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Conceição Silva,
“the architect of tourism”: “from Coderch to Candilis”.

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Introduction: Architecture and Urbanism of mass Tourism
Translated to Spanish as Arquitectura y Urbanismo del Turismo de Masas [Architecture and Urbanism of Mass Tourism] 1 Georges Candilis’ (1913–1995) book is the first and most probably the only comprehensive study developed in the disciplinary area of architecture on the phenomenon of mass tourism. Based on the French sociologist Joffre Dumazedier (Dumazedier, 1962) theoretical reflections over the impact of leisure on contemporary society, Candilis begins by clarifying the reason for this book: “the search for an authentic architecture of mass leisure” (Candilis, 1973, p. 5). And he justifies:

“It is our duty to analyse and show the visible or invisible relations between leisure and the different everyday life activities [...] This permanent, uninterrupted, diversified presence of the different types of leisure in man's life impregnates and transforms the very concept of the art of building, subverts the hierarchy of values established in the past and implies de prevalence of collective facilities in future interventions. This new perspective brings new ways of human settlement, new relationships between such settlements, new concepts of life, work, and communications, claiming a new architectural and urban attitude.” (Candilis, 1973, p. 7)

According to Candilis, this new attitude implied a double process of “dissection” and “reconnection” (Avermaete, 2004, p. 32). At first by the definition of minimal composition units — equivalent to the dwelling cell or part of it — that would then be combined together based on an underlying regulatory grid to form a new urban entity. In the case of single-family accommodations (row, patio and “puzzle” houses) by horizontal association, while in collective housing by vertical assembly of a denser or more dispersed character and introducing 45º deployments. In both cases always with different possibilities of spatial and volume configurations. Illustrating the proposed solutions, the book presented some of the architect’s projects, focusing in particular on those developed for the seaside resort of Port Leucate-Barcarès (1964–1972) built ex-nihilo on the French Mediterranean coast of the Languedoc-Roussillon. Here, in opposition to the growing simplification of the living cell interior, the new rhythms of holiday time introduced a different understanding of the relationship with the natural environment and public space, promoting the expansion of family life into the private and collective exterior and, as a result, the interconnection between the various dimensions and scales of intervention: the architectural, the urban and the landscape (Avermaete, 2004, p. 42). What is advocated with this approach is the retrieval of the relation between typology and morphology in a critique of modern urban development models.

But Georges Candilis goes further. Within the same logic of generative composition and from the democratic ideal of the “right
to leisure for the greatest number”, he presents an alternative housing solution – the “Hexacube” or “Dice Houses” – economically more accessible and more culturally adapted to the flexibility and mobility needs of mass consumer society. A dwelling unit situated “between house, tent and caravan”, composed by support (floor and ceiling) and façade elements (wall, door or window) along with different features of interior equipment (kitchen, toilet, beds, storage). Built in fiberglass, this solution allied prefabrication methods and standard forms with the possibility of a certain individualisation of the final product, but also of future spatial evolution, by selecting from a range of pre-defined components.

This idea of flexibility is also at the basis of the “Mecanno System” developed in the tourist unit of Port Leucate-Barcarès as a three-dimensional primary structure composed of a pillar and two beams, which, in addition to covered and uncovered pedestrian routes and meeting places, could integrate various activities – commercial, administrative, cultural and recreational – in a scheme that simultaneously favoured the diversity and spontaneity of occupation and formally guaranteed the unity of the whole (Candilis, 1973, p. 113). Inspired by the game with the same name which offered endless possibilities of construction, this system referred to the concept of “stem”, introduced in 1960 by Shadrach Woods (Woods, 1960, p. 181), forming a mediating space between the spheres of private and public life that also offered “endless possibilities”, in this case of social and cultural “construction”. Intended to serve as a connection infrastructure between the inland lagoon and the sea, this system never reached its full potential as an architectural element generating collective urban space once it was only rehearsed in the captaincy building of the Leucate port, and in the sailing school and the commercial centre of the CIL-CAF (1965–1975) tourist village in Le Barcarès.

