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Evolving mass tourism constructs and capitalist exploitation of the coast: From sustainable density and urban morphology to iconic megastructure

The tourism construct is a disruptive capitalist production of space that has generated and is generating new urban forms. Many architectural and morphological studies have specifically analysed its different models, but there is a lack of studies comparing their features. This comparative study examines four types of tourism construct related to the evolution of capitalism (including pre-Fordism, Fordism, and post-Fordism) and different types of tourist cities. Architectural iconicity, morphological patterns, and spatial metrics are analysed in relation to the economic, social, and cultural characteristics generated. The results suggest that high-density pre-Fordist and Fordist

tourism constructs facilitate social relations and a greater capacity to generate the city, whereas lower-density post-Fordist constructs have higher environmental costs (an increase in private green areas and bodies of water) and social costs due to architectural iconicity. The article assesses the relationship between the architectural and urban variables to be considered in the planning tourist destinations in the capitalist production of tourist space.

Keywords: coastal tourism, iconic architectures, morphology

1 Introduction

Tourism has traditionally been identified as an expression of the capitalist economy (Fletcher et al., 2021). The widespread triumph of the capitalist model seems to preclude the development of a socially balanced and sustainable model (Charley, 2010), as well as the protection of the most basic collective goods (Hollerman, 2015). Gauthier (2005) defines the differentiated tourism architecture and morphology as constructs. The tourism construct is the result of high-speed change linked to a greater level of disruptive development and experimentation. According to Knafo and Stock (2003), tourism is a system in which individuals must travel, they temporarily live in places outside their usual routine, and space actively participates in tourists' leisure and recreation. Therefore, the tourism construct is a spatial and physical response to the sum of three basic characteristics of tourist activity: the need for a means of transport, an event or experience as a reason to travel, and an accommodation system.

Mobility drives tourist relations (Coles et al., 2005; Urry & Larsen, 2012; Nebot-Gomez de Salazar, 2020) and has had a strong impact on climate change (Gühnemann et al., 2021), even during the COVID-19 pandemic (Yang et al., 2021). Tourist developments are places where space loses its strategic status and robust nature in a progressive dissolution process (Sparke et al., 2018), inhabited by a constant flow of temporary visitors and an ongoing need to reinvent their experiences to avoid obsolescence processes (Sanabria Díaz et al., 2020). The pressure of urbanization and tourism in coastal areas has increased with high impacts and changes to their landscapes (Petrișor et al., 2020). Specifically, the dynamic nature of tourism has generated new urban morphology, particularly along the coasts – consisting of autonomous elements – where open space basically consists of lawns and playgrounds (Levy, 1999). Capitalism's influence on the tourist space is clear in its activities and architecture. Tourist events are perfect capitalist productions because they consume places and produce meanings (Nogués, 2008). Events can directly influence the character of the city and its ability to attract tourists (Li et al., 2021). In turn, tourist architecture for accommodation is an international expression of the Western capitalist economy and an exponent of mass consumer culture and modern life (Britton, 1991).

Tourism is therefore an organized capitalist activity with socially and ideologically intentional spatial production (Britton, 1991). Currently, numerous forms of capitalist production of tourist space coexist: Fordist tourism models survive in peripheral areas – for example, Cancun (Torres, 2002) – and there are also hyper-iconic post-Fordist complexes – for example,

Dubai (Elsheshtawy, 2010); restructured pre-Fordist tourist centres – for example, the United Kingdom (Agarwal, 2012); or Fordist tourist centres in the Spanish Mediterranean (Antón Clavé et al., 2011). Numerous studies have analysed the various constructs of tourism in depth. Previous research into their morphological evolution related to political, economic, social, environmental, and physical variables has been conducted, including the spa (Agarwal, 2012; Xie et al., 2013), beach resorts such as those in the the Asia–Pacific region (Smith, 1991, 1992), Greece (Andriotis, 2006), or Mediterranean towns (Lekakis & Chatzikonstantinou, 2020). However, there is a significant lack of studies comparing the main tourism constructs of each capitalist period using a morphological and architectural analysis and their social and environmental consequences.

This article compares characteristic examples of tourism constructs developed by capitalism for coastal tourism – in terms of architecture, morphology, and spatial metrics – and analyses their social segregation and environmental effects (density and percentages of water and green areas). The article is organized as follows. After the introduction, the second section develops a methodology that analyses and compares the evolution of five selected constructs in terms of architectural, morphological, and spatial metrics characteristics and in relation to the evolution of capitalism. The third section briefly summarizes the relationship between architecture and the different periods of the capitalist economy. In the fourth section, the results show that the selected pre-Fordist and Fordist constructs have more sustainable densities, whereas the post-Fordist models have a greater environmental impact, social segregation, and iconic burden. The fifth section discusses the relationship between the architectural iconographic parameters and the morphological and spatial metrics characteristics. Finally, the conclusions and limitations of the study are considered in the sixth section.

2 Methodology and case studies

Levy (1999) considers two main approaches to studying urban form, focusing on the relationship between types of buildings and urban fabric, and the evolution of the tourism construct. Both are analysed in this article by comparing five case studies. The comparison was conducted from a socioeconomic dimension (capitalism and architecture) and from a physical dimension (morphology and the spatial metrics). The socioeconomic dimension considers the built environment as a direct expression of culture; in other words, it is a social construction both in its creation and in its evolution (Gauthier, 2005), and it influences the integration of residents and tourists (Soszyński et al., 2017). A bibliographic review was conducted for each economic period, along with a description of the architecture

Table 1: Relationship between selected morphological layers and parameters.

