



RESEARCH BRIEFING

Urban Design, Urban Space Morphology, Urban Tourism: An Emerging New Paradigm Concerning Their Relationship

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ABSTRACT *The paper concerns the relationships between the physical form of the urban environment and leisure activities. It examines how urban space morphology—i.e. spatial patterns and formal patterns—may have an impact on tourists' attraction and preferences in the contemporary cultural context of urban tourism. Can urban design and the physical form of space in themselves determine anything in urban tourism development?*

1. Introduction

There is a widespread acceptance¹ that following both the broad changes within the post-industrial economic regime and the pluralistic ideology of post-modern societies, tourism has gradually advanced from the highly organized forms of mass tourism characterizing the post-war period towards alternative—fragmented and flexible—forms of tourism reflecting new modernity, individualization and diversity.

The cultural context in which tourism and recreation occurs has changed nowadays: central to the concept of new modernity is the idea of movement. In relation to tourism, the acceleration of mobility in our era entails a sort of 'time-space compression' that has radical effects on how people actually experience contemporary world changing both their forms of subjectivity and sociability and their aesthetic appreciation of nature, landscape, townscapes, and other societies (Dietvorst & Ashworth, 1995, pp. 2–4; Lash & Urry, 1994, pp. 255–256). Forms of social discipline (e.g. custom, ideological codes) into which people used to socialize and entertain themselves do not function as they used to do in the past (Featherstone, 1991). Individualization and an increased sophistication of individual participants in leisure tours reinforce the personal basis of decisions about what to do or not to do in specific places (Boerwinkel, 1995, p. 241). Diversity becomes a magic word nowadays involving many

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contemporary social activities—and tourism in particular—and expressing the idea that the ‘world of otherness’, the different opposing or co-existing fields, define their own rights of being and tend to reproduce themselves; all different ‘worlds’ are seeking some space within the objective state of affairs (Lengkeek, 1995, p. 31). In this framework, new divergent leisure and recreational urban activities appear to require for themselves and consume more and more space in our cities; tourist-historic urban cores, special museums of any kind, urban waterfronts, theme parks, etc.

Certain spatial aspects of the urban tourism phenomenon have been already well documented in research mainly by planners and managers who focus their concern on (a) *urban planning issues* such as classifications of the variety of tourism products of cities into core elements, supporting elements, etc., patterns of spatial clustering of urban tourism activities, patterns of tourists movement in urban space, the impacts of urban tourism development on urban regeneration and redevelopment (historic urban cores, urban waterfronts, etc.), and (b) *urban management issues* such as management of the tourism products of cities, management of tourists spatial behaviour, etc. It can be said that the great corpus of studies concerning spatial aspects of urban tourism appear to focus on the functional dimension of the urban environment. So far there is limited literature² concerning urban tourism and the formal and the spatial dimensions of the urban environment—urban space morphology.

This paper attempts to investigate how urban tourism in its new cultural context, as previously described, may relate to urban space morphology. Can urban design and the physical form of space in themselves determine anything in urban tourism development?

2. The Shifted Cultural Context of Urban Tourism and Fitted Patterns of Urban Space Morphology

Many studies³ have interpreted leisure and tourism activities as a temporary distancing from the familiar situation that may place the individual in another existential context—as attempts to escape everyday life and seek ‘new worlds’. In this framework of tourism and leisure interpretation, scholars have introduced concepts such as ‘anti-structure’ and ‘counterstructures’ in order to define the idea of ‘new worlds’: Anti-structure expresses the other world organized around a different ‘centre’ than everyday life (Turner, 1973; Cohen, 1979). Similarly, counterstructures express other realities than everyday life that vary according to both the different cognitive styles of individuals and the corresponding state of affairs. These other realities might be radically different from everyday life, opposing everyday values or indifferent to them, broadening the possibilities, or simply reflecting everyday activities and habits within a mirror of a completely different setting (Lengkeek, 1995, pp. 27–28).