However, Georges Candilis’ intervention in Port Leucate-Barcarès is more than a test laboratory for the new “architectures of the sun”. It is representative of the change in scale witnessed at the turn of the decade in seaside resorts, with the hotel building giving way to the holiday mega-structure and the new cities of “sun, sand and sea” tourism. It was no longer just about equipping free time, but about planning the territory of leisure itself. Considered the main European seaside destination since the 1960s, the Iberian coast is undoubtedly the place where this transformation is best recognised. In the works of José António Coderch (1913–1984), Francisco Saénz de Oíza (1918–2000) or Ricardo Bofill (b.1939), in Spain, and, in Portugal, condensed in the production of Atelier Conceição Silva.

**Costa Iberica: “between the number 1 and the number 25.000”**

At the time of the construction of Leucate-Barcarès also the Iberian coast registers a significant increase in the demand for “sun, sand and sea” tourism, with Spain reaching ten million tourist entries within
its borders in 1964 and Portugal one million. Despite the disparity in the numbers, these values have a considerable effect in the local economies, generating a non-negligible income for the gross domestic product of both countries. On a territorial level, the development of seaside tourism would imply a structural transformation in the physical organisation of the coastline, in what Mario Gaviria has called “neo-colonialism of the production and use of quality space” (Gaviria, 1974, p. 275). In Spain, this particular issue had been the main theme of discussion in the 5th and 6th Pequeños Congresos (PPCC) [Small Congresses] of Malaga and Tarragona held in April and December of the previous year, this last one with the special participation of Georges Candilis, invited precisely to present the Languedoc-Roussillion plan. Created by Oriol Bohigas (b. 1925), from “Grupo R” (1951–1959) in Barcelona of which José Antonio Coderch was a leading member, and Carlos de Miguel (1904–1986), director of the Spanish Arquitectura magazine of the Colegio de Arquitectos of Madrid, the PPCC worked, from 1959 – the year of the dissolution of the CIAM – to 1969, as a collective platform for the debate of the most pressing problems related to the professional practice in Spain (Correia, 2010). The focus of two consecutive meetings on the same topic of the urban planning in coastal areas is revealing of the impact of the tourism phenomenon on the existing socio-spatial structures.3

News from the Malaga meeting reach Portugal through the publication of Federico Correa’s (1924) article Consideraciones sobre el Urbanismo en relación con el turismo en España [Considerations on Urban Planning in relation to tourism in Spain] in the Portuguese Arquitectura magazine in March 1964 (Correa, 1964, p. 40),4 where the architect advocates a “greater concentration” in alternative to “the current situation of extensive garden city development”. “Coderch’s solution for the urbanisation of Torre Valentina, which unfortunately did not materialize for other reasons, was, in my view, the perfect solution to this problem of building and can nevertheless bear fruit in similar situations”. Presented at the last CIAM in Otterlo, the Torre Valentina tourist-residential complex was also one of the main projects discussed in 1960 at the 3rd PPCC, in San Sebastian, dedicated to “Architecture bound to the tourist use of the territory”. In the Portuguese Binário magazine, Rafael Echaide highlighted the complexity of José Antonio Coderch and Manuel Valls proposal, combining twenty-six different layout options for the residential units “in an urban solution that is an example of adaptation to the topography and the character of the landscape” (Echaide, 1961, p. 201). More importantly, the project contemplated the possibility of serial construction, a “rationalist” principle “that in no way opposes the human values of its architecture”. In the sense that both architectural and urban forms are achieved by the regular repetition of cellular composition elements, Torre Valentina announced the transposition to tourism related developments of the “conglomeratic” design method (Avermaete, 2004, p. 34) that
Georges Candilis would further expand in Port Leucate-Barcarès, based on the investigation of alternative figures of dwelling and urban planning he had been exploring together with Alexis Josic (1921-2011) and Shadrach Woods (1923-1973). The difference between Coderch and Candilis approaches was one of scale. And this is clearly stated at the Team 10 Royaumont meeting of 1962, where during the presentation of Candilis-Josic-Woods plan for 25,000 housing units in Toulouse-le-Mirail, designed only in five months, Coderch commented he needed at least the same amount of time to study the project of a single home (Távora, 1963, p. 1). Also invited to attend the meeting, with him was Francisco Sáenz de Oíza (1918-2000) at the time engaged with the design of Ciudad Blanca of Alcudia (1961-1963) in Mallorca, a new seaside city for middle class leisure that was closer to Candilis concerns with mass society and also played with mechanisms of juxtaposition, superposition and sliding of modules to create an artificial urban topography. For Fernando Távora (1923-2005), the spirit of the Royaumont meeting was possibly in the contrast of positions personified by Coderch and Candilis, “between the number 1 and the number 25,000” (Távora, 1963, p. 1). Confronted with the tangible truth of both sides, the question was “how to achieve the essential synthesis of the same continuous reality between elements so real and so seemingly opposed?”