		Parameter		Morphology	
Symbol	Description	Unit	Relation	Symbol	Layer
A	Road area	m ²	$A + B = 100,000 \text{ m}^2$	ST	Street
B	Private plot area	m ²	$B = B1 + B2 + B3 + B4$		–
B1	Ground floor area	m ²		GL	Ground-level building
B2	Private space area	m ²		PS	Private space area
B3	Private water area	m ²		WA	Water area
B4	Private beach area	m ²			Beach area
H	Maximum height	number		AG	Above-ground building
Ba	Built area	m ²	$Ba = B1 \times H$		–
Ud	Urban density	–	$Ud = Ba / (A + B)$		–

Source: Authors

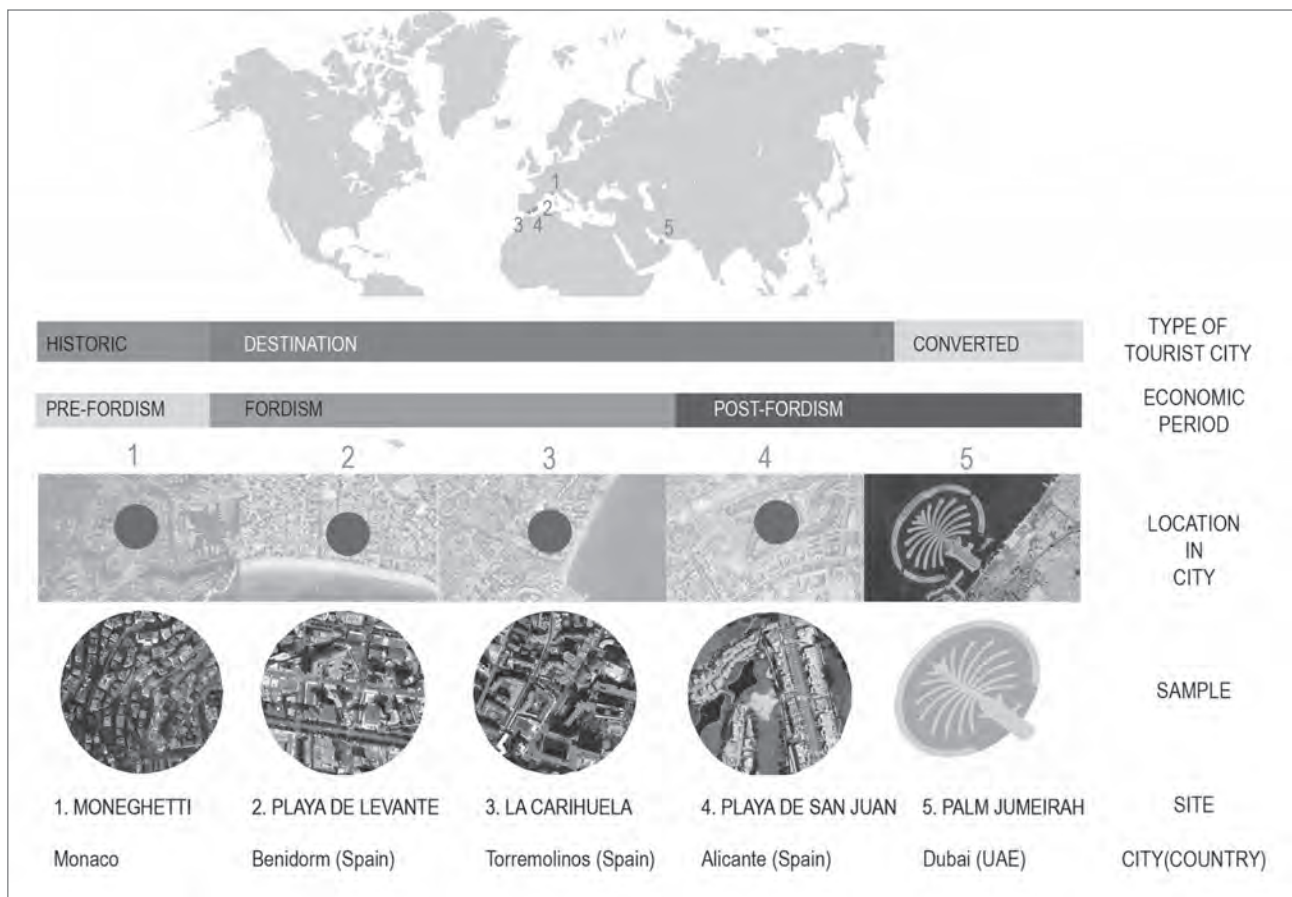


Figure 1: Location of the cases studied and characteristics of each sample (illustration: authors).

and of the economic and architectural thought that influenced its design, to analyse architectural and socioeconomic values.

As regards the physical values, the urban form has been related to the spatial metrics, taken to be “the quantitative measure-

ments that assess the spatial characteristics of the urban structures and settlements” (Reis et al., 2015: 330). These metrics identify the spatial components in the dynamics of the change (Herold et al., 2005), the urban patterns of tourist developments (Gkoltsiou & Terkenli, 2012), and the spatial patterns of

tourist coastal areas (Antón Clavé et al., 2011; Rovira Soto & Anton Clavé, 2017). The study compares ten-hectare circular samples of the tourist areas within the first 1 km strip from the coast. Using aerial images and mapping from Google Earth and a GIS programme, six morphological layers are related to nine parameters (Table 1) to analyse the occupancy percentages and the urban density. Urban density (Ud) is considered equal to floor area ratio (FAR) (MIT, 2019), and the built area (Ba) is obtained from the cadastral database as the product of the ground floor area (B_1) times maximum height (H).

