

Tourist Destination PorečDenis Ambruš¹, Vlatko Dusparić¹ University of Rijeka

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Abstract: The small peninsula on the western coast of Istria represents the landscape level of the existential space of the city of Poreč. Through a conscious choice of construction sites, the urban level of the existential space of the planned city/colony of ancient Parentium (Poreč) was shaped. On the relatively small area of the peninsula, a strict orthogonal system was applied with longitudinal and transversal streets forming blocks of rectangular base. The configuration of the urban level of the existential space continued to develop in the direction of the decumanus towards the inland, occupying natural areas. Research into the urban identity of the existing urban structure of Poreč points to the most important elements of identity:

- valuable urban spaces of the historic core on the peninsula and its extensions towards the mainland created on the block grid.
- ensembles and individual buildings of the highest value (Euphrasian Basilica, palaces, interpolation of the Neptun Hotel, ...).
- corridor-like dispersion of tourist facilities in the urban coastal area as the prevailing spatial pattern.
- The interweaving of city and nature at the city edges (the sea, greenery in the hinterland that in some parts approaches the coast).

The existing urban structure of Poreč indicates mistakes that, in our opinion, relate to hotel complexes located along the coast and multi-family residential areas. The analysis points to the problem with interventions in the renovation and reconstruction of existing hotel points, in which tourist resources – nature – are consumed. The altered surroundings thus become irrelevant as a reason for tourist visits. Problematic are also the multi-family housing settlements built in the 1950s, constructed in line with the prevailing practices of modern urbanism that interrupt the continuity of the block matrix as part of the urban identity. The fragmentation of the urban structure is also contributed to by tourist facilities that occupy large parts of the urban coastline in a punctiform manner. The observed shortcomings indicate the need to protect public interest in the city's spatial planning process.

Keywords: Poreč, tourist destination, urban identity, protection of public interest

1 Introduction

The peninsula on the western coast of Istria is the landscape level of the existential space of the city of Poreč. By consciously choosing the site for construction, the urban level of the existential space of the planned city/colony of ancient Parentium (Poreč) was shaped. On the relatively small area of the peninsula, a strict orthogonal system was applied, with longitudinal and transverse axes that form rectangular blocks. The main cardo and the main decumanus were determined based on their convergence according to a formula. The city's dominant features, the forum and the capitolium, are located at the end of the peninsula.

The isolation of the position of the capitolium, argues Mate Suić¹, is linked to the proto-urban phase when sacred places represented points of social convergence that were conservatively preserved. The configuration of the urban level of existential space continued to develop in the direction of the decuman towards the inland hinterland, occupying natural areas. In all phases of the settlement's development, architectural interventions meant a combination of the ancient medieval style and the substrate of later centuries. After Pula, Poreč is the second largest city in Istria and, according to the 2021 census, has 16,666 inhabitants. Located in the most developed / intensive tourist area, it positions itself as a family destination, with developed sports activities and a rich cultural heritage. **(Figure 1)**

