

DIAGNOSIS AND TERRITORIAL PERSPECTIVE OF GOLF IN ANDALUSIA: BETWEEN TOURISM QUALIFICATION AND REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENTALISM

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I. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

This article is expressed in the context of the studies which aim at analysing the spatial and tourism repercussions of the functioning logics of the new global economic system related to territories, in this case stemming from the effects of the globalization of real estate markets and the redefinition of the tourism-residential production spaces in Mediterranean peripheral areas, and more specifically in Spain. In the country, said redefinition has reached its highest extent, and this is proven by the accelerated urbanization of coastal spaces for the implementation of tourism-residential activities.

All of this is part of long-winded processes within which the creation of new coastal territories are generated. These are characterized by the juxtaposition of residential and tourism uses, this spatial configuration appears to be a product of short-term asset accumulation logics, in detriment of mid to long term territorial designs which display higher environmental, social and even economic sustainability.

This study has focussed on the role played by golf courses in these processes. The reasons for this have been, firstly that golf courses have been an important part of the urban growth of the Andalusian coastline in the last housing bubble period; and secondly that they perfectly illustrate the theory of hedonic pricing, according to which environmental and landscaping amenities imply an added value for residential areas. That is to say, golf courses lead to an appreciation in value of neighbouring plots of land and properties, and consequently these also undergo intense development processes, in some cases displaying clearly speculative trends.

Currently the golf industry is based on three basic pillars: sports, tourism and the real estate market. In using a variety of sources and through a specific method, it is possible to evaluate the weight of each of these in a given golf course, or as is the objective of this article, in the group of installations existing in a region. The terms real estate golf, tourism golf and sports golf are defined in this article.

Real estate golf is comprised of installations which are formal and functionally conditioned by this sector. Said orientation towards the real estate activity conditions the morphology and functionality of the course from its birth to its culmination, favouring real estate performance (views to the course) over sports-tourism usage (views from the course). Similarly, it will determine the development of said course's lifespan, as being immersed in the dynamics of the real estate business, in which profitability derives from the sale of homes associated to it, there is no special emphasis in the installation's correct upkeep and management, rather the repetition of the same business elsewhere will be sought.

As opposed to real estate golf, tourism golf is more focussed on the design and correct management of the sports installations. Residential factors are normally present, but the number of homes is significantly lower and the degree of visual contamination caused by these towards the course is better dealt with in what the player's visual harmony is concerned. The placing of hotels and tourism apartments insures the prolonging of the lifespan of the courses and, in many cases, reduces employment seasonality. As it depends on successful tourism, the business calls for adequate maintenance and normally adheres to environmental management standards.

Sports golf is defined as the group of golf courses which are neither influenced by real estate activity nor by the business of tourism. This is showcased in the design and the non-existence of residential or tourism usages. The presence of this typology in Spain and Andalusia is symbolic when compared to other countries where golf is considerably more popular.

This article is based on the following approach: In general, golf course promoters in Andalusia have opted for real estate golf, in turn, the Regional Government and Town Halls, which play a part in regulating this activity, have not been able to or have not wanted to re-orient the sector towards the tourism or sports options.

Based on the aforementioned approach, the objectives of this article are the following: Firstly, the confirmation of the role played by real estate golf in Andalusia when compared to its tourism or sports role; secondly carrying out a diagnostic about the current situation, outlining the territorial, economic and social problems derived from this option; and finally providing proposals which lead to a scenario of improved territorial profitability.

II. SOURCES AND METHOD

There are several sources for this investigation: The usage of aerial photographs will endeavour to verify the supremacy of the role of real estate in golf, whereas field work will verify and qualify the aforementioned hypothesis and finally, the bibliography will allow for comparing the reality of Andalusia with theoretical references, basically based around golf as a classifier of real estate products. On the other hand, the study of legislation and the measures approved by the government allows for the devising of a series of plans for the sector from a territorial viewpoint.

The method consists on quantifying and evaluating the weight of real estate golf related to tourism and sports golf in Andalusia. For this, fundamentally 3 aspects are studied:

- Firstly, and in more general terms, is a balance of the large revenue levels of golf as an economic sector, trying to compare the weight of what relates to real estate to what is tourism and sports-oriented.
- Secondly, a quantitative and cartographic approach, an analysis of the current situation and the evolution of golf courses and their surrounding areas, with the objective of confirming and quantifying the real estate role of these installations.
- Thirdly, an approach which relates to legality, stemming from the study and interpretation of the norm which regulates the implementation of golf courses in Andalusia, in order to verify whether the Government clearly tends towards a model of tourism quality or in turn, towards one which is more oriented towards the use of golf courses as a real estate tactic.

Of these aspects, the second is the one which displays higher methodological originality. It is based on a geographical database about the development process of the Andalusian coastline, and its usage is possible thanks to manipulation of data through Geographic Information Systems. The database is synthesized in a vectorial layer which gathers urban uses of the ground digitalized at a (1:5,000) detailed scale throughout 9 reference dates (from 1956 to 2011), which allows for diachronic studies of the phenomenon.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Aerial photography analysis and the visit to a variety of golf courses point at an irrefutable fact: the overwhelming majority of golf courses appear to be surrounded by –or filled up in their interstices– developed areas, normally residential; the percentage of golf courses with some sort of real estate development reaches 93% in the coastal areas of the region. The link between golf and the real estate sector is definitively verified if the weight golf has had in the development process of the Andalusian coast is taken into consideration: data drawn from the database allows us to state that in 2007, golf courses and their annexed residential areas accounted for 21% of the urban area of the Andalusian coastline. If the development process for the period before the bursting of the real estate bubble (1998-2007) is taken into account exclusively, the result is that a third (32%) of newly-built coastal urban areas were linked to golf courses.

The dates and trends revealed in the investigation allow us to state that in the preceding stage, real estate speculative logic had prevailed over business logic in what golf is concerned, which is more centred around tourism and sports, as well as improved mid and long term economic and social profitability. Orientations towards the favouring of the tourism worth of courses seemed to be predominant, at least where statements were concerned in the political and legal discourse which had been building up in Andalusia in light of the rapid growth of the number of courses during the first few years of the new century; however, the start of the financial crisis minimized a discourse which was still incipient, reducing the normative precautions on the extending of residential use of golf spaces, and effectively reinforcing them for the future in the face of their possible real estate orientation.

The real estate constraints related to the design and functioning of courses may negatively affect the future development of golf tourism in the affected areas. Despite the financial results of this tourism model having displayed a global uptrend in the last few years, it is also true that competitive destinations with significant average standards offering very reduced prices have been emerging; therefore a negative image of Andalusia as a golf destination for the more qualified sector of consumers may lead to a serious structural threat for the future development of the sector, especially when related to securing the more profitable markets in the sector, this is due to excesses in construction saturation and deficient course designs.

Currently, the preferred residential orientation of the majority of Andalusian golf areas places these in a critical context which is similar to the rest of Spanish real estate products, characterized by a collapse of their demand and a steep depreciation of said products. In this way, the usage of golf as an element of the real estate business has played a part in the intensifying of residentialism in coastal areas, guiding the use of higher quality territories (this quality is measured through criteria such as proximity to the coast, climatic comfort, access to important communication hubs or places with increased landscaping value) towards one which is markedly more stationary and displays limited mid and long term economic and social productivity; entailing a high opportunity cost which is caused by removing said products from a possible future use which is more in line with their exceptional territorial assets. All in all, it may be stated that said orientation towards the real estate business makes environmental and territorial costs associated with the process unaffordable when their low long-term economic and social profitability is taken into account.