



Holiday on the coast of Port Leucate-Barcarès, Photograph. © Fondo CANGE-G.
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Tourist towns in Languedoc—Roussillon: projects and discourse for mass tourism

BY IZOL MAREZ LÓPEZ

Greenfield tourist towns in Languedoc—Roussillon, built in the 1960s, are some of the best examples of the application of modern principles in the production of architecture and space for mass tourism. Contributions of the Modern Movement in the construction of tourist facilities are thus exposed through the analysis of the theoretical proposals put into practice by Georges Candilis and Jean Balladur, modern architects of the third generation in France, in two of the tourist projects on the Languedoc—Roussillon coastline: *La Grande—Motte* and *Port Leucate—Barcarès*.

Mass tourism

From the 19th century, the production of tourist facilities has undergone transformations derived from the emerging needs of society. The first cultural voyages undertaken by the English, influenced by the society of the 19th century for the creation of the first tourist resorts in Europe had, as a consequence, the consumption of the territory and the transformation of the landscape.

In 1936, tourism in France underwent a great change when workers were granted paid vacations. During these periods of rest and recreation, motivated by contact with nature and the sea, the vacationers moved en masse to the French coast, sometimes in their mobile homes to camp on the beach.

The democratization of leisure activities generated a change of scale, the masses invaded the European coasts and the previously used spa facilities lost their validity. The hotels, casinos, residences and ports built in a traditional way in the 19th century tourist resorts were adapted to meet the needs of a massive sun and beach tourism, which led to the appearance of a new architecture adapted to the new leisure society.

In the mid-20th century, passive vacations were transformed into active vacations. Nautical sports were available to all, due to the introduction of plastic for the construction of boats. Step by step, the coasts of France were invaded by the masses. A transformation of spontaneous and unorganized coastlines was observed. *Ports de plaisance* [leisure ports] were built for nautical activities, and the beaches became insufficient, overflowing and decadent. The rise of boating became the activity generating the tourist exploitation of the coast of Languedoc-Roussillon. The *ports de plaisance* and marinas would be the urban elements guiding the nautical activities on the French coast and causing the change in the activities in tourist resorts (Figure 01).

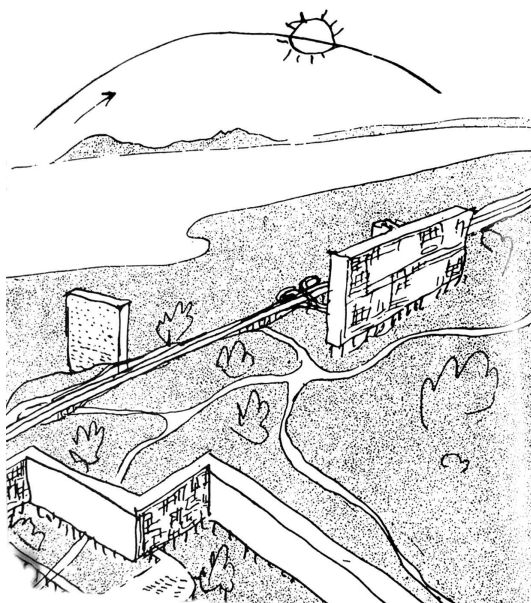
Modern architecture in France

In France, after the WWII, the government faced the needs of the reconstruction of bombed cities and the housing deficit through the creation of various agencies and public institutions that would be responsible for the reconstruction and production of housing. The magazine *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* published, in 1947, a letter from the architect Marcel Lods (1891–1978) in which he exhorted architects and urban planners to apply the *ordre ouvert*¹ implicit in *The Athens Charter* (Figure 02).