The choice of the case studies follows an evolutive time sequence of the three main periods of capitalism (pre-Fordist, Fordist, and post-Fordist) that seeks to highlight significant changes to the tourism construct. Judd and Fainstein (2000) differentiate between three categories of tourist cities: the historical tourist city, the destination city specifically designed for tourism consumption, and the converted city, which builds infrastructure to attract tourism (Figure 1).

The historical tourist city includes the “spa cities” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Along the Mediterranean coast, Monaco is one of the most frequently visited tourist destinations in the world (Gjorgievski et al., 2013) and a classic European destination, similar to Las Vegas in North America, Johannesburg in Africa (Fu & Murray, 2014), or Macao in Asia (Kwan, 2004). A sample of the Moneghetti–La Condamine neighbourhood has been selected.

Within the destination city, in Europe, the explosion of mass tourism during the Fordist capitalism period was significant along the Spanish coast due to its rapid transformation from the 1960s. Three examples of the Spanish Mediterranean coast were selected: Torremolinos, Benidorm, and Alicante. Torremolinos was one of the first tourism developments in Costa del Sol and is a tourist destination widely analysed in the literature (Navarro-Jurado et al., 2019). It is a mature destination, similar to Acapulco (Mexico), where the La Carihuela neighbourhood is a representative sample of its features. Benidorm and its Playa de Levante neighbourhood is the most outstanding mass tourism destination on the Spanish Mediterranean coast (Nolasco-Cirugeda et al., 2020). It is a singular tourism model based on high-density urban development and high-rise buildings. Finally, the Playa de San Juan neighbourhood in Alicante represents the transition to the post-Fordism associated with residential spaces for golf tourism, focused on higher purchasing power and renovation of mature destinations (Ruiz et al., 2016). It is a tourism construct with a more vernacular architectural style and greater development in green areas. In the converted city, Dubai is the paradigm of a post-Fordist neoliberal tourism model. The selected sample of the Palm Jumeirah artificial island is an example of a “tourism bubble”

consisting of convention centres, sports complexes, large congress hotels, and shopping malls with attractions designed exclusively for tourists and which are not used by the local residents (Fainstein, 2005).

3 Tourism constructs and capitalist exploitation of space

3.1 Capitalism and tourism architecture

Each economic period of capitalism has generated its own constructs. The pre-Fordist tourism construct was originally the destination of the upper classes of urban industrial capitalism from the second half of the nineteenth century to the Second World War. It is a winter tourism destination, where the tourist experience was developed in architecture in the form of spas, thermal resorts, and casinos.

The period of Fordist capitalism development (from 1945 to the mid-1970s) plays a key role. After the Second World War, tourism followed the characteristics of industry and Fordist capitalism in response to the growth of mass tourism. Architecture embarked on mass production. This mass production system is based on maximum production at minimum cost by means of creating large volumes of a limited series of standardized products (Watson, 2019). The mass tourism of Fordist capitalism is highly standardized, packaged, and inflexible tourism constructs consumed by large numbers of tourists (Torres, 2002). The democratic opening up to the middle classes and the improvement of salaries allowed workers access to mass consumption of tourist packages. This was all thanks to the Keynesian economic model – particularly adopted in western Europe – with a new capitalist class of transnational companies that embarked on the physical production of the tourist space (Yrigoy, 2014). The transport and accommodation revolution favoured the extensive occupation process of the territory. Aircraft made long-haul tourism possible without the need to develop the road infrastructure. The Grand Hotel gave way to the tourist hotel, designed as a self-contained unit with apartments, a dining room, tropical gardens, a solarium, swimming pools, and entertainment areas. Right from the start, the architects of the Modern Movement included the functionalist ideology of international architecture until the triumph of the Team X ideas in the Languedoc–Rousillon project designed by Candilis, Josic, and Woods (1962–1977).

The transition to the neoliberalism of post-Fordism meant the deregulation and deindustrialization of capitalism, which led to globalized, individualized, and flexible tourism (Bianchi, 2018). The capitalist spontaneous order was replaced by the economic totalitarianism of the financial system at the start of

the twenty-first century. The liberation era covers three decades: from the end of the 1970s to the 2007 global financial crisis (Roberts, 2010). Between 1985 and 1995, the shift was from mass production to mass customization, and the Keynesian model and protectionism was replaced by a Hayekian and neoliberal approach to the economy, globalization, and obsessive competitiveness (Woodley, 2015). Tourism changed radically between 1975 and 2005 due to its intensification and disproportionate growth (Soja, 2005). It was based on the new economy of flexible capitalism and the development of information and telecommunications, which have allowed a time-space compression in the new era of globalization (Harvey, 1990). With the saturation of the Fordist traditional sun-and-beach market, a new type of tourist has emerged, increasingly more gregarious and difficult to classify. These tourists are searching for alternative experiences, which include leisure products, but which come with new motivations to travel as a life experience (Bonet, 2003; Ashworth, 2005).