In context of the individual’s everyday environment, one may conceive of Lengkeek’s counterstructures as the following:

- (A) changes in the functional dimension of the environment—i.e. changing part or the whole programme of the individual’s everyday activities;
- (B) changes in the formal dimension of the environment—i.e. projecting or performing everyday activities in a radically different form of space;
- (C) changes in both the functional and the formal dimensions of the environment—i.e. changing both everyday activities and the physical form of space (see Figure 1).

In the above conceptual framework, the evolution of urban tourism in the second half of the twentieth century might be described as follows: mass urban tourism during the post-war period was predominantly—though not exclusively⁴—based on counterstructures in the

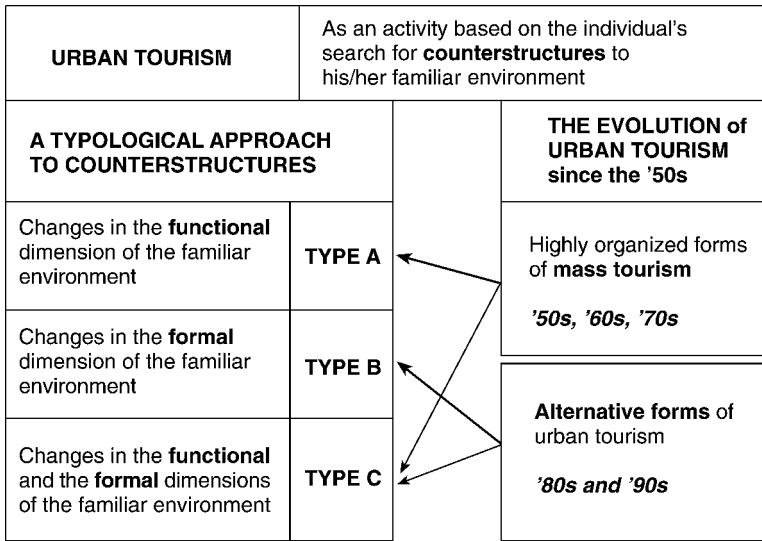


Figure 1. The shift of urban tourism.

functional dimension of the familiar environment (Figure 1: types A and C of counterstructures). Holidays were mostly understood as a break in work and other everyday activities in order to do something different—in any pleasant environment. On the contrary, contemporary forms of urban tourism tend to predominantly reflect the individual’s search for counterstructures in the formal dimension of the environment (Figure 1: types B and C of counterstructures).

This shift seems to be associated with certain technological developments and the spirit of new modernity: the high level of telecommunications has resulted in excessive information and growing distance participation (electronic access) of individuals in various social activities such as work, banking, shopping, education, recreation, leisure, tourism, etc. The new modes of communication and social participation tend to blur the limits among social activities well distinguished in the past. Nowadays, activities such as for instance work, creativity and leisure may simultaneously occur in spaces without clear functional identity or in ‘non-places’ (*non-lieu*) to use the words of Mark Augé (1992). Some scholars go as far as to argue that this situation may even mark the end of urban tourism as a distinct activity since, “people may in a sense be tourists most of the time whether they are literally mobile or only experience simulated mobility through the incredible fluidity of multiple signs and electronic images (Lash & Urry, 1994, p. 259). This kind of functional homogenization of the individual’s everyday environment allows someone to argue that nowadays the urban tourists’ search for counterstructures is mainly oriented towards the formal dimension of the urban environment. In other words, urban tourism is gradually becoming an activity based on the projection or reflection of ‘homogenized’ everyday activities and habits within a mirror of completely *different spatial settings*—i.e. radically innovative forms of urban space. In this sense, it can be said that urban space morphology and urban design are gradually becoming significant parameters or resources in urban tourism development. Therefore, it is challenging to attempt to investigate what can actually constitute counterstructures in terms of the physical form of space and urban space morphology in contemporary European cities.

2.1 Counterstructures in the Field of Urban Space Morphology

Referring to counterstructures on a more general level than urban space morphology, Lengkeek states that the more we are faced with rapid change and rationalized worldly affairs, the more we look for our other possibilities desperately reconstructing (a) what has gone and (b) what actually never existed (Lengkeek, 1995, p. 34). Building on this basis, one can attempt to both interpret why certain forms of urban space seem to actually ‘work’ as counterstructures attracting urban tourists as well as investigate which other forms of urban space may also have the potential to perform as counterstructures in the context of contemporary urban environments.