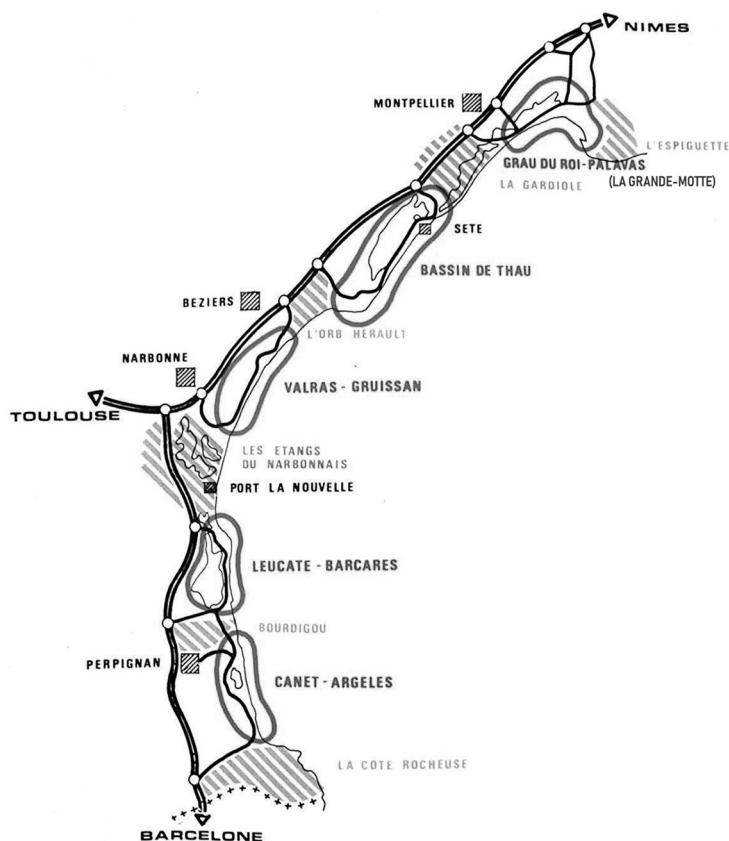
The official use of *ordre ouvert* in the construction of massive and collective housing located in the periphery, far from the urban centers, resulted in the production of *grands ensembles* [large-scale high-rise housing projects]. The rigidity and lack of flexibility in applying the principles established in *The Athens Charter*, generated their review and reformulation by the architects of TEAM 10, a group of architects of the third generation of the Modern Movement that would contribute with new forms of urban organization without giving up the postulates of modernity.

The members of *L'équipe Candilis-Josic-Woods*, active participants of this group, experimented on the elements of the vertical and horizontal articulation of residential buildings in various projects that broke with the rigid *edificio bloque* [slab block] line of their predecessors. In addition, they sought to rationalize the space based on functional criteria, considering climate, maintaining contact with nature, and also to recover concepts like the traditional *casa-patio* with solutions such as those that projected for *Atelier des bâtisseurs—Afrique* (ATBAT–Afrique).

In the second half of the 20th century, modern architecture and urbanism projected according to the principles of the *ordre ouvert*, had difficulties in adapting to urban landscapes. Most of the *grands ensembles* were located on the urban periphery and, for economic reasons, some of them



01 Le Corbusier, *Ordre ouvert*. Hand drawing. © Le Corbusier.
L'urbanisme des trois établissements humains.
Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1959.



02 Scheme of tourist units made for the tourist management at the Languedoc-Roussillon coastline.
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grew larger, generating serious urban and social problems. On the other hand, the *ordre ouvert* was adapted in a natural way to the needs of tourist facilities in places where the user especially valued some of the principles of the relationship of architecture to nature that the Modern Movement pursued and could not perform in the city.

It was in tourist resort areas where modern architecture could adapt some of its proposals. Initially, it was the “Five Points of a new architecture” by Le Corbusier that adapted to the new practices of a leisure society. The terrace garden became the ideal space for the enjoyment of the sea and the landscape, and the pedestrian street a place to walk, consume and socialize.

Architecture of leisure

In 1969, when *L'équipe Candilis-Josic-Woods* was dissolved, Georges Candilis (1913–1995) began writing a series of texts regarding the architecture of leisure. He wrote three articles and published a book in which he left reflected on his thoughts based on his experiences of many years in which remodeling ports, hotels, master plans and holiday homes were included.