3.2 Architectures of spectacle

The aim of the Fordist tourism construct is the mass production and exploitation of tourist space, where architects design standardized accommodation architecture dissociated from the production of experiences (Lefebvre, 1974). They end up generating a tourist megalopolis designed for consumption and the outcome of an accumulation of discontinuous, disjointed, and autonomous architectural and urban structures (Gausa, 1996). Antagonistically, the pre-Ford and some post-Ford tourism constructs are based on symbolic and emblematic architecture that helps create an elitist space and hide an existing social reality (Pié-Ninot & Rosa-Jiménez, 2014), where post-modern imagery has turned architecture into an event.

Those architectures of spectacle are consumer goods, or architectural displays that have generated their own “architourism”. The literature distinguishes two trends. The first is architecture focused on the identity of the place (Figure 2a) and which strengthens its meaning (Lasansky & McLaren, 2004); in other words, non-iconic buildings of vernacular architectural styles to authentically experience a place (Chang, 2010), and to boost tourism and local development (Palupi et al., 2021). At the other extreme is hyper-iconic architecture; that is, “disneyfication” and thematic resorts (Figure 2b), which have transformed the tourist metropolis into a tourist utopia: “enclaves within the state that constitute another post-industrial reterritorialization of urban forms, constructed by international capital to attract workers and non-local tourists” (Simpson, 2016: 28). These places are already related to an “intensification” economic rationale that relies on the speculative circulation of capital, without the resource of production of goods (Nealon, 2002).

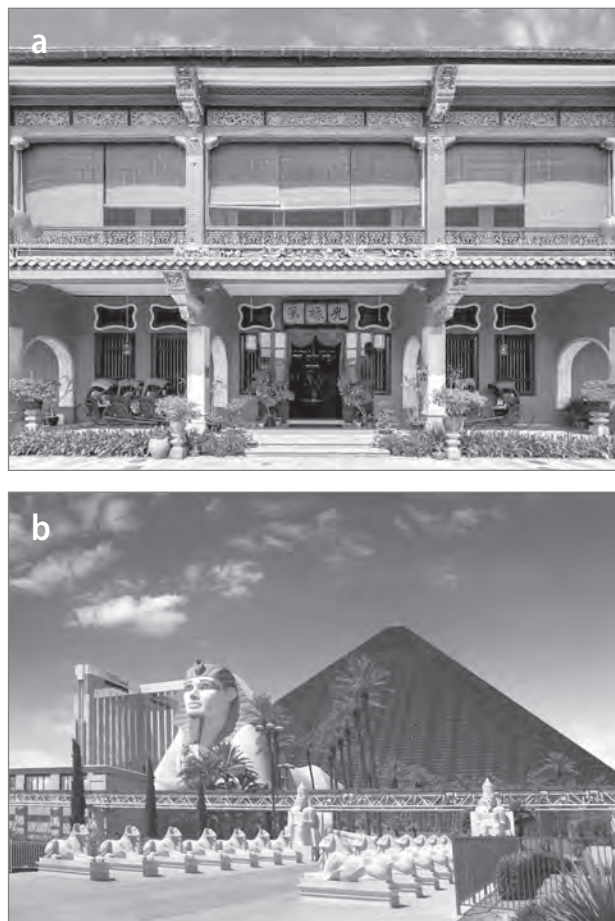


Figure 2: a) Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion (Malaysia) as an example of non-iconic buildings of vernacular architectural styles; b) Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas as an example of hyper-iconic architecture (photo: Alberto E. García-Moreno).

Harvey (2005) criticizes the fact that the strategies of neoliberalism have been designed to restore the class powers of the elites against the working class since the 1970s, thus generating wealth and poverty simultaneously. It is associated with the “scintillant cities” concept (Simpson, 2013) as an example of connection of glass architecture, enclave urban development, financial capital, and fictions. They are cities made up of iconic architecture. Sklair (2006) defines iconic architecture as that which is famous and has a special symbolic or aesthetic meaning. The transnational neoliberal capitalist class, as the dominant force, drove the iconic architecture, instead of the state and religion, of the 1960s (Sklair, 2010). “Celebrity architects” with internationally renowned firms were therefore contracted to guarantee the value of the investments (Larson, 1995). The connection between iconic architecture and architects with globalization is the result of information and communication technologies and computing, which has allowed them to design buildings in “impossible” forms (Sklair, 2010).

Table 2: Summary of the main characteristics of each type of tourism construct.

Type	Period	Site	Urban density	Iconicity	Pattern	Morphology
1	Pre-Fordism	Moneghetti	High	High (eclecticism)	Urban fabric	Urban
2	Fordism	Playa de Levante La Carihuela	Medium	Low (rationalism)	Urban fabric	Expansion
3	Post-Fordism	Playa de San Juan	Medium-low	Low (vernacular)	Urban fabric	Suburban
4		Palm Jumeirah	Low	High (architecture-spectacle)	Icon-fabric	Megastructure

Source: Authors

4 From urban morphology to iconic megastructure

The results of the comparison of the socioeconomic dimension of Section 3 with the physical dimension (morphology and spatial metrics) suggest four types of tourism constructs associated to four morphological types or urban patterns, which we have called urban, expansion, suburban, and megastructure (Table 2 and Figure 3). They present differentiated qualities as regards the urban density, iconicity, and type of urban pattern, in which an evolution from urban rationale to the tourist megastructure can be detected.

