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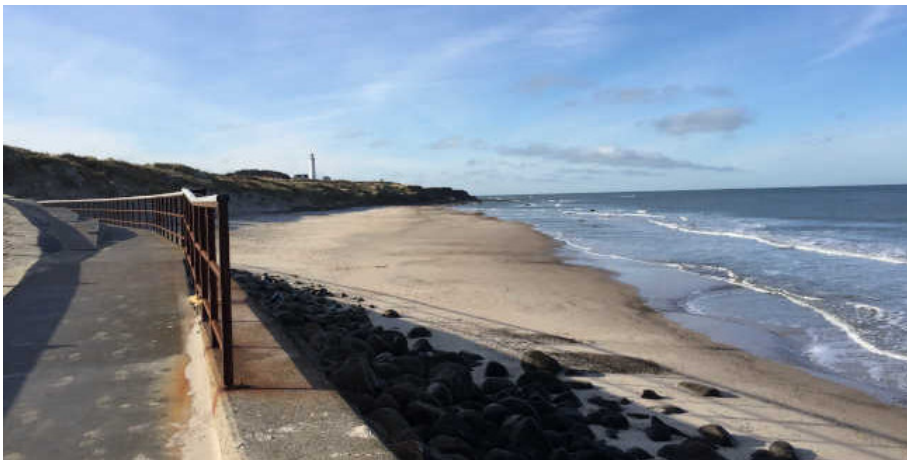
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Waterfood

The remote and exclusive taste of border port cities



Port cities with exclusive, symbiotic and intense karmic bond with its own harbour can be counted on the fingers one hand ... and Hirtshals is one of these.

The brand-new city – born in 1919 – was founded on the occasion of the launch of a new artificial harbor located in the extreme north of Denmark, (previous image), strategic centre of gravity of maritime trades between Scandinavian countries. In the first decades of the Twentieth Century the Danish government took the decision to realise a portal infrastructure (next image) with the aim to catch multitudes of the finest fish-banks transiting between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea: herrings fat of Omega-3, versatile codfish, succulent pink shrimps, fine flatfish like flounder, sole and plaice that thrive thanks to the richness of the shallow sandy seabeds and the excellent quality of uncontaminated seawater.



Fishing port of Hirtshals.

Danish architects Steen Eiler Rasmussen and Knud Christiansen, winners of the competition for the design of Hirtshals, worked hard to reflect on the shape and fate of the new urban settlement. Excited by the recent avantgarde theories of the “Garden City” and exalted by the idea of founding a city from scratch, their image of the “ideal” city was based on grafting three transit infrastructures: railway, motorway and harbour.

Wisely, they split the city out in parts, so that wealthy people could live and enjoy a posh quarter facing West, looking out an enchanting natural landscape. Moreover, they made sure that this high-ranking neighbourhood was well detached from the working-class quarter, the industrial zone and the port area. They designed spacious driveways, large parks, houses with gardens.

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Full Profile

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So now we wonder: what's left today of their great planning project?

Well, like any other “new towns”, born for the utopia of the above-mentioned Garden City theory, nowadays, Hirtshals is a sad and dreary town. The low construction density reproduces, here like anywhere else, a sense of void, rarefaction, of a suspended life hanging and waiting for a future that never turns into present.

The original planning was betrayed many times by new lotting and the effort aiming at concentrating commercial and touristic activities along the Nørregade (next image), a main road that was forcedly converted into a pedestrian street, and Den Grønne Plads, an undefined widening that should represent the central square, are not good enough to convince the two million passengers that every year embark onto the ferries that depart from the harbour of Hirtshals, heading towards Sweden, Norway and the Faroe Islands, to live and dedicate a little bit of their attention and time to the city.



Nørregade. The pedestrian street of Hirtshals where commercial activities, restaurants and pubs are concentrated.

Hirtshals does not even show off the look of a transit city. If reached by car, road signs hijack drivers straightaway towards the port, completely bypassing the city centre.

If arriving by train, it feels like the final destination has not been reached and that train has stopped only because it could not go any further: land is finished, that train cannot continue its ride, all it is left is the North Sea ahead. Train stops, it has reached its final destination but you feel like you should not get off. You cannot find the destination, the final stop; you can not even find a train station. It feels like you reached nowhere land.