Understanding popular forms of urban space as counterstructures. Among forms of urban space popular to tourists, historic urban areas⁵ and theme parks, especially Disneyland and Disneyland-like theme parks, have been doubtlessly representing the most attractive ones in the last decades.

The growing tourist interest in the architectural heritage of cities as well as in reconstructed and revitalized historical urban areas⁶ since the 1970s can be seen as an expression of the individual’s nostalgia for ‘what has gone’ using Lengkeek’s words. In terms of counterstructures, the phenomenon can be interpreted as follows (see also Figure 2):

- Historical urban cores representing *long living survivals from the past*, constitute counterstructures to the *ephemerality* of fashions, products, values, etc., that according to Dietvorst and Ashworth, is rooted in the growing flow of events in time (acceleration of history) characterizing the era of *new modernity* (see Dietvorst & Ashworth, 1995, p. 3).
- The architectural heritage of cities reflecting *differences* among cities—and thereby their *authenticity*—in terms of history, culture, society and particularly in terms of urban space morphology, constitutes a counterstructure to *globalized design trends* promoted by international architectural and urban design movements.

The tourists’ attraction to theme parks such as Disneyland and the like can be regarded as reflecting the individual’s nostalgia for both ‘what has gone’ and ‘what never existed’ using Lengkeek’s words: On the one hand, such theme parks meet the individual needs for fantasy and play as a vehicle to personal growth, gone with childhood (Tsartas, 1996, pp. 206–207; Urbain, 1991). On the other hand, they also satisfy the tourist’s quest for authenticity—in this case, not in terms of existing reality but in terms of the unreal world: spectacles offered by such theme parks, are clearly stated as artificial and consciously conceived by (adult) tourists as artificial. In such contrived tourist experiences, according to Fainstein and Gladstone, the quest for authenticity is replaced in the tourist’s consciousness by the quest for stage-authenticity (Fainstein & Gladstone, 1997, p. 127).

In terms of counterstructures in the formal dimension of environment, the popularity of such theme parks could be interpreted as follows (see also Figure 2):

- Three-dimensioned and human scaled sceneries, virtual reality spaces, audio-animatronic figures, etc., create an *illusionary physical environment* that constitutes a counterstructure to real physical environment. For some theorists in architecture and urban design (see Venturi *et al.*, 1978), this species of illusionary physical environment appear to attract individuals and tourists in particular; they seem to serve important psychological and social needs of individuals and on this basis, they need to be understood by architects, planners and others, rather than snobbishly criticized, or dismissed.

Taking into account diversity and individualization that characterize contemporary urban tourism, one could further deepen his/hers understanding about the tourists’ attraction to

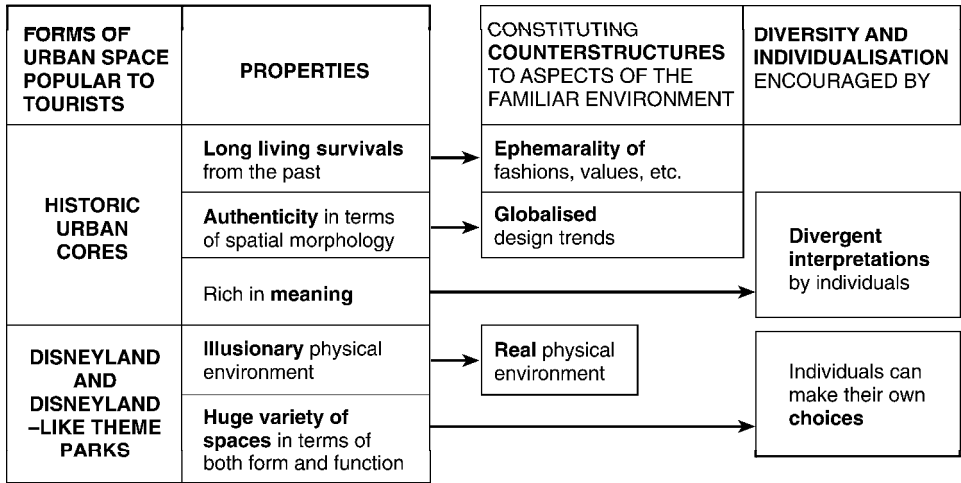


Figure 2. Forms of urban space popular to tourists; describing them in terms of counterstructures, diversity and individualization

