
***ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AS AN EFFECTIVE
ASPECT FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE
TOURIST PRODUCT***

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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[1], 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[2] 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).

Greek reality

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[3], 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.

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[4]. 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.

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»[5] 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[6] ; 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»[7] holiday and 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

The following examples confirm the afore-mentioned data by implementing the key concept to an existing city hotel, altering thus the aesthetic and functional treatment of its areas with a holistic approach but also with respect to sustainability and the effects on the environmental balance. These are student project of the 7th semester of the Department of Interior Architecture, Decorative art and Design, of Technological Educational Institute of Athens (TEI), under the supervision of the instructors, Mrs. Frangou Dionissia and Mr. Dimitris Marnellos. The hotel is located in the center of Athens, near Syntagma square. It was renovated in 2007 and is primarily suitable for professionals and leisure travellers. Being a historic hotel – a reference point for the city of Athens and its visitors -, it was built in the 1960s by the architect P. Valsamakis and is considered to be a specimen of its time. It has 98 rooms distributed in four floors. On the ground floor there is the reception, the lobby and the breakfast room. The hotel can provide conference facilities. The basic concept underlying the design of the space should promote quality tourism as expressed through the interior design, propose new design ideas and concepts and provide solutions to certain problems that were identified by the preceding local investigation. The studies presented were chosen for their originality, uniqueness and diversity. The same

methodology can be followed in smaller or larger tourist facilities or tourist accommodation, drawing on the existing structures and shells.



Figure 1: Reception



Figure 2: Lobby



Figure 3: Bar



Figure 4: Restaurant



Figure 5: Roof



Figure 6: Room

5.1. The interpretation of space using modern aesthetics of reproducing shell

directions: The main idea of the design lies in: the creation of organized flows with the simultaneous organization of parallel or perpendicular corridors inside the carrying organization of the building; the addition of specific structures inside the building, such as wood or glass dividers; the respect of the historical significance of the city, and harmonization of the end, modern design of the hotel with the environment; its transformation into a modern design hotel so that its design reflects to a considerable degree the aesthetic typology of the time it was built; the discretionary interventions in the original aesthetic, where the technology and the hotel requirements demand modern solutions so that the outcome serves the central idea and the requirements of a hotel in the city center. (Team: E. Kokologiannis, Ch. Sebastiao, M. Tomasevic & E. Yanniou, A. Karakoussi, G. Kelpetidis).



Figure 7: Reception



Figure 8: Lobby



Figure 9: Bar



Figure 10: Restaurant



Figure 11: Roof



Figure 12: Room

5.2. Design of space within space by deconstructing the existing shell. The objective of this proposal is the differentiation and the “break” of symmetry of the existing building. Its main element is the use of different shapes (triangles, trapeziums), irregular but sharp, contrary to the shell and any familiar form and shape that man is accustomed to use in

space and furniture. At the same time, the design also emphasizes the transparency idea selecting materials such as fiberglass, glass and lighting of the interior space.

In the interior space, the symmetric axes reading/readout and their fragmentation can be easily perceived. Onto their traces, asymmetric spaces were created inside the existing rigid shell, containing the internal uses and functions. So the reception, the bar, the circulation areas (i.e. corridors) but also the room spaces are “contained” within such types of structures and marked by them as well as by the intense presence of color. (Team: E. Americanou, M. Leontidou, K. Myrogiannis).

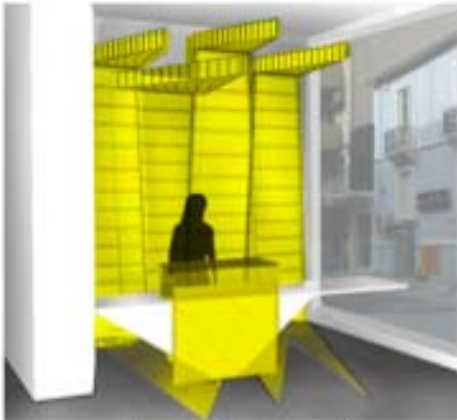


Figure 13: Reception



Figure 14: Lobby



Figure 15: Bar



Figure 16: Restaurant



Figure 17: Roof (inside)

