

# Costa del Sol occidental – changes, problems and possibilities of a mature tourist territory

**Antonio Jesús Palacios Ortiz**

Universidad de Granada, Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura, Av. de Andalucía, 38, Granada,  
Spain  
e-mail: a.palaciosortiz@gmail.com

## Abstract

*During the last 50 years, the urban and infrastructure development derived from tourism exploitation of this territory has become the Costa del Sol into a recognizable entity, made of fragments with different characteristics related to decades of urban research.*

*This development in the Costa del Sol area has become it into an urban laboratory as a result of an economic / speculative optimization process with negative consequences.*

*The colonization of this area would not have been possible without infrastructure assets, which play a key role in internal and external connections, allowing the Costa del Sol to have the versatility to reorganize itself and keep on growing.*

*But this type of development tends to the saturation of the urban system and today the Costa del Sol has become into a mature tourist territory with some problems related to resident mobility, environment and obsolescence.*

Keywords: networks sustainability coastal railway

## Introduction

During the last 50 years, the Western Costa del Sol has been the object of big structural changes that have changed essentially both its physiognomy and the conception that we have nowadays about it as a territory. The main trigger of these modifications was a deep change in the economic structure of the area during the 50's, which made the primary sector to abandon. This primary sector based its subsistence on the agricultural exploitation and fishing, throwing themselves into the service sector, much more profitable, dominated by the rising mass tourism typical of the social welfare state.

The propitious characteristics that presented the Western Costa del Sol, together with its infrastructural resources, based on the existence of two airports (the one in Málaga in the Eastern, and the one in Gibraltar in the Western), and a national road joining both of them and crossing lengthwise the coast few metres from the beach, what favoured the fast implantation of the touristic industry, its success and its later expansion.

This fast expansion of the initial exclusive and elitist tourism, its evolution into a mass tourism and its subsequent restructuring into a residential tourism have ended up by making this area an urban conglomeration with more than 100 kilometres long and dominated by the automobile culture, in which interrelation, services, sun and beach live together in big not-delimited urbanizations.

In this context, the research “Dinámicas territoriales en la Costa del Sol Occidental” that has been developed as final project, in which some studies about the infrastructural dynamics of the touristic spaces have been carried out, raising them by the elaboration and construction of an abstract graphic system of conceptual representation which pretends to understand and transmit the complexity of the area aim of study, proposing sustainable alternatives for the mobility.

### **The layout of the city between lines.**

The Western Costa del Sol is a territory under transformation. From its first apparition, this unclear idea connected to an area not very-well delimited, has developed itself through a process of adjustment to the requirements of a market that has an influence on this area, becoming into a complex reality which goes further than a touristic fact. (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 – Torremolinos (Western Costa del Sol). A. Palacios.

*Evolution of the occupation and the patterns of growth.*

From the year 1950, the adoption of a new economic model, object to the apparition of the touristic phenomenon speed up the occupation of Western the Costa del Sol, which in that time was constituted by small towns which were scarcely inhabited and far from each other kilometers of natural areas and farming lands.

This picture, which differs abysmally from the current one, found itself quickly transformed by the urban development arising from the better use of the tourism of this territory, what has made this area to be recognizable as an entity in the last 50 years. It is made by fragments of non-similar characteristics corresponding to the decades of urban research, turning into a laboratory of the city/ tourism which has been decreasing the shape and planning with the passage of the time attending to a process of an economic improvement of concerning consequences (Fig. 2).