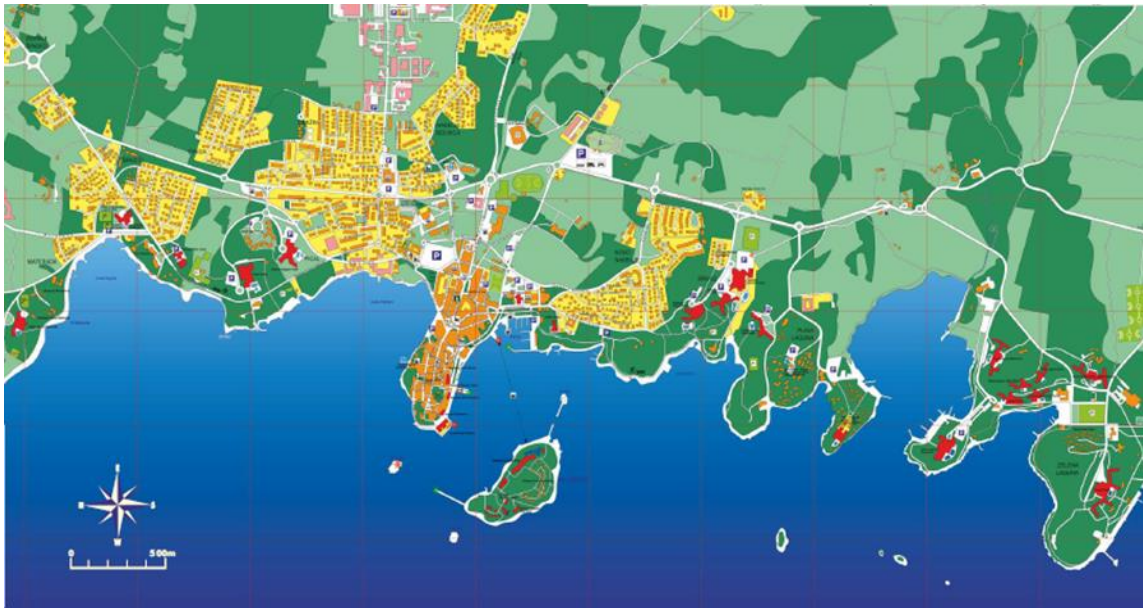


Figure 1. Poreč - City map. (<https://ontheworldmap.com/croatia/city/porec/porec-tourist-map.html>)

2 Analysis of Urban Structure

Research on the urban identity of the existing urban structure of Poreč points to the most important elements of identity:

- valuable urban spaces of the historic core on the peninsula and its extensions towards the mainland developed on a block grid.
- ensembles and individual buildings of the highest value (Euphrasian Basilica, palaces, the interpolation of the „Neptun“ hotel, ...).
- corridor-like distribution of tourist facilities in the urban coastal area as the prevailing spatial pattern.
- the interweaving of city and nature on the urban edges (the sea, greenery in the hinterland which in parts approaches the coast).

The existing state of Poreč's urban structure, in our opinion, indicates the following shortcomings at the level of spatial planning and implementation:

- replacement of the traditional urban form with functionalist one in the location of multi-apartment housing settlements,
- lack of appropriate physical and functional structures in a large part of the urban coastal area outside the historic center.
- reconstruction and expansion of existing tourist facilities along the coast at the expense of natural green areas,
- omission of central city functions accommodation along the development axis of the historic core – extension of the decumanus to the east.

The architectural heritage of Istria, warns Antonio Rubbio, is very rich and should serve as an inspiration and guide on how to build, preserve the landscape, and integrate the city with the natural surroundings: "The old urban elements of Rovinj, Poreč, Pula,... are functional, beautiful, and humane spaces where humans are creators and the center of the world."² Inherited structures are characterized by "pronounced rusticity, intimate, specifically Mediterranean environments and ensembles, the spontaneous clustering of buildings, and a unique logic of growth."²

The multi-family residential neighborhoods of Poreč, built in the 1950s following the prevailing practice of modern urbanism, do not contain the values of traditional urbanism; they indicate a break in the historical experience of continuity in urban space as part of the city's urban identity and "stand sadly as if torn away from the core of the settlement."² The disintegration of the city's block matrix is evidenced by free-standing multi-family buildings placed on green areas that were supposed to function as social spaces for the new neighborhoods.

