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Water

Design and Management

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Platja Llarga, Cap de Salou

Jordi Bellmunt, Xavier Andreu

Two seaside projects address landscape's relationship with tourism and water.

Located in Salou, near Barcelona, the Platja Llarga and nearby Beach Club underline the relevance of landscape by reinventing tradition for contemporary uses.

In 2000 our practice won a competition to redesign the one kilometre long seafront promenade of Platja Llarga in Salou, approximately 100 kilometres south of Barcelona. Salou is the most important of the Costa Daurada's tourist centres where the Port Aventura theme park was built in 1994. So the Salou's Platja Llarga Promenade was to be the first of a series of interventions promoted by the touristic resort of Port Aventura in an effort to link the theme park with the sea.

Salou's image is historically related to the seafront and the landscape. This project began with an absolute respect for the site, involving a careful environmental sensibility towards such pre-existing elements as the beach, the pine forest, the natural amphitheatre, the dry stone walls, the red rocks, the promenades, and the scent of the shrubs. Respectful to the area's landscape, these elements together with the sloped site maintained and underlined the design, defining the seafront promenade and its public spaces.

The criteria for the project were at the same time clear and cautious. The primary goal was to upgrade and protect the site, mostly because the Platja Llarga is a place where one feels the presence of nature; a part of the coast where water, sand, and rock meet each other under a wonderful pine-forest splashed by majestic trees, palmettos and agaves. The intent was to recover the beach and its original dimensions by restoring its sand dune systems and vegetation of teucrium, narcissus and tamrisks, consolidating the "sea-land limit" border-zone.

The project had two steps: redefining the dune skyline and planting the dunes with seaside vegetation; and defining the organization of the publicly used coastal fringe, the Platja Llarga. The final result of the design was the revealing of the landscape that arose from the analysis. The purpose appears to fit the site perfectly; the design is the result of a dialogue between the site and a creative intent.

An oxide concrete pavement and a continuous white bench define the promenade at Platja Llarga, conducted by newly planted agaves. Walls of natural rocks are built to manage water (page 84/85).

The seafront promenade is defined by a continuous white bench and an oxide concrete pavement laid on a bed of sand. The same element contains the lighting and pluvial waters and is a visual reference on the landscape, designing a continuous, tense line upon the site. Small rest zones appear between pines and the new vegetation. Walls that manage water, contain slopes, and control security, were designed – like the pre-existing walls – with locally extracted rock with a maximum diameter of half a metre. New vegetation planting of lavender, bougainvillea, agave, hiedra, Spanish broom, mastic trees and thyme, cover slopes and coloured walls and offer familiar fragrances. The promenade, among trees, corners, and shadows will find west “bay windows”, meeting places or simply the gratitude to feel nature all around.

A minimally dimensioned roadway, for driving, incorporates a promenade for visitors with wheelchairs and prams. Belvederes, “static” areas, and alternating paths that fit the site conditions and potentials, are incorporated with the road. Vegetation is an important part of this project; it’s not used for primarily aesthetic reasons but as an instrument to transform the landscape. The choice of the plants and the way of planting defined the different spaces. At the same time the use of sand allowed the recovery of the original dune landscape. The species planted are typical of the Catalan coastal landscape. In fact, many of the plants adapted perfectly to the sandy and windy dune landscape and are tolerant of hot temperatures.

The pine-forest is another important part of the project. The aim was to overlap the border of the coastal landscape with the pine forest and at the same time to conserve its main structure by using almost the same number of trees on the coastal part. The edge of the pine forest was destroyed by the salty air. The project incorporated and complemented the initial pine-forest with substitute plants to help make the planting less fragile, protecting the existing trees from marine winds and, at the same time, ensuring their permanence and reinventing the forest edge with new shades and colours. New vegetation like *Tamarix gallica*, *Acacia dealbata*, and *Pinus pinea* resist the harsh conditions of the Mediterranean coastal zone. The main idea is to respect the topography of the site and adapting the project to it, so there are some soft slopes and ramp paths where vegetation appears as a tool to merge these interventions.

Some scented species have been used to cover the slopes and for maintaining the character of the place, they include: *Lavandula stoechas*, *Rosmarinus officinalis*, *Thymus vulgaris* and *Agave americana*. The vegetation also allows spaces which separate the dynamics of the beach to better integrate with surrounding urban developments. The public park located in the eastern end of the beach is an example of it, where we found arboreal species that offer shadows to the travelers and shrubs with beautiful colors.

The new Beach Club is respectfully integrated into the existing pine forest. The thematic water park includes dressing rooms and a restaurant, heated pools for adults and children as well as one with salty water and sand beach.



PLATJA LLARGA SEAFRONT PROMENADE, CAP DE SALOU, TARRAGONA, SPAIN
Client: Port Aventura, S.A. - G.P. Resort
Architects: Jordi Bellmunt i Xavier Andreu, Arquitectes Associats, S.C.P.
Collaborators: Olga Alonso, Agata Buscemi
Area: 2.9 hectares
Costs: 2.5 million euros
Completion: 2005





The 2.6 hectare Beach Club lies on a slope above the Platja Llargu. A complex programme of different waterfaces is marking the seven pools.

After the realisation of the Platja Llargu in 2005, Port Aventura proposed the design of a Beach Club on a slope close to the Platja Llargu. With a complex programme of water surfaces, dressing rooms, restaurant and swimming-related facilities, the Beach Club fits in with tourism promotion and the creation of a global image for the resort. Hotels, residential areas, and golf courses connect the thematic park to the seafront. The Beach Club project – itself a water-based thematic park – could offer a quality image for the touristic resort.

The principal aim of these projects has been the use of good site orientation, working with maximum respect for the area of environmental and landscape quality originating from a strong pre-existing landscape. Also there is the definition of an adequate programme that allows fragmentation, efficacy of using, and the control of all the seafront, including the beach and the public seafront promenade.

At least, the proposals for the seafront promenade of the Platja Llargu and the Beach Club, lie in an strategic point on Salou's coast, the meeting point of the coastal fringe. The projects bet with an integral vision, offering a quality image that increases both the resort's and the municipality's tourist image and offer a revision of usual landscape with elements designed for its new use that as well as naturalize it, and reinvent it for its contemporary use.

BEACH CLUB, CAP DE SALOU, TARRAGONA, SPAIN

Client: Port Aventura, S.A. – G.P. Resort

Architects: Jordi Bellmunt i Xavier Andreu, Arquitectes Associats, S.C.P.

Collaborators: Agata Buscemi, Fabrizio Calosci, Albert Castejón, Cony Lupercio,

Odette, Rigano, Mar Santamaria

Area: 2.6 hectares

Costs: 6.5 million euros

Completion: 2006



Water: Design and Management. As a fascinating design means, water creates a focus in many outstanding projects. But water is also a precious commodity, a vital resource. The challenge is in combining striking design with sustainable water management, integrating flood protection and stormwater management in usable urban spaces. This issue of *Topos* presents new parks and waterfronts as well as comprehensive planning projects for entire cities – including examples from Singapore, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Mexico, the USA and Europe.

ISBN: 978-3-7667-1730-6



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