In his speech on an architecture of leisure, he analyzed the evolution of this human activity based on two facts:

- the importance and role of the architect in the evolution of leisure;
- the influence of the civilization of leisure on architecture.

The weekend exodus to the countryside and the annual trip of city dwellers to vacation spots put the authorities in

trouble rather than sociologists or urban planners. George Candilis highlighted the importance they have taken in leisure society:

Leisure today touches a large number of people, it is subject to economic laws and it must be organized so that it is accessible to all (economy wise). From a class phenomenon in the 19th century, it became a mass phenomenon in the 20th century².

Georges Candilis suggested an immediate reordering of the coasts in thinking that you should not only take action on the coasts but also in the space where leisure manifests itself: The architect must always be present. It is up to him to think, to organize, to participate in the new organization of the cities and their surroundings³. Georges Candilis affirms that leisure has become impregnated in everyday life transforming the conception of architecture, so much, that in the future it will form an essential part in the nature of the facilities and in the construction of the city. It refers to a leisure architecture, which appeared only a short time ago and which would undergo important changes in the future. To deal with the situation, he proposed not to invent a new architecture focused on leisure but to incorporate the notion of leisure in current structures: *habitat* architecture should contain the notion of leisure in the same way as the notion of living, working, resting, “It is a matter of defining a leisure architecture in which the human needs are part of the conditions of realization of the habitat”⁴.

In 1967, the article “*Vers une architecture du loisir*”⁵ by Georges Candilis was published in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*. At the beginning, there is a quote from Joffre Dumazedier (1915–2002), author of *Vers une civilisation des loisirs*:

*Thus, for a hundred years, leisure has been growing and has become more valuable. It is expanding. It is not a secondary but central product of the present civilization. Has the world entered the civilization of leisure?*⁶

Georges Candilis adds that it was time to admit that “...the leisure of the masses, of the greatest number, is becoming a crucial phenomenon of contemporary civilization”⁷. In the content there is a remarkable transcription of the ideas of Joffre Dumazedier that showed on the part of the architect, a consideration for mass culture especially in the field of tourism.

Similarly, he stated that: “leisure has become a part of the organization of society”⁸. At the time, it was glimpsed that society was heading to a time where the time corresponding to the individual's work will be less than leisure time. No matter who, everyone had the right to leisure. Modern life had become so complicated, so fatiguing, so confused, that if man did not have the possibility to enjoy leisure, then he would be in imbalance so, according to Georges Candilis: “Leisure will allow man to find his lost balance”⁹.

In the article it refers to the three major functions of leisure mentioned previously by Joffre Dumazedier in his work *Vers une civilisation des loisirs* [Towards a civilization of leisure]: rest, fun and development. Each one fulfills its own objective. Rest frees man from fatigue and allows fun to overtake boredom. Development liberates man from the aspects of conformism and automatism of thought and daily actions and helps the flowering of personality. These three functions coexist in varying degrees, for all situations and for all beings.

According to Georges Candilis: “We cannot isolate the problem of leisure from the concept of human life's environment”¹⁰, since leisure is permanently manifested, intertwined with other activities and sometimes dominates them. The permanent, uninterrupted, diversified and growing presence of leisure in the life of man permeates and transforms the very conception of the art of construction. It proposes three types of leisure according to the place they occupy in the life of men: 1) daily-urban leisure, 2) weekly-suburban leisure and 3) seasonal-regional leisure, alluding that the author resumes: “Everyday leisure, end-time leisure Weekdays, leisure holidays, are present in the evolution of architecture and sometimes direct it”.

Tourist management of the Languedoc-Roussillon coastline

In France, the actions carried out to face the imminent development of massive sun and beach tourism in the 1960s coincided with official regional planning policies that integrated

tourism into activities that could be exploited to achieve economic equilibrium of the French regions. The first of the tourist projects implemented by the French Government that contributed to the economic development of France was the Tourism Management of the Languedoc-Roussillon coast, under the charge of the *Délégation à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'action régionale* (DATAR) [Delegation for regional planning and regional action]. The aim of this initiative was to boost the socio-economic development of the Languedoc-Roussillon region, which had remained based on a precarious agricultural base. The Interministerial Mission (Operation Racine¹¹), was in charge of operating the tourism policy determined by the DATAR.