4.1 Types of tourism constructs

Type 1: Industrial capitalism and the eclectic construct. Monaco's casino-based economic activity attracted tourists with high purchasing power in an area of poor and rocky terrain (Gay, 1998). The main impact of that economy was the socio-spatial segregation that drove the social expulsion of activities and people not in keeping with high social status (Pié-Ninot & Rosa-Jiménez, 2014). In Monaco, the urban industrial capitalism formula of tourist colonization, used by the British Empire in its colonies, was deployed: grand hotels built by travel agencies or by consortia with stakes in the transport systems and designed by European architects in an eclectic neo-classical style (Wharton, 1999). Thus, following the building of the railway (1863), the opening of the Grand Hotel de Paris (1864) led to the appearance of elite amenities such as the Monte Carlo Casino and its adjoining opera house, the work of Charles Garnier, the eclectic architect that went on the Grand Tour between 1852 and 1855. The territorial constraints of Monaco have transformed the initial residential villas into a contemporary high-density urban space, following a vertical and horizontal filling-in process. The streets there adapt to the steep relief of the land and occupy a very important percentage of the area,

whereas the free area of the plots is relatively low, with no swimming pools.

Type 2: Fordist capitalism and the international architecture construct. This model allowed the rapid transformation of the coast, but the mass growth and the economic vision generated significant impacts on the landscape values that are, paradoxically, the lure of tourism (Pié-Ninot & Rosa-Jiménez, 2014). The Benidorm (Playa) and Torremolinos samples share the same morphological pattern of hotels and residential complexes with private free areas for leisure programmes. Smaller roadways benefit the size of the block and the inclusion of swimming pools with ever larger water areas. In those Fordist fabrics, the main problem is the physical obsolescence of the spaces created in the boom of the 1960s and the dwindling of a simple and trivial culture product that does not meet the needs of the new tourist (Ashworth, 2005).

Type 3: The post-Fordist transition and the vernacular construct. The epicentre of the structure of the post-Fordist tourist space is the airport, which has become a hub and micro-city due to the remarkable growth in the use of the airplane (particularly low cost) as a means of transport (Soja, 2005). That has driven the blurring of the line between the urban and the suburban, and the development of the suburbanization as a growth model of the second holiday home. The Playa de San Juan tourism construct (Alicante, Spain) includes a significant increase of the plot and of private free space to include the golf course. Furthermore, it has increased the water area by introducing artificial lakes and swimming pools in low-density residential complexes, which may even include a larger length of artificial beach rather than natural beach (Rosa-Jiménez et al., 2016). The drop in urban density in tourist residential complexes, along with the recovery of the local-roots architectural style, led to a trivialization of cultural styles and images.