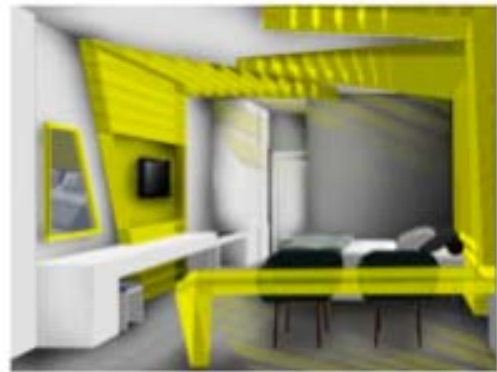


Figure 18: Room

5.3. Symbolism (The elements of nature as a symbol). The key idea of the design is based on the four elements of nature: Air, Fire, Water, Earth, the sense that these elements express and the selection of the appropriate colors.

The element of Air is linked with lightweight structures and perforated materials or transparency giving a sense of freedom and “cool” atmosphere of white, blue and gray colors. It is proposed for the room space. The element of Fire is associated with the selection of warm colors such as orange, yellow, red and similar quality lighting, giving the feeling of coziness and friendliness. It is mainly selected for the dining area. The element of Water is expressed in structures characterized by plasticity-fluidity and water-like elements, offering balance and tranquility. It is expressed in colors like blue and white. It is recommended for the entrance, lobby and bar.

The element of Earth is embodied in “stable” structures and in materials such as wood, stone, fabric and upholstery, giving the feeling that nature has taken over the interior space. Shades of ocher, brown and gold colors are selected. (Head: G. Kouri, Th. Kostioutsouk) .



Figure 19: Reception

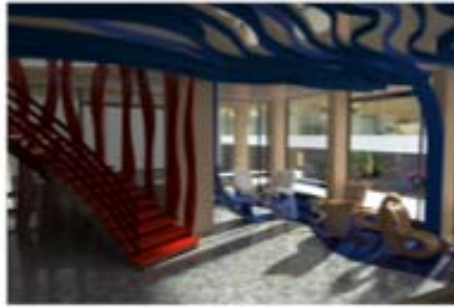


Figure 20: Lobby



Figure 21: Bar



Figure 22: Restaurant



Figure 23: Roof



Figure 24: Room

5.4. Organic architecture. The central axis of the design is the idea of organic architecture and the forms that this approach produces. The organic architecture does not imitate

shapes of natural (organic) forms, but includes those mechanisms which govern the various physical processes. It is a form of personal expression of the architect himself and at the same time the emanation of the continuous search of the human spirit to find new ways to express memories, desires and expectations (Iliopoulos, V., (2005), Lecture: "Organic architecture", School of Architecture NTUA).



Figure 25: Reception



Figure 26: Lobby



Figure 27: Bar



Figure 28: Restaurant

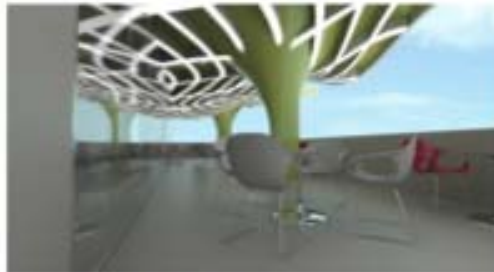


Figure 29: Roof



Figure 30: Room

The idea expresses the birth and co-existence of organic forms within the strict rules and principles of the given shell. These forms contain areas such as the reception, the restaurant itself as contour, the special ceilings with the lighting coming out of the shapes themselves without the use of lighting fixtures. The furniture chosen for public spaces (restaurant, lobby and bar) and private spaces embrace the users-clients of the hotel.

These organic forms become more dynamic in the rooms and the roof garden bar in order to experience a new accommodation environment in a modern city hotel. (Team: Ch. Alfatzis, E. Kalyva, L. Polycandrioti).

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.

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. The apparent benefit of this project is the utilization of the existing shell and the enhancement of the place and the services offered.

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[7] This refers to holidays in serene locations with loose schedule, i.e. going for walks, enjoying local cuisine, exploring urban cities, etc.