To make the region of Languedoc-Roussillon suitable for the development of tourism, the Interministerial Mission made some preliminary actions such as the eradication of mosquitoes and the advanced acquisition of land to avoid future speculation. The Agency for Architecture and Urbanism (AAU) was responsible for drawing up the plan and the project to act in the region. This agency comprised Georges Candilis as president, Jean Balladur (1924–2002) as general secretary and the architects Jean Le Couteur (1916–2010), Raymond Gleize (1913–1992), Edouard Hartané (1910–2003), H. Castella (b. 1921), Eugene Beaudouin (1898–1983) and André Gomis (1926–1971).

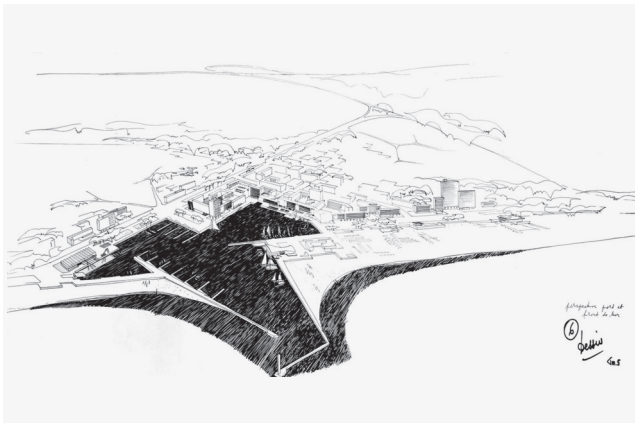
The AAU was dedicated to the exploration of the area, recognition of the landscape and study of the built and cultural heritage of the region. It also helped to locate land for a regional acquisition policy that avoided speculation and proposed a Plan for Urban Structure of the Region and a Technical Infrastructure Master Plan. The latter included actions such as the eradication of mosquitoes, reforestation of the region, drinking water supply, a road network and the creation or rehabilitation of 20 *ports de plaisance*.

In 1964, the *Plan d'Urbanisme d'Intérêt Régional* (PUIR) [Urban Plan of Regional Interest] was officially presented. The main objectives were:

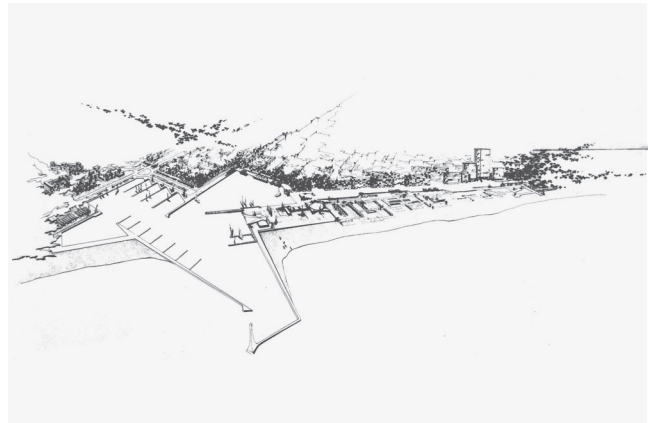
- to unify and balance tourism and the economy of 200 kilometers of coastline according to the needs of the place;
- diversify each of the zones based on the differences marked by nature and history;
- provide the characteristics of the coastal region that distinguish it from other regions and can compete favorably with them;
- contribute to the integral enrichment of the region, spreading tourism activity within the region.

The plan proposed a new structure of the region's coastline based on the establishment along the coast of tourist units (*unités touristiques*), protected green areas, tourist developments on greenfield sites and a system of *ports de plaisance*, which included existing or newly-created ports. The new tourist developments considered the port as the leading element of the main activities of the city. The first urban areas built were the two located at the ends of the region: *La Grande-Motte* and *Port Leucate-Barcarès* (Figure 03).