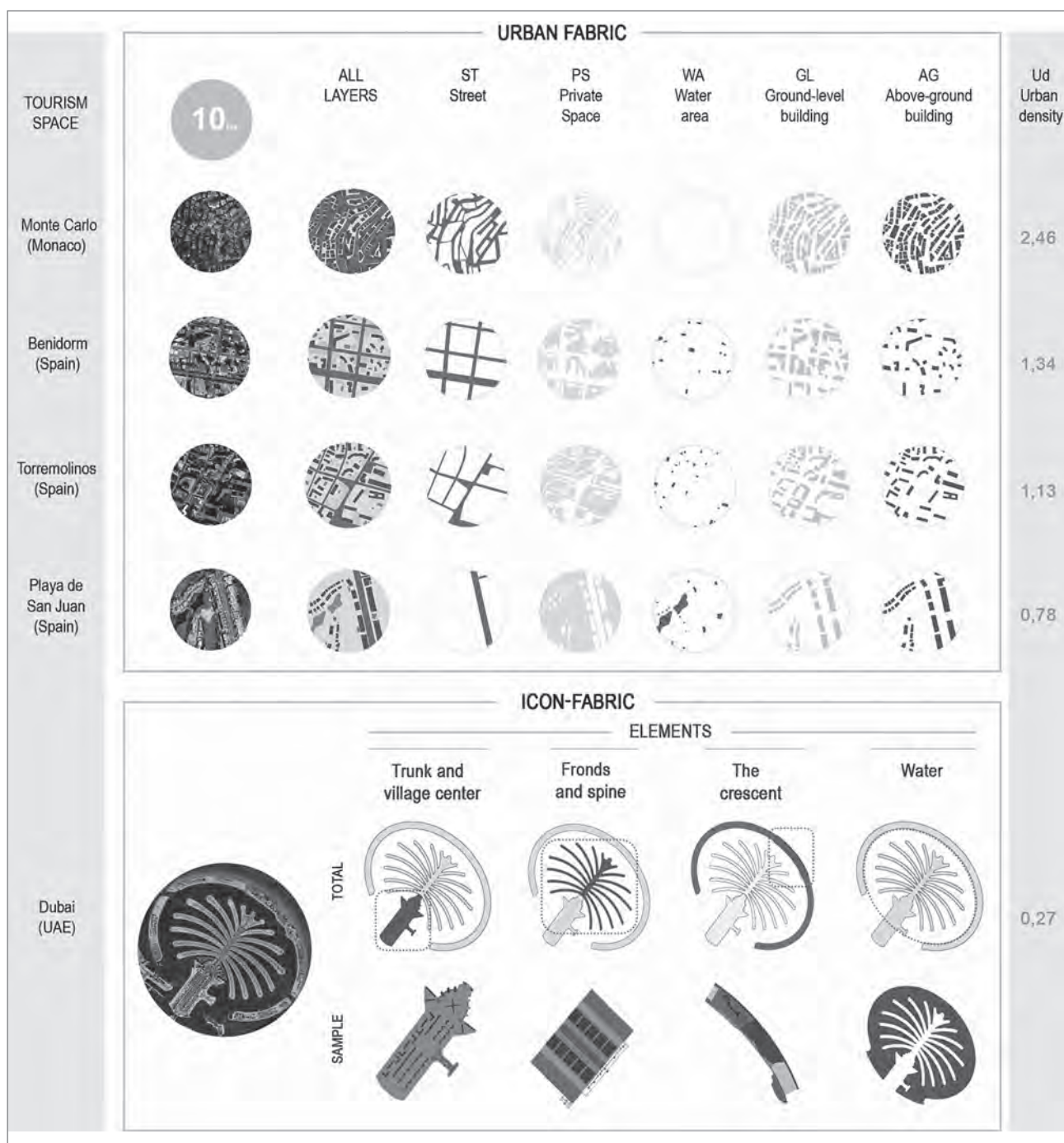


Figure 3: Urban densities and morphology features of each case study (illustration: authors).

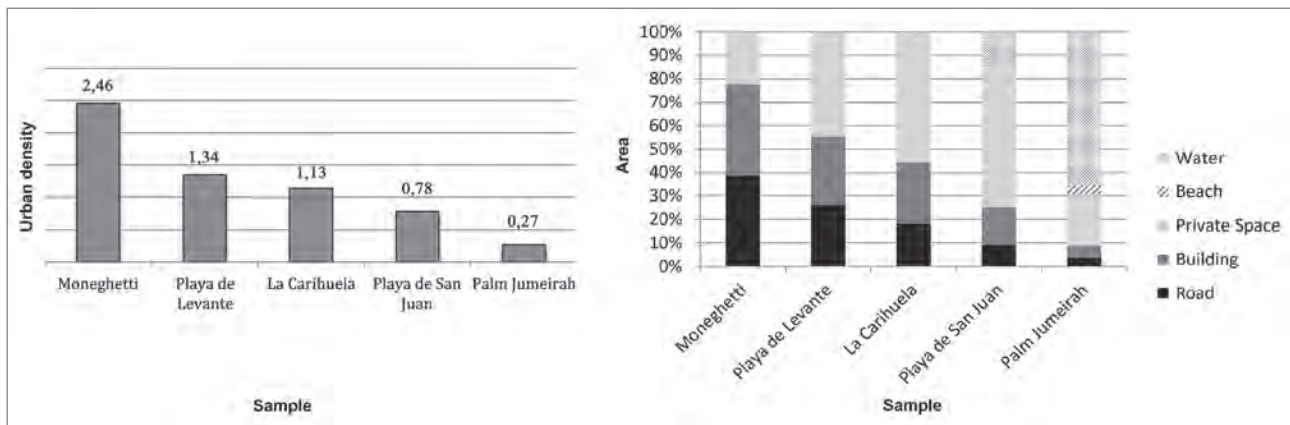
Type 4: Post-Fordist capitalism and the iconic megastructure. The Dubai model is similar to others of East Asia (China, South Korea, or Taiwan) analysed by Jeon (1995). Dubai's urban development is an example of neoliberal economic policies that seek to attract top-tier tourism and foreign investments and exclude the immigrant and local population. Dubai is a model based on the power of spectacles (Elsheshtawy, 2010), which develops skyscrapers, shopping malls, and high infrastructure that are out of context with their settings. Further-

more, it exploits and marginalizes its immigrant construction workers (Ghaemi, 2006) and those with precarious livelihoods (Gibson, 2009). The megaproject to transform Dubai's sea-front expands its coastal land from 45 to over 1,500 kilometres. It comprises Palm Deira, Palm Jebel Ali, The World Islands, The Universe, and the Waterfront City project, designed by OMA to be home to up to 1.5 million people (Velegrinis & Katodrytis, 2015). Palm Jumeirah Island (2008) is the smallest of the three Palm Islands and is home to over twenty-five

Table 3: Urban parameters of each tourism construct

Sample	T	A	B				Maximum height	Built area	Density unit	
			(m ²)	(m ²)	B1 (m ²)	B2 (m ²)				B3 (m ²)
Moneghetti	1	38,695	61,305	38,690	22,615	0	0	14	245,730	2.46
Playa de Levante	2	26,186	73,814	29,045	41,844	2,925	0	29	134,252	1.34
La Carihuela	2	18,203	81,797	26,069	43,670	2,058	0	13	113,152	1.13
Playa de San Juan	3	9,258	90,742	15,967	58,498	16,277	0	6	77,637	0.78
Palm Jumeirah	4	3,718	96,282	5,128	21,894	65,441	3,819	21	27,027	0.27

Note: T = type, A = road communications, B = private area, B1 = building, B2 = private space, B3 = water, B4 = beach. Source: Authors.

**Figure 4:** Urban density (left) and percentages of land use (right) for each tourism construct (illustration: authors).

international hotels, such as the Atlantis Dubai Hotel, with 1,500 rooms, an aquarium, and a theme park. The iconic design of the palm tree creates a form in which the trunk is the centre of the complex, consisting of apartments, hotels, and attractions, and the seventeen branches make up a residential group of villas and homes with private beaches. The crescent is a semi-circular artificial island with tourist amenities.