both historic urban cores and Disneyland-like theme parks: the former can be seen as formal fragments of the city which, in the course of history, have become rich in meaning and can be interpreted again and again in different contexts (Vidler, 1978, p. 31). In this sense, they can allow themselves to be divergently interpreted by individuals and tourists in particular. On the contrary, the latter are not rich in meaning neither by form, nor by history; though they can become meaningful to tourists due to their huge variety of spaces in terms of both form and function; thus, they allow individuals to make their own (different) choices (see also Figure 2).

Investigating Spatial and Formal Patterns Fitted into the Concept of ‘Leisure’. In order to investigate spatial patterns that can be attractive to urban tourists, Boerwinkel approaches the idea of ‘leisure’ in relation to the concepts of ‘creativity’ and ‘stimulation’. According to Boerwinkel, ‘creativity’ can be defined as the ability to come up with rather divergent associations; and it is encouraged by those physical environments that can provide individuals with intensive sensory stimulation. ‘Stimulation’ has to be absorbed in a climate relatively free from pressure. On this basis, ‘freedom’ appears as one of the core aspects of leisure and thereby, it can serve as a main concept in the analysis and evaluation of which spatial patterns fit or do not fit into leisure activities (Boerwinkel, 1995, p. 251).

Regarding the basic categories of buildings and public open spaces that are addressed to urban tourism (e.g. museums, exhibition halls, parks, etc.), Boerwinkel distinguishes two fundamental types of spatial order underlying the formal variety: (a) ‘successive arrangement’ and b) ‘simultaneous arrangement’. The former corresponds to spatial systems in which there is a step-by-step uncovering of the particular spaces to the observer in terms of both sight and movement. The latter corresponds to spatial systems that, while the observer is moving in any particular space, provide him with multiple choices in terms of both sight and movement. According to Boerwinkel, buildings and public open spaces characterized by ‘simultaneous arrangement’ are more attractive to tourists because this type of spatial order encourages relatively ‘free exploration’ of space by the individual, and as already described, freedom is a core aspect of leisure activities (Boerwinkel, 1995, pp. 251–255).

Building on Boerwinkel’s ideas, one could add that ‘simultaneous arrangement’ by offering