03 *La Grande—Motte*, France (1964). Perspective of the Port and the Sea front (Version 1). © Fondo BALJE—C—64. Dossier 373 IFA 211. *Centre d'Archives d'architecture du xx^e siècle de l'Institut français d'architecture*.



04 *La Grande—Motte*, France (1964). Perspective of the Port and the Sea front (Version 2). © Fondo BALJE—C—64. Dossier 373 IFA 211. *Centre d'Archives d'architecture du xx^e siècle de l'Institut français d'architecture*.



La Grande-Motte

In the *Centre d'Archives d'architecture du xxe siècle* of the *Institut français d'architecture* [Center of 20th century Architectural Archives of the French Institute of Architecture] located in Paris, there are unpublished documents (plans, diagrams, sketches, models, etc.) that recorded the creative process of both Georges Candilis in the *Port Leucate-Barcarès* project and Jean Balladur in *La Grande-Motte*. Both architects reflected, in a more intense way, the influence of the Modern Movement on the preliminary designs, which were modified and corrected in the design process.

There are three preliminary designs by Jean Balladur of *La Grande-Motte*. In the urban aspect, the drafts of *La Grande-Motte* are those that respond most to the principles of *The Athens Charter* with the application of zoning and *ordre ouvert* concepts. All proposals revolve around the *port de plaisance* and the city center that remained unchanged up to the final project and was built as the initial proposal. The urban structure started from a main road that crossed the city and led directly to the city center, the road system in the first two preliminary projects had the shape of a cluster of grapes with streets ending in parking areas and cul-de-sacs.

All the proposals of the architecture were made through a manifesto. Jean Balladur expressed in several sketches different ideas of the same project. A first manifesto uses the *edificio bloque* [slab block] on stilts with front sunshades to adapt the building to a holiday architecture (Figure 04). The second manifesto presents a continuous building composed of lodges, which generates a long façade with a play of light and shade. In both, you can see a covered corridor on the ground floor either by the existence of pillars or a series of arches (Figure 05). A third manifesto proposes a city with navigable canals that cross a stepped vertical mega-structure that allows the installation of terraces. The covered corridor or archway is repeated (Figure 06).

The three versions of *La Grande-Motte* present high-rise buildings far from the city center for what the *edificio bloque* [slab block] proposes with glazed facades or loggias.

In all the versions, the ground floor of the buildings present as pillars so that it can work as a series of porticos with shops and restaurants protected from the sun.

In the final project of *La Grande-Motte*, the urban structure is maintained around the *port de plaisance* located in the neighborhood called *centre-ville* that concentrates most of the recreational activities and commercial facilities. The urban structure starts from a hierarchical road system that is characterized by roads that end in parking areas and cul-de-sacs. The road system is a cluster that is less organic and spontaneous, but which allows the circulation of vehicles without interfering with pedestrian mobility.

The project eliminates the traditional urban elements of the spa city: promenade and sea front. The diagonal line of the buildings with respect to the beach opens the possibility to the properties located at the seafront to enjoy the view of the sea without obstacles. The open spaces include squares, gardens and non-traditional public green spaces such as a linear park (or parkway), a pedestrian promenade that connects the beach with a residential area in the interior of the city.