4.2 Urban density and physical exploitation of space

In Table 3, a drop in the urban density of the fabrics is detected in the evolution of the tourism construct, from the inherent values of the compact city in Monaco ($U_d > 2$) to the low levels of the golf residential complexes. The average density near 1 of the Fordist fabrics (Type 2) allows a complex programme of free zones and swimming pools to be developed. The drop in density of the Type 3 (average density around 0.5) and Type 4 (low density of 0.25) constructs leads to a progressive reduction of the road area and of the area occupied by buildings in favour of greater private free space, water, and private beaches, which is particularly obvious in the Palm Jumeirah megastructure (Table 3 and Figure 4). The construction of the Palm Jumeirah artificial island involved a major engineering project with an environmental impact affecting

the ecosystem of the Persian Gulf (Sale et al., 2011). In this regard, this increase in private free space in the post-Fordist constructs is accompanied by social segregation as the result of land privatization (gated communities); the increase in the green landscape and swimming pools is associated with environmental costs of high water consumption (Gössling et al., 2012; Hof & Blázquez-Salom, 2015).

4.3 Iconicity as social exploitation of space

According to Sklair (2010), the development of iconicity in architecture has fostered the segregation and social exploitation of space. At an initial level, the Fordist construct (Type 2), aimed at the middle and lower-middle class, first adopted the principles of the architecture of the Modernist movement. Sun and beach as the main tourist experience was architecture with a reduced iconographic value and that acted as accommodation support infrastructure. At a second level, the architecture of the Type 3 constructs, particularly from the 1970s, included vernacular architectural styles to experiment with or recover the place (Chang, 2010), which were already used by the jet-set in highly elitist destinations such as Marbella (Spain) or Port Grimaud (France). Finally, at a third level, constructs 1 and 4, linked to iconography and the architectural style, likewise share international architecture and are aimed at the capitalist

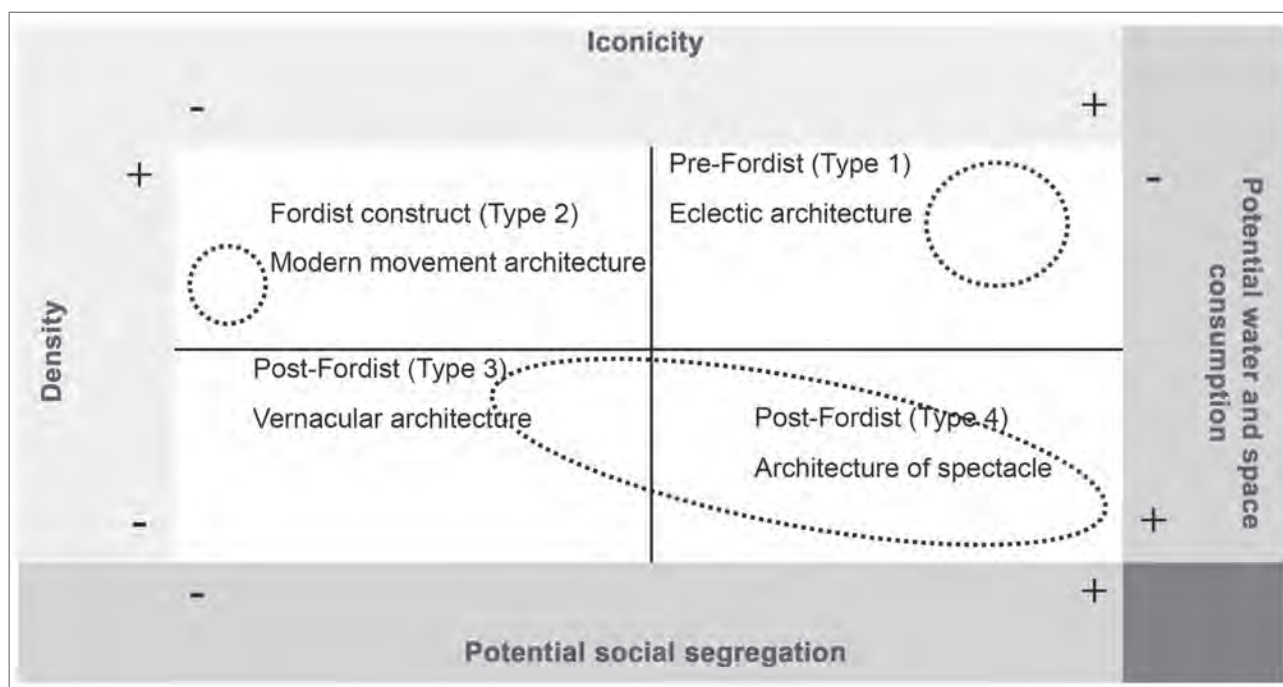


Figure 5: Relationship between the tourism constructs studied with potential social and environmental effects (illustration: authors).

elite that fosters spatial segregation and the “exclusivity” of power that lies within. However, whereas Dubai is a converted city radicalizing urban and architectural iconography aimed at capital flows and the liquid quality of the “scintillant cities” (Simpson, 2016), Monaco has a “solid” urban character and architecture in terms of urban density, which facilitates social city growth.

4.4 Urban patterns and new icon-fabrics

This quality of the architectural iconography has also shifted to urban fabrics in the form of icon-fabrics, with Palm Jumeirah being an exceptional example. The icon-fabric is the design of an urban layout as an iconographic object where there is a dismantling between architecture and urban development, typical of the megastructure concept. Whereas Types 1, 2, and 3 are traditional and open urban fabrics, insofar as they can spread in the territory while maintaining their characteristics, the icon-fabric of Type 4 is closed and can only be reproduced with formal and/or size variations. It clearly meets the tourist bubble idea developed by Fainstein (2005).