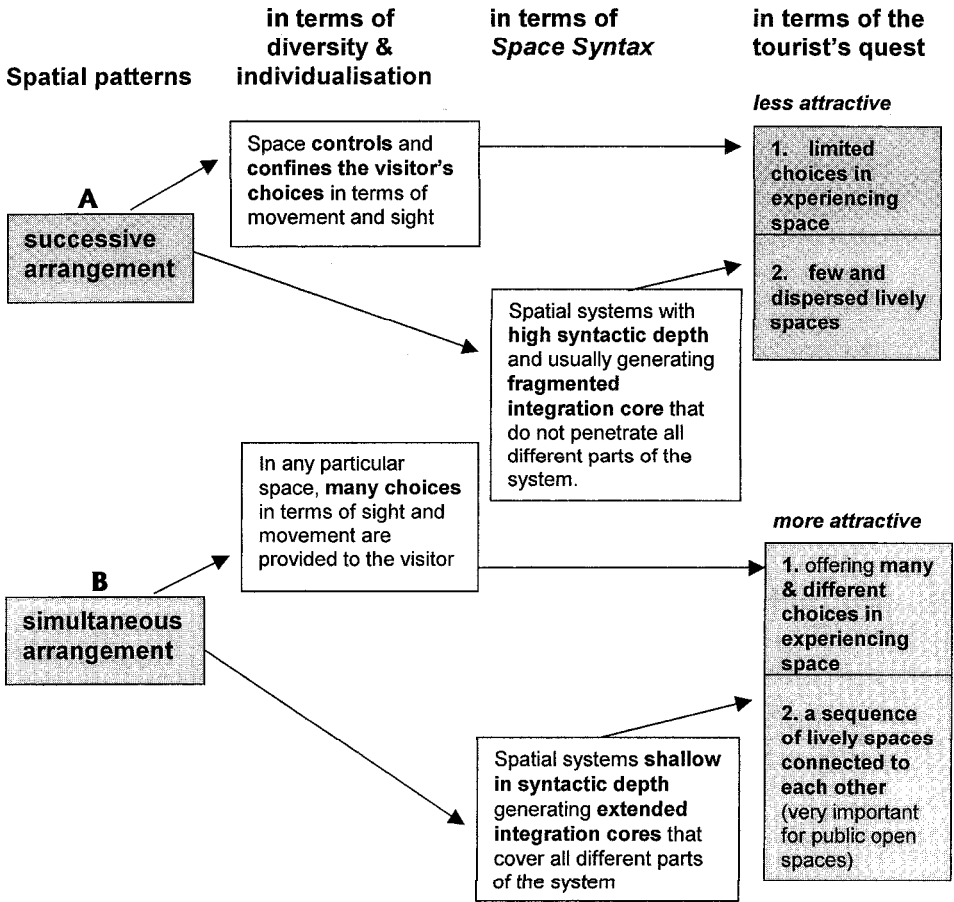


Figure 3. Basic spatial patterns (public open spaces and buildings working as tourism resources); a description—evaluation in terms of diversity, individualization and space syntax.

to the visitor multiple choices in terms of sight and movement, also fits better into the concepts of diversity and individualization that are core aspects of contemporary urban tourism (see also Figure 3). Besides, in terms of Hillier's space syntax (see Hillier & Hanson, 1984; Hillier, 1996), 'successive arrangement' corresponds to spatial systems characterized by high syntactic depth (see Figure 4) whilst 'simultaneous arrangement' corresponds to spatial systems that are shallow in syntactic depth (see Figure 5).

In spatial systems shallow in syntactic depth, the core of the best-connected spaces—the 'integration core'—tends to be relatively extended, including many parts of the spatial system. On the contrary, spatial systems with high syntactic depth tend to generate fragmented integration cores including only a few parts of the system. Research⁷ has pointed out that spatial systems which are shallow in syntactic depth and characterized by continuous and extended integration cores, tend to encourage 'by-chance-encounters' among individuals on their way from one space to another within the system. Moreover, there is a positive correlation between the degree of integration of space and the use-density of space by individuals; in other words, the relatively more integrated spaces tend to have relatively higher use-densities by individuals (Hillier *et al.*, 1993). This relationship has been tested and found accurate also in the case of tourists—a special category of users (see Gospodini & Loukissas,

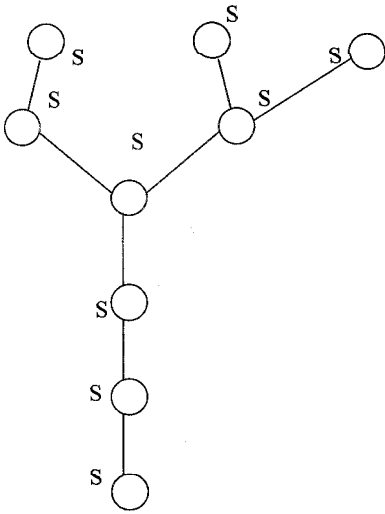


Figure 4. A spatial system with high syntactic depth (6).

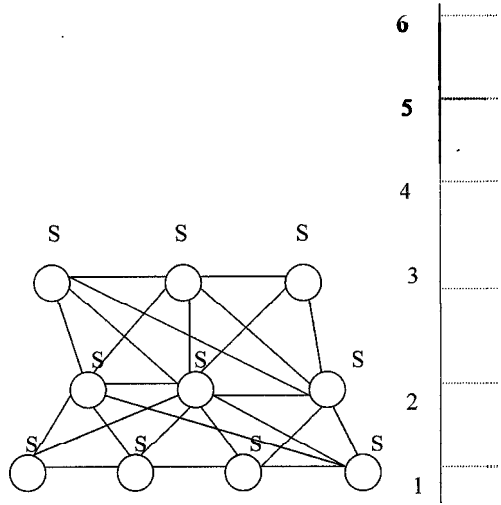


Figure 5. A spatial system shallow in syntactic depth (2).