It is precisely this ideological conflict between identity and mass production values that is at the origin of a major fracture within the Portuguese disciplinary debate. A fracture exposed at the National Meeting of Architects (ENA) of 1969 as a result of a particular “architecture of the sun” also published in the Arquitectura magazine: the Balaia Hotel (1964-1968) by architects Francisco Conceição Silva and Maurício de Vasconcellos.

**Francisco Conceição Silva: “the architect of tourism”**

To speak of tourism and architecture in Portugal in the 1960s is to speak about the work of Francisco Conceição Silva (1922-1982). Between 1950 and 1974 the architect’s office produced around two hundred tourism-related projects, almost half of them effectively built. This number does not include private holiday houses, another area in which the atelier would also be quite requested. Furthermore, the majority of those commissions can be narrowed down to the last nine years of that time span, testifying the quick march of capitalist society towards a “leisure civilisation” in the mid 1960s. And, in a country where the coast represents over than forty percent of its continental border, it is not surprising that only an insignificant part of these projects is not associated with seaside developments. The commitment to this specific type of architectural programme, accounting to a third of the office’s production, and the amount of work sustained in such a short period of time, rather unusual for the common professional practice, either in a national or international context, seemed out of place at
a moment when most Portuguese architects were ideologically engaged in the social aspect of their role in society, fighting for the “right to housing for the greatest number”. To align with the interests of the big capitalist companies and their economical agendas was not favourably viewed amongst the professional class, even if under the conviction of ensuring the “right to leisure for the greatest number”. This divergence of views, on the way architects should act and what their priorities should be, led to a major fracture inside the Portuguese architectural discourse, with a clear demarcation between those who were against and those who embraced the “commercialisation” of architecture, the former in the name of an ethical exemption of the architect’s role as a social and cultural agent and, therefore, independent of market interests, and the latter in the perspective of a desired convergence between the structures of production and those of implementation. A division made more poignant at ENA, where what “was planned to be an informal meeting” ended up in “a formal disagreement” (Almeida, 1969, p. 200).

To understand the reasons behind this debate it is necessary to look back eight months, when the Balaia Hotel makes the cover of the Arquitectura magazine in its issue of March/April 1969. In the article that complements the publication, Tomas Taveira (responsible, within Atelier Conceição Silva, for the architecture project) starts by pointing out that “the degree of development of the various techniques that constitute the background of the profession does not allow the project exercise to be carried out with efficiency and professionalism [...] without integration [...] of interdisciplinary work which [...] is essential when these become highly complex. The architectural object is a product whose design structure is based, at the research level, on a notion of high complexity” (Taveira, 1969, p. 53). This comment emphasises, not only the change in scale that takes place in the challenges faced by architects at the time, but also the perception of architecture as a “product”, subject to market logics like any other object of mass consumption. Faced with this new reality, Taveira “risk(s) stating that only the creation of ateliers ’or companies’ with the defined purpose of obtaining a technical know-how that is not within the reach of the stairwell atelier working in the evenings, can allow the development of architecture to the degree of correct professionalism”. For architect Francisco Conceição Silva it is the groundbreaking “turn key” commission of the Balaia Hotel that provides this “leap forward” and, with him, the hotel industry in Portugal would follow.