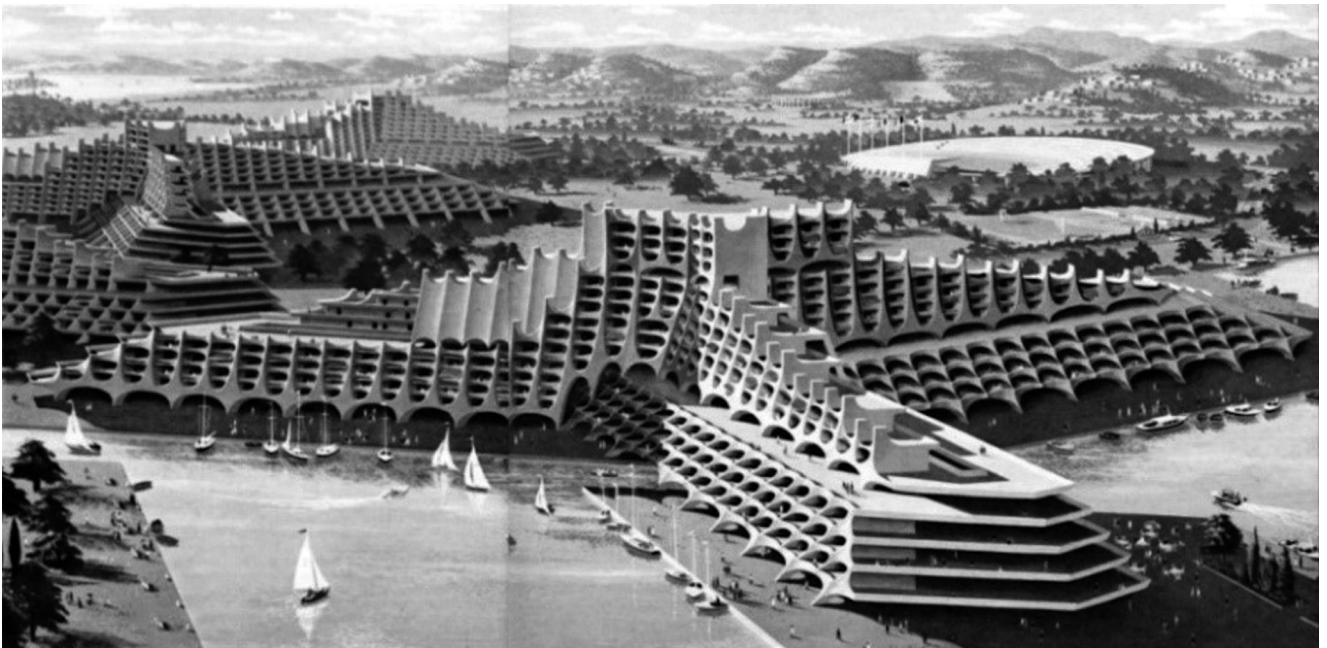
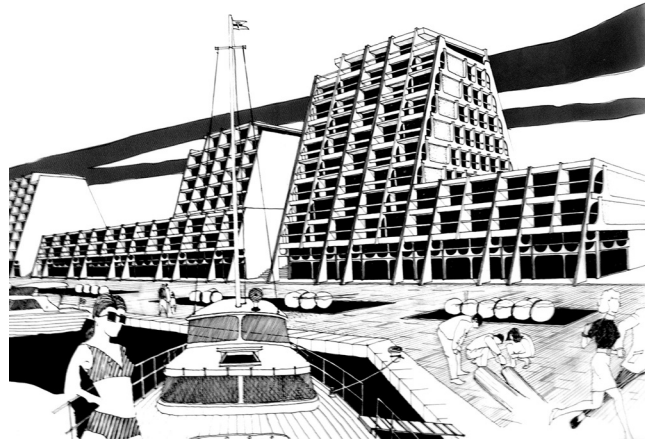
La Grande-Motte applied the modern concept of zoning where each area is a residential tourist district with an urban density and architectural typology different from the others. It can be said that the project replaces the zoning of uses of the industrial city by a zoning of architectural typologies for tourist accommodation. Areas are characterized by different densities, uses, heights and forms of the building.

Attached housing prevails in two types: pyramid buildings and shell buildings that innovate with their lattice-like facades. The architectural concept was based on a regulation that establishes the regulations to create a homogeneous city in harmony with nature, a white architecture with sinuous shapes achieved by the use of concrete (Figure 07).