5 Discussion

The comparison in terms of architecture, morphology, and spatial metrics of the four characteristic examples of tourist constructs developed by capitalism for coastal tourism, and the analysis of their social effect (social segregation) and environmental effects (density and percentages of water and open

areas) are shown in Figure 4. The study clearly shows the capacity of the capitalist tourism industry to adapt to all urban fabrics and even transgress traditional urban models with the development of tourism megastructure. However, the social and environmental consequences are very different in each of them.

The Palm Jumeirah post-Fordist tourist construct is the maximum expression of urban-architectural iconography and supposes maximum social and spatial exploitation. The Palm Jumeirah megastructure represents a new standard to be incorporated into the four spatial patterns of urban grow defined by Reis et al. (2016): expansion, urban sprawl, polycentrism, and densification/coalescence. Thus, the post-Fordist model of the Dubai tourist megastructures has been a turning point because iconographic patterns have been created that do not meet urban patterns, and the social and environmental impacts generated there have reached dramatic levels. Palm Jumeirah Island has been replicated in other Global South countries such as the Melaka Gateway (Malaysia) – an object of social protests (Arnez, 2022) – or Pearl Island (Qatar), which has led authors to call them predatory cities; that is, selfish and megalomaniac utopias that allow the exploitation of models of architecture and human labour (Rizzo, 2019). However, there is an influence of these predatory logics supported by oil tycoons on the Mediterranean Coast, especially in the new reconfiguration or expansion of marinas or the construction of new hotels similar to the sail-shaped building of Dubai, the Burj Al Arab, on the Costa del Sol (Navarro-Jurado et al., 2019).

A higher density of buildings for the same number of tourists suggests less occupation and exploitation of the space, especially if they have a balanced distribution of water and green areas. According to Gaffron et al. (2005), sustainable cities are characterized by having a medium height and a medium-high building density, between 0.8 and 3.0. Type 1 and Type 2 comply with those densities, particularly the Type 2 ones, which have an average density that allows optimum fabrics to be created to develop qualified private free spaces, regarding the water area and maintaining green areas. Low densities, as is the case in Type 3, and especially in golf courses, increase water consumption and the privatization of space, and risks for the future integrity of local socio-ecological systems (Briassoulis, 2007), but it seems that they are directed more toward real estate products than toward active and dynamic tourist destinations (Del Campo Gomis et al., 2006).

High-density constructs potentially prevent social segregation. Density is also indicative of urban quality or transformation potential, as can be seen in the case of Monaco, where the evolution from a spa city model (similar to Type 3) toward high urban density has allowed sustainable development based on citizen participation. D’Hauteserre (2005: 308) concludes that “Monaco’s practices demonstrate its pragmatic adaptation to global environmental, economic and cultural systems and a realistic application of sustainability principles. Monaco’s leadership has applied, when possible, ‘human-centred sustainable development.’” Monaco shows that high density is also a symbol of high purchasing power. In contrast, the model of Dubai, and particularly of the islands, can only find a potential for urban recovery and social cohesion by examining the parts of the city that generate life outside the “spectacle city” (Elsheshtawy, 2010).

The pre-Fordist tourism construct of density > 1 (Type 1) and the Fordist tourism constructs of density 1 (Type 2) are a reasonable option for mass tourism in terms of morphology and spatial patterns. In both cases, architecture plays a crucial role in the construction of the tourist event itself because of the iconic capacity of the building as an element to generate tourism (Scerri et al., 2019). In the first case, the scant amount of green areas and water requires the existence of iconic architectures; in this regard, many historic centres have carried out recovery policies of cultural heritage for its regeneration (Richards, 2011) through the transformation of monuments into cultural icons. In the second case, the Fordist tourist megalopolis’s great ability to restructure (Gausa, 1996) allows its renovation against obsolescence through the design of iconographic urban projects, as has been the case in Benidorm, where its urban design projects have created an attractive and efficient tourist city (Nolasco-Cirugeda et al., 2020).

6 Conclusion

Even though Charley (2010) does not believe that capitalist economic development is sustainable, a comparative study of the various capitalist constructs throughout history suggests that planning should consider the value of building density accompanied by a balanced distribution of water and green areas, along with a balanced arrangement of iconic architectures. However, transformations of waterfronts with iconic morphological patterns should be avoided.

In addition to the pre-Fordist constructs, which benefit from their urban status, the Fordist construct of densities close to 1 is a balanced model for mass tourism because it allows for an adequate amount of green areas and swimming pools with a reasonable distribution. Nonetheless, the Fordist construction processes were guided by principles of standardization and economy. Therefore, they generated a construct considered rather more an accommodation infrastructure than the iconographic value of its architecture and construction of the landscape. The main drawback is the poor quality of its landscape because socially they were products designed for access by the majority of the population, with less social segregation. The required conversion of the destination would be midway between two revitalization trends. On the one hand, the temptation is to evolve as post-Fordist tourism constructs, with the danger of environmental and social impacts. On the other hand, increasing the number of architectures of spectacle plays a key role in the construction of an always vibrant and lively destination.

This research has limitations particularly in terms of representativeness of the selected case studies. The models studied are just a sample of a broad spectrum of urban morphologies and architectures. Even though they are representative models of each phase of the evolution of capitalism, we cannot generalize the results of the research to other geographical areas. Future research should focus on comparative studies of each period of capitalism by expanding the number of case studies. Along these lines, it would be interesting to analyse the tourism constructs of the world’s sun and beach tourism areas in order to be able to assess the impacts they have suffered in their evolutionary process.

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