Implying that the hotel had to be delivered as a finished product, ready for immediate use, the “turn key” concept introduced a structural transformation in the traditional role of the architect, from creative asset to manager of the entire production process, including construction, interior and furniture design and, even, advertising. For this purpose, between 1964 and 1969, the architect devised a
network of companies working in straight relationship with the main architecture office: a building company (AC – Trabalhos de Arquitectura e Construção), a real estate investment company (SIURBE – Sociedade de Investimentos Imobiliários) and a publicity company (ARP – Agência de Realizações Publicitárias). The atelier would also be restructured to incorporate the partnership with architect Maurício de Vasconcellos (1925–1997), established between 1965 and 1967, and a wider team of collaborators, comprising graphic and equipment designers, painters and sculptors in a bauhausian approach to the integration of the different arts and of the artistic practice into the logics of industrial production. It was Conceição Silva’s conviction that this was the path for a closer involvement with society (Silva, 1971, p. 46). By providing for the real needs of the public and, thereby, educating its taste, it was possible to balance commercial concerns with “high culture” values, in what Jorge Figueira considers to be a precursory step towards a “democratisation of taste, the availability of the erudite for collective fruition” (Figueira, 2010, p. 87).

In transition: “from Coderch to Candilis”

After the Balaia Hotel, Conceição Silva’s production shifted from mainly residential and shop design projects to office buildings and,
above all, tourism infrastructures. The Urbanisation of the Tróia Peninsula (1970–1971/1973–1974), for Torralta, would be the most ambitious of these undertakings: creating, from the ground, an entire city dedicated exclusively to seaside leisure. It also represents the culmination of a professional course that had begun with the Hotel do Mar (1960–1963/1965–1966) in Sesimbra, the architect’s first hotel commission where he rehearses a different approach to seaside architecture by deconstructing the traditional monolithic block of the International Style beach hotel model of the 1950s. Together, these three projects – the Hotel do Mar, the Balaia Hotel and the Urbanisation of the Tróia Peninsula – define the already mentioned typological evolution in seaside tourism architectures: from the hotel, to the mega-structure and the city of leisure. An evolution that illustrates the contrast in scale – “between the number 1 and the number 25,000” – expressed in Team 10’s Royaumont meeting, introducing an “in-between” stage. This idea of transition is furthermore reinforced by the gradual change in the conceptual and formal references that inform each of these works, mirroring the development of the international disciplinary debate on the revision of the Modern Movement. Starting from the exercise of “Mediterraneanisation of the modern” of the Hotel do Mar (Figure

Fig. 2 Le Grande Large (1971–1974), Port Barcarés, Georges Candilis. Postcard. Source: Author’s Collection.
1), inspired in the contemporary works of José António Coderch and Francisco Sáenz de Oíza, but also in a “transhistorical stylisation closer to BBPR’s Neo-liberty ethos, namely their metaphorical Velasca tower, in Milan” (Barata, 2000, p. 55). Then moving to the Balaia Hotel conglomerate composition (Figure 3) which combines Coderch’s indented design of the Hotel de Mar (1962-1964) in Palma de Mallorca with a structuralist “configurative” spatial approach (Avermaete, 2004, p. 34), that reports us to the works of Aldo Van Eyck (1918-1999) or Herman Hertzberger (b.1932), intersected by an Anglo-Saxon neo-brutalist expression. To end in the alternative urban and architectural solutions of the Torralta complex in the Tróia Peninsula (Figure 8), that convey the same experimental spirit of Candilis’ research on mass tourism developments but, here, also referred to Alison (1928-1993) and Peter (1923-2003) Smithson and James Stirling’s (1926-1992) grand scale, high-density collective housing schemes with elevated pedestrian streets, punctuated by, again, neo-brutalist references and a vague hint to “Japanese metabolist” structures (Barata, 2000, p. 63). The use of colour, even if in a more subdued manner, enhancing the architectural composition of the residential blocks, additionally suggests some affinities with Ricardo Bofill’s post-modern take on regional architecture and pop culture, in particular the La Muralla Roja (1968-1973) project in Alicante. A wide spectrum of influences

Fig. 3 Balaia Hotel (1964–1968), Praia Maria Luísa, Francisco Conceição Silva. Aerial photo. Source: Taveira, 1969, p. 54.
that ranges and evolves from a Mediterranean vernacular syntax and
textures to embrace the new “isms” that the revision of modernity by
Team 10 precipitates at a global scale.