Despite the great number of travellers, Hirtshals has remained at the margins of tourism business, due to the uptight urban planning, or to a poor advertising campaign of its beautiful natural and cultural sites of interest.



Hirtshals Fyr. Light and sound signal beacon built in 1868 on the northern coast of Denmark.

Along the sandy coasts that offer lovely suggestive landscapes, dominated by the massive Hirtshals Fyr (the huge lighthouse built during the reign of Frederick VII in 1868) (previous image), hidden behind the dunes are dozens of bunkers of the coastal line of defence of the Adriatic Valley (next image), built between 1940 and 1944 by the Dutch Army. The concrete of the military shelters preserving their original aspect, the anti-ship mines and the anti-tank obstacles (image still below) constitute the Bunkermuseet, an open-air museum that vividly renders the terrible landscape of the Second World War, frozen at the eve of the landing in Normandy. An historical patrimony of rare emotional power.



Complex of bunkers garrisoning the Danish coast. It is part of the defensive system of the Adriatic Wall built by the Germans from 1940 to 1944 to face the landing of the Allies.



Anti-ship mines and anti-tank obstacles exposed at the Bunkermuseet open-air museum.

Perhaps it is thanks to this marginality compared to the most beaten touristic trails, that Hirtshals retains its original essence. It is an authentic city, and so are her citizens, wearing rubber boots, waxed waterproofs, keeping bristly hair and beards and their skins thickened by saltiness and wind. They are all bonded to the port: to the fishing, including preparation, commercialisation and export of fish, and the maritime touristic and commercial trading (next image).



Fishermen on a fishing boat at the port of Hirtshals.

Also the museum of history of Vendsyssel, a small city museum, is dedicated to the illustration of the exclusive function of Hirtshals as port city: the museum tells the stories of sailors, the evolution of the port through historical photos, describes fishing-related activities such as rope and fishnets making and procedures of fish preservation. The museum enchants visitors also with tasting of homemade *fiskekugler* (fish balls) and *smørrebrød* (buttered rye bread) with smoked mackerel. The city is strongly anchored to its port. From the harbour, inhabitants get their sustinment, top of the list the food. Part of fishing (yet never leftovers! as we see it happening in many other port cities) integrates in the social texture through extraordinary creations elaborated by the local culinary tradition.

To act a great witness is the *Stjernesked* (literally meaning “shooting star”). The *Stjernesked* (next image) is one of the finest *smørrebrød* in the Danish cooking. So preciously presented, worthy of the most refined artist, the traditional slice of buttered rye bread is topped with succulent flounder, showing off in two glamorous outfits: steamed juicy fillets alternate with fried fillet; adjacent,

steamed pink shrimps and asparagus tips, luxurious adds-on with their opalescent iridescent shades ranging from white to super pale green, altogether composing a symphony of colors. Majestically overhanging this work of art are garnishes of salmon eggs, caviar, lettuce, cherry tomatoes and fresh sprouts. All ingredients are exquisitely mingled together by a dressing made of cocktail sauce. To finish, thin lemon and cucumber slices are interestingly served to be used as refreshing interval between each reverently repeating bite. A triumph of freshness, organoleptic taste and beauty! Stjernes kud! What else!



Stjernes kud. Traditional Danish cuisine dish made with steamed and fried fish fillets, steamed pink prawns, fish eggs, lettuce and sprouts.

All around the main square facading the port of Hirtshals, gathers a multitude of traditional restaurants (next image) and pubs that, crowded by a curious mixture of fishermen returning from a day of fishing and travelers waiting for the next coming ferry, proudly, yet unpretentiously, offer the best of the Danish cooking mainly based on fresh fish, delivered straight from the port.



The Lilleheden restaurant, open on the main square of Hirtshals, Den Grønne Plads, serves fish dishes caught on site and brought directly from the port with strict respect for the Danish culinary tradition.

It is really a must-do experience for those searching for authenticity, for quality and charme of uncontaminated places and flavors.

And this, to me, is the beauty that characterizes Hirtshals; a beauty of which the city, remotely hanging in its solitude, is happily unaware!



Northern Denmark landscape. The defensive field of the bunkers, built during the Second World War by the Germans, is camouflaged in the coastal dune system.

English translation of
Ester Badami

Head Image: Northern coast of Denmark. The sandy coast is dominated by the Hirtshals Fyr built on the dunes.

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Mi piace 0