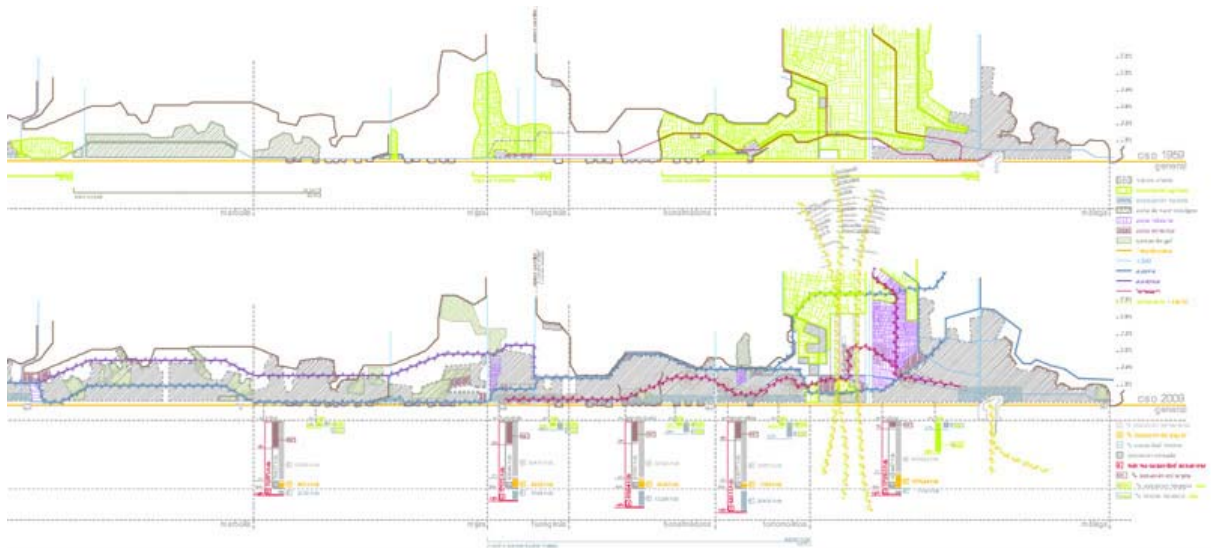


Fig. 2 – Settlement process and level of development. Western Costa del Sol (1959 – 2009). A. Palacios

The study of the settlement process of this territory (Fig. 3) shows the main paper that the infrastructures have carried out in their configuration, formality and evolution. From the first beginning, all these facts have transformed the touristic and urban development, defining the internal and external mobility and giving to the system the necessary versatility, what let the appropriate changes of polarity for its reorganization and later growth.

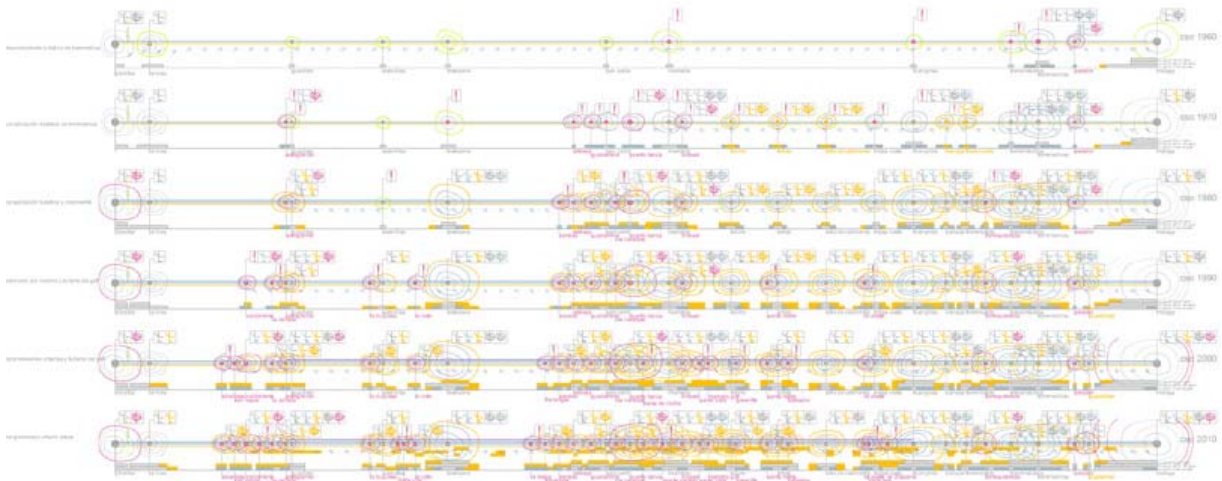


Fig. 3 – Evolution of occupation and growth patterns. Western Costa del Sol. A. Palacios

*Touristic equipment and associated elements.*

The Western Costa del Sol is like a complex logistic system of tourism, where each constituent element has a specific approach in the moment to understand the administration of the territory (beaches, hotels, apartments, golf courts, shopping centres, funfairs, etc.) The spontaneity that defines this touristic machinery, created and its later planning, has let to coexist cleverly with the historic city, making the most of it. Nevertheless, its configuration, far from be risky, shows an implied order in its organization that attends to the values of the market, mainly with regard to the organization in hierarchy of the distance to the line coast and infrastructure.

The elements associated to the touristic development must be taken into account in the transformation of its subsequent urban development. Its appearance makes easy to understand largely the changes in the coast and determines the level of development of each of the existing contexts (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 – Tourism equipment and associates elements

## El funcionamiento de la ciudad dual

### *Interrelation.*

The urban / touristic conglomeration in which the Western Costa del Sol has its bases on the interrelation, what defines its origin and what has allowed the development of its characteristic model of coastal exploitation.

