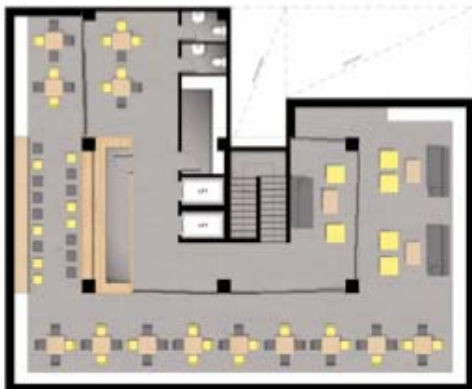


Figure 39: Floor plan Roof



Figure 40: Roof

Forms simple, clean aiming to achieve a leaner and simultaneously dynamic solution, which will highlight the existing building and especially its interior space. The idea is based on a dynamic element, which dominates the area. It is a rectangular element that encloses the central stairway lifts that symbolically and essentially is the binding element of all levels of the hotel. Materials such as wood either in furniture or as vertical elements – walls - partitions (or space dividers) implement this idea. (Team: A. Avgita, V. Bollati, S. Tran, T. Spathas).



Figure 41: The idea



Figure 42: Ground floor



Figure 43: Reception



Figure 44: Lobby



Figure 45: Bar

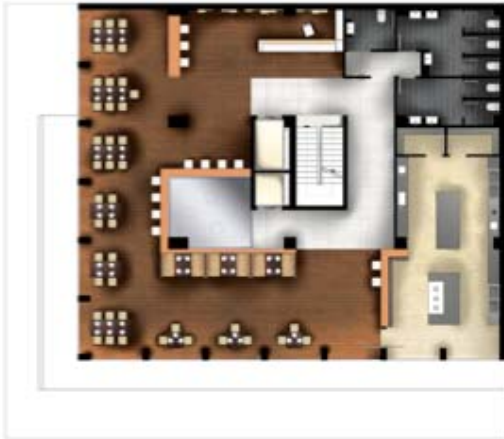


Figure 46: Floor plan first floor



Figure 47: Restaurant



Figure 48: Floor plan Room



Figure 49: Room



Figure 50: Floor plan Roof



Figure 51: Roof



Figure 52,53: The idea



Figure 54: Ground floor



Figure 55: Reception



Figure 56: Lobby





Figure 57: Floor plan first floor



Figure 58: Restaurant

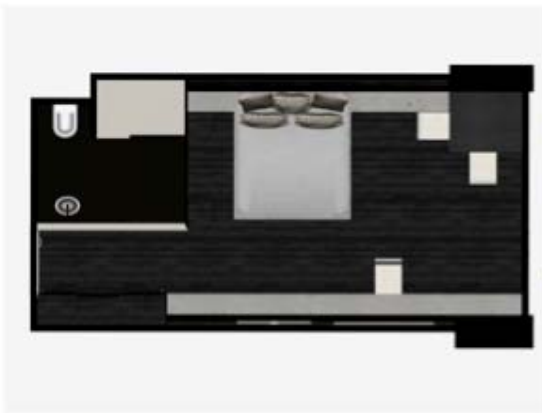


Figure 59: Floor plan Room



Figure60: Room

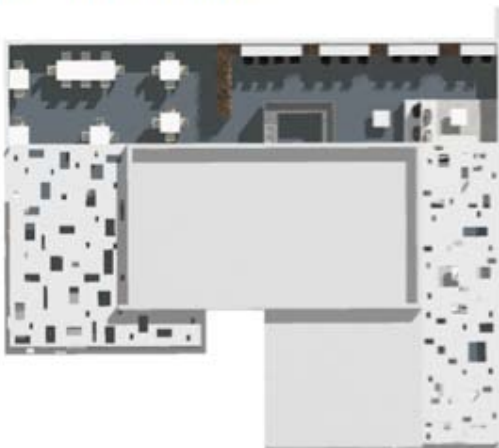


Figure 61: Floor plan Roof



Figure 62: Roof

### **5.5. Suspension and grid**

Central idea of the design, except for the element of grid and the rectangular shapes, is a special feature of the shell of the building, as well as of other buildings of the era it was designed, the suspension. The building, as mentioned above, consists of base-body-crown, the base section is none other than the colonnade and glass as a vertical element filling instead of masonry. So this finding of the architect, that the glass-transparent “base” of the building gives the impression that the building is suspended is the basic idea for the design of spaces. Volumes within the hotel premises such as the reception, levels, stairs, walls, construction, and furniture such as tables and chairs, all of which obey the orthonormal logic of the shell, suspend in the way they are designed. This integrative decision is implemented using different color intensities, with full and empty and the use of lighting. So the spaces and constructions - furniture inside them act are complementary and created with the coexistence of one element next to each other like a puzzle. (Team: G. Danochristou, A. Piladarinou).

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

The transition from mass tourism to quality tourism is proven and necessary if tourism is to ensure the modernization of the tourist product offered but also the development of Greece and the exit from the economic crisis. This new tourism model is based on the international trends and developments, the principles that govern sustainability, diversity and development of SME businesses but also the services required by the visitor of the future. Tailored to his/her specific needs and requirements, the model establishes the customization of services offered, leverages the existing infrastructure, relies on personal relationships, promotes various types of tourism (conferences, religious or medical meetings, etc.) and enables the extension of the tourist season. In so doing, modernization and renewal of existing tourist infrastructure is achieved, promoting thus alternative tourism models integrated in the residential complexes of each area and giving a personal style to any small or larger unit. Therefore, the visitor-tourist finds what he or she wants, develops personal bonds with the place and people, reinforcing at the same time the dynamics of the Greek tourism product.

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