Although no concrete evidence of any personal or professional
relation has ever been established between Conceição Silva and
Coderch or Candilis, it is interesting to note the coincidence of
design methods concurrently developed by the three architects for
seaside tourism related projects. The recourse to similar composition
mechanisms of formal and spatial configuration (juxtaposition,
superposition, sliding, etc) allows us to identify contact elements
in their architectural production. This is more straightforward in
Conceição Silva’s Hotel do Mar and Balaia Hotel, where we can find
more or less direct citations of Coderch’s solutions for Torre Valentina
and Hotel de Mar, but which we can also relate to some of Candilis’
collective housing deployments in Port Leucate-Barcarés or to his
reflections on mass tourism architecture and urban planning.

Following the same concept explored by Coderch, in both the
Portuguese hotels Conceição Silva divides the functional programme
in two parts – the social and the private cores – with distinctive
characterisations. In the Hotel do Mar, in Sesimbra, the layout of the
bedroom wings evolves from a stepped composition, in the initial stage
of construction, reminiscent of the third project for the Torre Valentina’s

Fig. 4 Hotel de Mar (1962–1964), Palma de
Mallorca, José Antonio Coderch. Photo. Source:
Cuadernos de Arquitectura, 1966, p.22.
hotel, to a fan-shaped plan, in the extension areas, identical to the one later used by Candilis in the Le Grande Large (1971-1974) residential complex in Port Barcarés (Figure 2). In all cases, the authors highlight the intention of, through these fragmentation devices, reducing the impact of the new constructions in the natural extant settings, as well as attaining their integration in a Mediterranean context, not only in formal terms, but equally by creating private terraces and balconies for an extended outdoor living. As Candilis would put it, “it is not about making a ‘regionalist’ architecture, but about finding new solutions that are a direct consequence of a realistic tradition based on climatic conditions” (Candilis, 1973, 25). On the other hand, in the Balaia Hotel, near Albufeira in the Algarve, Conceição Silva explores a more concentrated and self-referenced scheme in the jagged vertical body of the bedrooms, inspired in Coderch’s Hotel de Mar (1962-1964) (Figure 4) and Candilis’ La Sardane building (1965) (Figure 5), also in Port Barcarés, although in these last two cases most of the living units are placed in a 45° angle in relation to the coastline. Nevertheless, if we take in consideration that the final plan for the Balaia Hotel results from the adaptation of the never built project of an Aparthotel in Quarteira (1966) (Figure 6) the connection to Coderch and Candilis is made more evident. A project that incorporated the 45° fishbone layout of the final solution for Torre Valentina’s hotel (Figure 7) and which Candilis considered in his book as the solution for providing “the maximum facades oriented to an elected place and ensure the privacy of the exterior private spaces” (Candilis, 1973, p. 68).

In Tróia, the focus is not so much on the interplay of cellular dwelling units but on the design of the urban form. The use of a composition grid of territorial occupation, comprised by rows of
apartments and aparthotel towers (Figure 9), establishes a precise and rigorous matrix where the built elements are grouped creating a system of green open-air courtyards that define neighbourhood clusters of communal outdoor living and structure the circulation and access networks. Mediating the public and private realms, an elevated passerelle or promenade links the various apartment buildings, working simultaneously as a collective infrastructure and as an extension of the individual living space, while promoting, in the process, social encounter amongst residents. Moreover, for its dual character — directly related to the housing units while overlooking the surrounding settings — it guaranteed the connection between the different levels of intervention and, hence, the sense of continuity of the whole: architecture, urban environment and landscape. In contrast, the vertical aparthotel towers, treated as “nodes” in the layout grid of the plan that introduce punctual torsions in its regular base, are assumed as elements of visual ordinance of the territory, shaping the Tróia peninsula’s skyline and aiding the apprehension and recognition of the overall urban composition. Towards Conceição Silva’s conviction that “quality tourism is defined by what is offered and not by the economical capacity of the so-called quality tourist” (Silva, 1972, p. 6), a series of different recreational and commercial facilities, also exceptional for their distinctive and unique image, are strategically placed throughout the peninsula supporting the residential areas and the substantial flow of