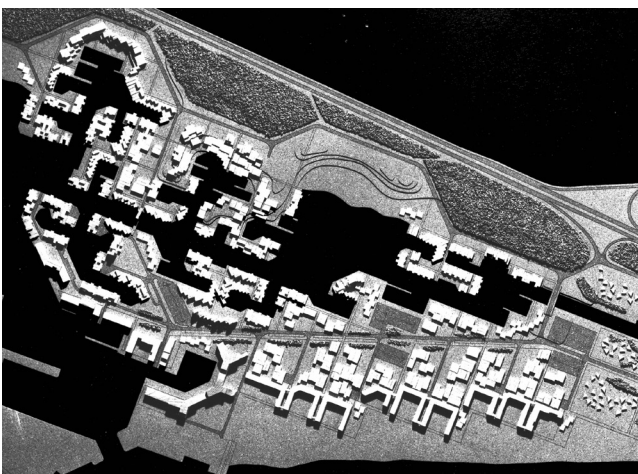
Port Leucate-Barcarès

There is a single preliminary design for *Port Leucate-Barcarès* by Georges Candilis presented in modalities, which shows the adaptation of the theoretical concepts previously

- 06 *La Grande Motte*, France (1969). Residential buildings Commodore, Concorde et Acapulco. © Fondo BALJE-C-67-2. Dossier 373 IFA 22/2. Centre d'Archives d'architecture du xx^e siècle de l'Institut français d'architecture.



- 05 *La Grande—Motte*, France (1964). [Version 3]. © "Voici la Floride de demain, *Le Languedoc*". Paris—Match. 1964, août, n° 799.



- 07 *Port Leucate—Barcarès*, France. Nautical boulevard model. © Fondo CANGE—G. Centre d'Archives d'Architecture du xx^e siècle de l'Institut français d'architecture.

formulated by the architect in his work with his colleagues Alexis Josic (1921–2011) and Shadrach Woods (1923–1973), immersed in the revisionist stage of the modern principles of *The Athens Charter* at the head of TEAM 10.

A first sketch of the city shows a mega-structure that runs through the entire site in a zigzag manner, allowing it to allocate a large part of the land to a green area and it is articulated by horizontal mega-structures or webs, conceived as dense points that concentrate spaces connected by patios. A vertical mega-structure spread over the land concentrates all the attached housing. The parking spaces are located at strategic points while navigable channels run through the land together with the buildings connecting the sea with the lake (Figure 08).

The urban design of the final project of *Port Leucate-Barcarès* is based on the concepts of zoning and a hierarchical road system with pedestrian priority. Each zone represents a neighborhood of individual or attached dwellings of low, medium or high density. A freeway crosses the entire city connecting it with other areas. Secondary and tertiary roads arise from the freeway to access the interior of the city in which the priority of the pedestrian with closed streets or cul-de-sacs predominates. Georges Candilis integrated stem concept within the tourist town by proposing a commercial pedestrian street that connects the sea with the lake and offering, along its route, the commercial and recreational facilities.

The architecture is characterized by the diversity of vacation habitats that represent the previous studies of Georges Candilis in his concern to solve housing problems for the less privileged classes. *Port Leucate-Barcarès* offers a typological diversity of leisure habitat that depends on accommodation needs. The attached buildings are characterized by the use of terraces, loggias and balconies commonly coupled at 45° (Figure 09). The individual dwellings are characterized by the patio as a central element of the house. New typologies are established, such as marinas for individual and attached housing and vacation villages for social housing. In the urban-tourist architecture, the web system was adapted for some shopping centers and the grids were used for the design of commercial pavilions and beach facilities.

In *Port Leucate-Barcarès*, Georges Candilis solves the road network in a different way. Since this summer town develops along a sandy Lido, which separates the sea from the inner lagoon, the general scheme is solved with a specialized road network that runs through the center of the lido and from which the parts are accessed. Along the landward side of the main access road a canal opens, around which a series of marinas or nautical boulevards are organized (Figure 10). Between the sea and the highway there are several neighborhoods with a variety of accommodation types.

Finally, note that the final projects of both tourist towns are especially sensitive to the site, the climate, the territory and the natural landscape. In *La Grande-Motte*, Jean Balladur maintains the big lines of the blueprint and proposes an architectural regulation based on pyramidal volumes and

white tones. The pyramidal shape, according to the author, is a reflection of the mountains that surround it. In *Port Leucate-Barcarès* the final project maintains the basic ideas of the first sketches, but it is developed in a more complex and detailed way.