The interrelation permits the connection of the territory, improving the duration of the traveling and cutting down the costs. The large economic benefits that come from the touristic development made possible the improvement of the existing infrastructures. With the passage of time and thanks to the big demand of mobility that involve the processes of urban restructuring to which the coastal has been forced, would be saturated and exceed by other infrastructures, new and more powerful, that have increased the interrelation of the residential complex of the coast, contributing, nevertheless, the increase of its saturation.

The study of the available means of transport, its main points of exchange (airport – agp, railway station – María Zambrano and bus station) and the effective connection between them (Fig. 5) permit to obtain a global idea of the level of the connection that exists between the different points of the territory and the relation between those with external destinations to the coast.

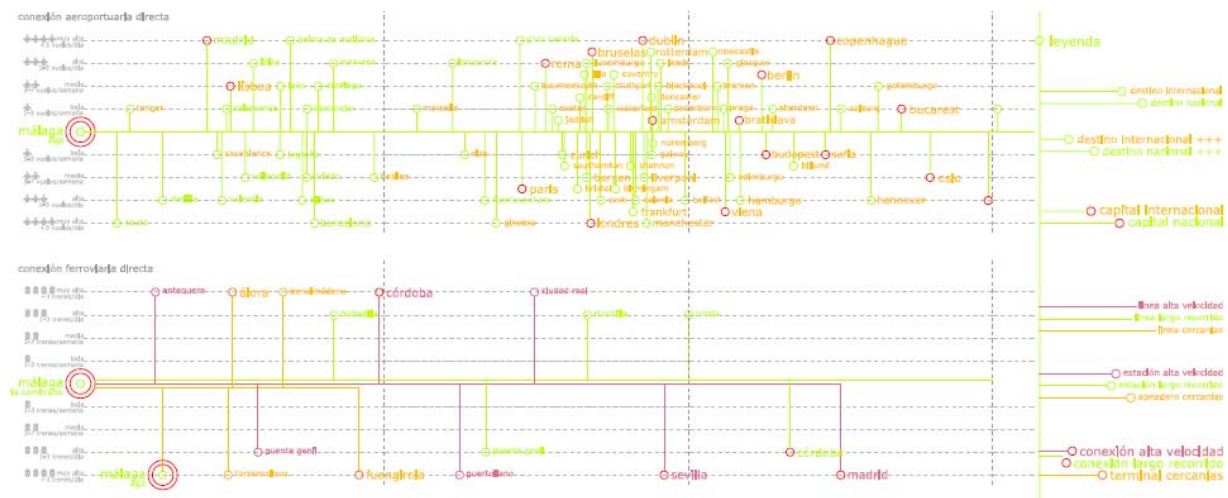


Fig. 5 – Interrelation. Western Costa del Sol. A. Palacios. [1]

*The N-340 as regulating element for the construction of the new city between lines.*

The N-340 is becoming the origin of the urban growth. It is closed to the beach and the required passing of the tourists in the route favoured the construction of areas next to this road. Nowadays, it is confined because of the growth of a continuous periphery that has turned it into its main street. This fact shows the



complexity of the model that is generated in this axis and its transformation let us to understand how the urban model with a base on the connection instead of the centre.

The study of the different existing typologies, their location regarding, the urban space and the parameters that determines how it performs (Fig. 6) permit to obtain different levels of activity related to them, which helps to understand the relationship between the areas.

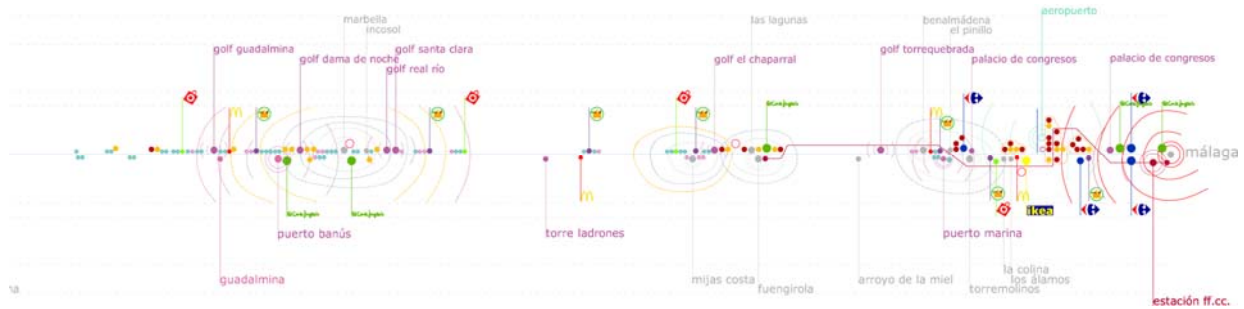


Fig. 6 – N – 340 colonization. Western Costa del Sol. A. Palacios. [1]

**Conclusion.**

Despite the fact of the necessity of the interconnection inherent in the urban structure and the existing use, the Western Costa del Sol is settled over a network of individual mobility favourable for the collapse.