weekend visitors, predicted to reach the number 25,000 in the summer months. A second urbanisation plan (Figure 10), never implemented, extended the intervention area to the riverfront and lagoon, proposing, like in Port Leucate-Barcarés, a spatiotemporal organisation of tourist activities divided between “summer coast” (sea) and “winter coast” (river). Here, besides a wider range of housing solutions, the main collective equipment would be the Marina, complemented by an array of cultural amenities – Congress Hall, Cultural Centre, Theatre, Museum, Exhibition Park and Casino – introduced to promote the continuity, after the holiday period, of the daily life in the region. In all, the proposed plans for Tróia consider a methodological approach similar to Georges Candilis’ for Port Leucate-Barcarés and crystallised in his book. Both in the adoption of an underlying grid that allows organising the group of dwellings, securing the structural and collective continuity of the whole and rationalising the construction process (Candilis, 1973, p. 16), and in the intention to “make a new architecture, governed by simplicity, economy and climatic conditions (enclosed spaces, courtyards for apartments, gardens for each block, etc” (Candilis, 1973, 131). But also because of a growing awareness “that it is inconceivable to transform an entire region only from the angle of leisure” (Candilis, 1973, p. 129), thus the inclusion of other amenities to help counteract the traditional seasonal character of seaside resorts.

Conclusion

Despite Portugal’s peripheral condition, political and geographically distant from the heart of the disciplinary debate of the 1960s, the production of Atelier Conceição Silva contradicts the common idea of cultural mismatch with the European context of the time. The three works analysed in this essay – Hotel do Mar, the Balaia Hotel and the Urbanisation of the Tróia Peninsula – testify to the architect’s close knowledge of the international architecture panorama, from an Iberian background to a broader scope of references. Either through the avid subscription of the main contemporary foreign periodicals of the field, or the input of his younger collaborators, in particular Pedro Vieira de Almeida (1933-2011), with a noteworthy contribution as an architectural critic in the Portuguese Arquitectura magazine, and Tomás Taveira (b.1938), known to be one of the most up-to-date and travelled architects of his generation, with a special interest in British architecture. Additionally, these works mark the evolution from the small-scale atelier to the interdisciplinary office megastructure. An evolution always defined by the high standard, innovation and quality of the architect’s production.

Hence, and as a way of conclusion, we claim that, if Fernando Távora is the Portuguese architect that personally witnesses the transition from CIAM to Team 10, it is Francisco Conceição Silva that truly embodies the transitional spirit conveyed by the different discourse and production approaches of Team 10 members, particularly through his work on tourism projects. A transition that starts by being one in scale – from the individual tourist to mass organised tourism or “between the number 1 and the number 25,000” – but, with it, also a transition in influences, geographies and visions that support these “architectures of the sun” – “from Coderch to Candilis” and, from here, to the rest of the world.
First published in 1972 by Karl Krämer Verlag of Stuttgart in a trilingual edition (German, French and English) with the title Planen und Bauen für die Freizeit/Recherches sur l'Architecture des Loisirs/Planning and Design for Leisure.

3 The 7th PPCC would take place in Segovia, in 1965, under the theme “Urban planning of historical-artistic cities” with the presence of another Team 10 member, Giancarlo De Carlo (1919-2005), presenting his project for Urbino (Correia, 2010, pp.19–21).

4 Originally published in the Spanish Arquitectura magazine, issue number 55.

5 A partnership that lasted from 1956 to 1970, all of them members and important contributors to Team 10.

6 From a list of more than six hundred entries compiled from Francisco Conceição Silva's Atelier archive and the exhibition catalogue Francisco Conceição Silva Arquitecto: 1922/1982 (AAVV, 1982), still the only publication to this date dedicated to the architect's work.

7 Specially if we take into account that “the Candilis-Josic-Woods partnership realised around ninety tourism projects in a time span of about twenty-four years” (Avermaete, 2004, p.22), less than half the production of Atelier Conceição Silva in the same amount of time.

8 As the article “Habitações para o maior número” [Housing for the greatest number] by Nuno Teotónio Pereira for Arquitectura magazine expressed at the time (Pereira, 1969, pp.181–183).

9 Fernando Távora was one of the Portuguese delegation architects that participated in the CIAM conferences in Hoddesdon (1951), Aix-en-Provence (1953), Dubrovnik (1956) and Otterlo (1959) and was the only architect from Portugal to be invited to attend the Team 10 Royaumont meeting of 1962. Amancio Guedes, although also present for the first time, is considered as an active and long-term participant of Team 10, hence we place him in a different category from Távora.

References


— Cuadernos de Arquitectura (1959), 37, pp. 18–21.