Conclusions

The architects Jean Balladur and George Candilis, responsible for the new tourist town projects of the Languedoc-Roussillon region, based these projects from the principles of the Modern Movement. The projects of *La Grande-Motte* and *Port Leucate-Barcarès* were some of the first urban developments where the production of spaces for the development of leisure activities has come from the principles of the Modern Movement. For the sake of it, we can affirm the following:

- in the 1960s, the urban-architectural principles established in *The Athens Charter* and reformulated by TEAM 10, were an important reference in the production of the space of mass tourism;
- in the creation of space for mass tourism during the 1960s there was a transposition and adaptation of the urban-architectural models of the industrial city with the projects of new tourist towns in Languedoc-Roussillon;
- the ideal places for the materialization of the theoretical thought of the architects of the Modern Movement were the proposed scenarios for the development of mass tourism;
- the tourist towns of the Languedoc-Roussillon coast were places where different perceptions of the revisionist thinking of TEAM 10 were manifested.

This essay highlights the extent to which the tourist facilities have been designed using urban models typical of the industrial city and architectural elements that make up the repertoire of Modern architecture. The industrial activities of the traditional city have been replaced by nautical, and recreational activities and tourist services (restaurants, hotels). The *port de plaisance* centered the activities of the heart of the city and acted as a driving force for the local and regional economy. The zoning of uses is resolved by type and density, the urban layout adopts the concept of the cluster and the road system is clearly hierarchical, clearly separating the pedestrian space from the road.

Notes

- 1 The French architect Jacques Lucan (b. 1947), in his book *Architecture en France (1940–2000)* calls “ordre ouvert” the set of urban principles which were the product of *The Athens Charter* (1933). The concept is not used in texts translated into Spanish and English, here it will be used literally from the French.
- 2 Free translation from the original: “Les loisirs aujourd’hui touche le grand nombre, est soumis aux lois économiques, doit être organisé pour qu’il soit accessible à tous (souti économie). D’un phénomène de classe au XIX^e siècle, il est devenu un phénomène de masse au XX^e siècle”.
- 3 Free translation from the original: “L’architecte doit être toujours présent. C’est à lui de penser, d’organiser, de participer à une nouvelle organisation des villes et de leurs environs”.
- 4 Free translation from the original: “Il s’agit de définir une architecture des



08 Port Leucate-Barcarès, France. Collective housing with stepped terraces. © Fondo CANGE-G. Centre d'Archives d'Architecture du XX^e siècle de l'Institut français d'architecture.

- loisirs qui aux aux besoins humains et qui s'insère dans le conditions de réalisation de l'habitat".
- 5 Georges Candilis, "Vers une architecture du loisir". *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, avril-mai, No. 131, Paris, 1967
 - 6 Joffres Dumazedier, *Vers une civilisation du loisir?*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1962. Free translation from the original "Ainsi, depuis cent ans, les loisirs est né, a grandi, s'est valorisé. Il est en pleine expansion. Il n'est pas un produit secondaire, mais central, de la civilisation actuelle. Le monde serait-il entré dans la civilisation du loisir?".
 - 7 Free translation from the original: "...le loisir des masses, du plus grand nombre, est en voie de devenir un phénomène crucial de la civilisation contemporaine".
 - 8 Free translation from the original: "Les loisirs fait partie de l'organisation de la société". Georges Candilis, extracted from a non-classified document.
 - 9 Georges Candilis, "Existe-t-il une architecture des loisirs?" Fondo CANGE-A-8. Dossier 236 Ifa 314/14. Centre d'Archives d'architecture du XX^e siècle de l'Institut français d'architecture. Free translation from the original: "Les loisirs permettront à l'homme de retrouver son équilibre perdu".
 - 10 Free translation from the original: "On ne peut pas isoler le problème des loisirs du concept du milieu de la vie de l'homme".
 - 11 The name of the operation was taken from the first director of this mission, who was a senior government official named Pierre Racine (1909–2011).

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