The different tries to provide with these alternatives networks of collective mobility have been successful, achieving the establishment of systems of public transport that, although they don't count with a large number of users, it does not end up by being considered as a priority transport. This predominance of the individual mobility instead of the collective one results territorially in a delocalization of its uses, what produces a dispersal of the residential elements (Fig. 7) that depends on the external uses situated in strategic places of the network of mobility to obtain the accessibility they need.

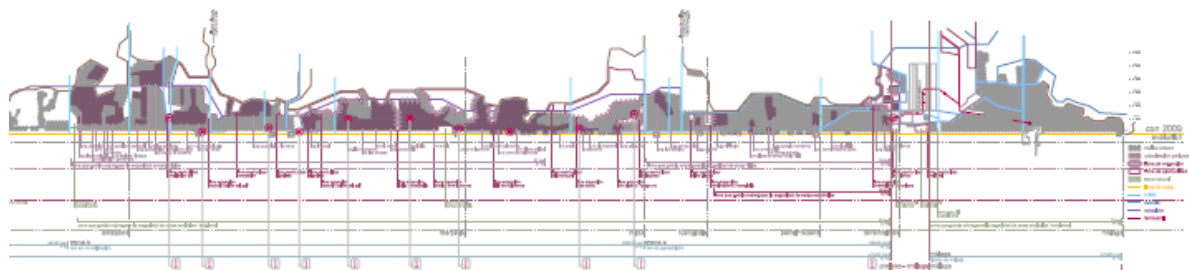


Fig. 7 – Urban restructuring processes and growth. Western Costa del Sol.

The model and its problems that are still growing with infrastructural building works, which are mainly aimed to clear the transit between towns and also to prepare the territory before the arrival of the new

tourists. The construction of the hiperronda of Málaga (a new huge ring road connecting different urban points) or the project to extend the coastal railway to the West means the confirmation of these metropolitan alterations and at the same time they are established as an opportunity to redefine the mobility in the heart of the urban conglomeration of the Western Costa del Sol.

This project based on the coastal railway to the West may be understood not only as a proposal to improve the internal mobility of the system, but also as an opportunity to mediate in a well- established territory carrying out a global strategy and specific operations, which aim is to connect a powerful and initial infrastructure of collective transport with an interesting offer of public equipments with the capacity to improve the effects of the polarization that derive from the currently model.

This new network of interrelation infrastructure (Fig.8) would make the uses more accessible by a collective and sustainable means of transport, what helps to equip the large quantity of urban space separate from the existing centralization in this longitudinal periphery.

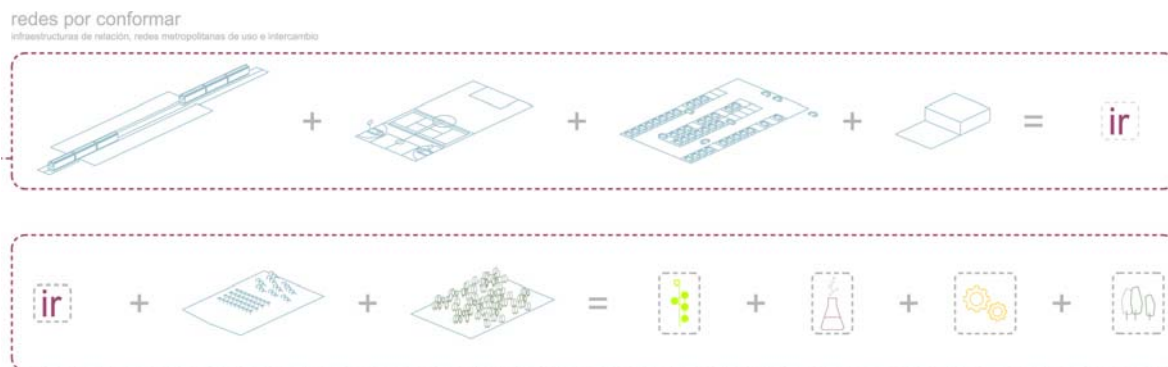


Fig. 8 – Interrelation infrastructure network. Western Costa del Sol.

## Acknowledgements

Rafael de Lacour Jiménez.

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