1998; Peponis *et al.*, 1989). Given that high use-densities of space—especially in the cases of public open spaces—creates a lively atmosphere mostly appreciated by tourists, it can be argued that, also from the syntactic point of view, the spatial pattern of ‘simultaneous arrangement’ tends to be more attractive to tourists than the spatial pattern of ‘successive arrangement’ (see also Figure 3).

Turning onto the formal or representational discipline of urban space, the investigation of patterns that may potentially be attractive to urban tourists, could be helped by the concept of ‘counterstructure’ and the quest of tourists for counterstructures to their familiar environment, as earlier introduced. In the formal discipline of urban space, one may conceive as ‘counterstructures’ those formal schemes that can be read by individuals as exceptions in the context of the familiar environment. In other words, counterstructures can be understood as design schemes that, in virtue of organizing principles or/and images and symbols, are in great contrast to the rest of forms constituting the familiar environment, as a whole entity. As system of reference, the ‘familiar environment’ can represent an urban area, a city, or a group of cities. Let us exemplify this:

- In the context of a *particular urban area or a city*, design schemes can constitute counterstructure to the familiar environment, by contradicting the existing formal homogeneities such as for instance, architectural elements and forms, symbols and signs characterizing the area or the city, or/and by distorting the existing formal regularities, such as for instance, the geometricity of the street pattern, the urban blocks pattern, the open spaces pattern, or the skyline of the urban landscape, etc (see Figure 6).
- In context of *large groups of cities—at national or international level*—design schemes can constitute counterstructure to the familiar environment, by contradicting the established international design trends and being avant-garde (see Figure 6). This can be supported by examples from recent history of architecture and urban design: ‘new’ movements appear to have always produced in their beginning, design schemes—at small scale and large scale, buildings, open spaces, urban areas, or even cities—which being avant-garde in their era,⁸ constituted ‘counterstructures’ and thereby, great resources of urban tourism. For instance,

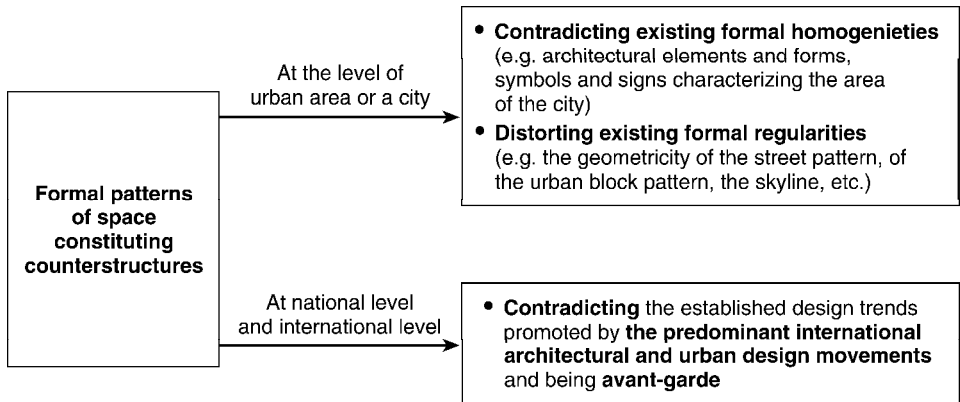


Figure 6. Formal patterns constituting counterstructures and thereby, urban tourism resources.

Modern Movement and Le Corbusier's Church of Ronchamp, the city of Brazilia; high-tech architecture and the building of the Pompidou Centre in Paris, the Lloyd's Building in London; Post-Modernism and the glass-pyramids of the Museum of Louvre, the 'follies' edifices of La Villette in Paris, the Canary Wharf in London's Docklands. In the last years, following the movement of Deconstruction, the best example supporting this argument is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain.

3. Urban Design as a Means of Urban Tourism Development

Bilbao has set an example on how architectural and urban design can be used as means of development, and urban tourism development in particular. Bilbao's local economy, mainly based on old industrial units in decline, was regenerated by the urban redevelopment schemes of the underused industrial area located along the riverside in the centre of the city. Large scaled urban design interventions and avant-garde physical design of both public open spaces and buildings, and especially the avant-garde design of the Guggenheim Museum of Modern Arts by Frank O. Gehry have transformed Bilbao into an international tourist place. Local economy is being gradually restructured towards urban tourism and services. This is clearly shown by the first results concerning the increase of visitors; foreign travellers have increased a significant 43% whereas non-Basque Spanish represent a 20.4% growth (Plaza, 1999).

The building of the Guggenheim Museum does reinforce an emerging new paradigm concerning the relationship among urban design, urban space morphology and urban tourism: irrespective of the particular functions and activities accommodated in space, it is avant-garde design of both buildings and open spaces that can make urban space morphology in itself and of itself a sightseeing, a tourist resource. Using the words of Beatriz Plaza, "the avant-garde image of this monumental cubist sculpture of a ship is having a significant positive impact on Bilbao due to the museum's capacity for attracting tourists and for improving Bilbao's image. From the opening of the Guggenheim-Bilbao Museum, the city is exercising a great leap forward" (Plaza, 1999, p. 592).

The emergence of the above new paradigm and the 'use' of urban design as a means of development, are important for the development prospects of all cities within the global urban system of Europe. However, they become critically important for a special group of cities; peripheral smaller cities without indigenous resources of development (see Gospodini, 2000). According to studies (see for instance, CEC, 1992; Petrakos & Economou, 1999) focusing on the function of the European global urban system and assessing the development prospects of different groups of cities formulated in it, the majority of smaller cities located in the

'periphery' (economic or/and geographical) of Europe is likely to face particular constraints in getting integrated into the new competitive environment. Those peripheral smaller cities, that lack of indigenous or other recourses (e.g. exploitable cultural heritage, attractive natural environment, infrastructure, qualified human capital, etc.) to restructure local economy towards flourishing economic activities (e.g. new technology industry, services, cultural industry, tourism) are considered to have particularly unfavourable development prospects. For those cities, the emerging new paradigm among urban design, urban space morphology and urban tourism is a chance and a challenge; they may use urban design as a means of urban tourism development.

Notes

1. See for instance Lash Urry, 1994, p. 260, Weiler & Hall, 1992; Eadington & Smith, 1992; Tsartas, 1996; pp. 198–199.
2. See for instance, Boerwinkel, 1995.
3. See Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Tsartas, 1996, p. 206
4. Categories A and B of counterstructures are valid more in a conceptual framework rather than in practice. All forms of urban tourism are in practice based on counterstructures of type C. However, different form of urban tourism may predominantly be based on either type A or type B of counterstructures.
5. Historic urban areas regarded as cultural tourism resources, are systematically analysed in Ashworth and Tunbridge (1990) in relation to urban planning policies and management of cultural heritage.
6. It should be noted that the period between the late 1970s and 1990s coincides with the predominance of Post-Modernism in architecture and urban design. Central in the manifestos of this movement was the idea of the historical meaning of urban forms while design practices were focused on reconstruction, revitalization, renewal of urban space.
7. Here is meant a large number of research projects that concern the relationships between syntactic properties of space and people's patterns of movement and adopt Hillier's methodology of syntactic analysis of spatial configuration. This kind of analysis is operated by means of *Axman* software programme that has been developed in Space Syntax Lab. directed by Professor Hillier, Bartlett School, University College London.
8. According to Lengkeek, counterstructures when incorporated into everyday reality, loose their specific meaning. Then, the quest for counterstructures goes on a search for new horizons (Lengkeek, 1995, p. 31). The same seems to happen with avant-garde design; when avant-garde trends are established in the design practices, they loose their innovative character and thereby, can not work as counterstructures attracting tourism.

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