The disintegration of the city's block matrix is evidenced by freestanding multi-residential buildings placed on green areas that were supposed to function as social spaces of the new cities. Unfortunately, this did not happen: 'The socialization of space allocation resulted in antisocial behavior within it.'³ Fragmentation of the city is also contributed to by tourist facilities that occupy parts of the urban coastline in a punctiform manner. The traditional city is 'a spatial phenomenon of continuous form, and the loss of continuity of urban space could mean its symbolic destruction.'⁴

The historical center and the urban coastline are the most important components of the 'city by the sea,' and their integration indicates the values of the city as a whole.⁵ Urban theory distinguishes three models of integrating the historical center and the urban coastline: fragmentation, balance, and wholeness. The historical center of Poreč (**Figure 2**), located on the urban coastline, represents a complete model of integration (**Figure 3**), unfinished and problematic in terms of the choice of physical and functional structures in the coastal area outside the historic core.

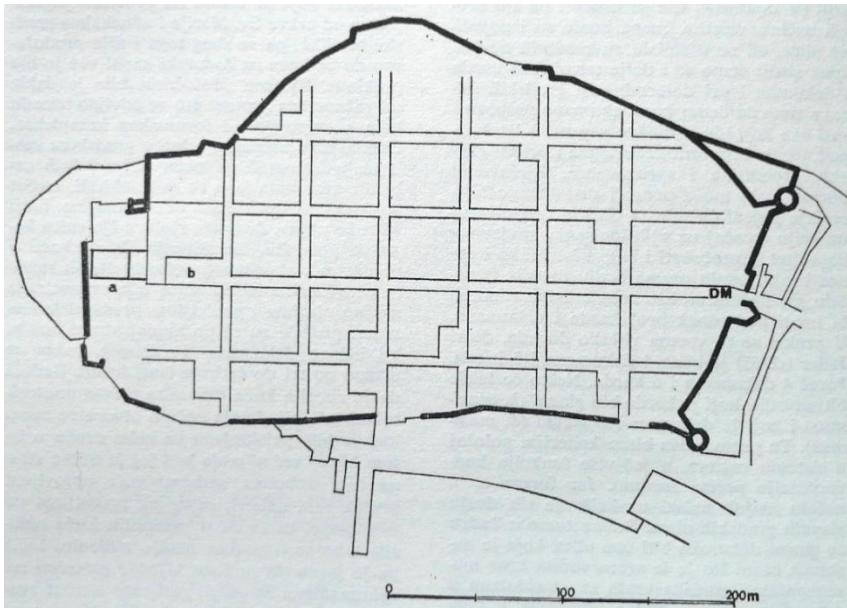


Figure 2. Layout of the urban grid of ancient Parentium (Prelog, M., 1957).



Figure 3. City of Poreč – Valamar Riviera Hotel & Residence (author, 2022.)

Numerous hotels in Poreč are located within the green landscape structures along the urban coastline (**Figures 4, 5**). The coast is the soul of a coastal town, and the positioning of tourist facilities along much of the coastline of Istrian towns, according to Tomislav Buzančić, indicates the creation of a tourism reserve at the most vital point of the town: "in this way, the values of life are sacrificed to the brutal and imposed hegemony of tourism."⁶ Coastal towns, Živojin Kara – Pešić reminds us, turn their face to the sea: "they are not linear in the continental sense of space, but the coastal necklace is their most significant, spontaneous magnetic pull."⁷ Instead of a corridor system of high-density, point-like tourist structures along part of the urban coastline, a more compact structure of various urban facilities harmoniously mixed with smaller-capacity hotels is considered more suitable, in order to affirm the identity of a "town on the sea" rather than a "town by the sea".



Figure 4. Hotel Valamar Diamant (author, 2022.)



Figure 5. Poreč, Rubin Sunny Hotel by Valamar (author, 2022.)

Hotel Pical 2, located in the urban coastal landscape north of Poreč's historic center, is being transformed into the luxury year-round Pical Resort 5*, Valamar Collection, with 500 accommodation units for 1,700 guests and a congress center for 1,200 visitors. The reconstruction project resulted in an increase in the building plot's development coefficient and utilization coefficient compared to the original state.⁸ Previously, Hotel Luna 2 in

the same area was transformed into Marea Valamar Collection Suites 5*, with similar spatial consequences, positioning both as one of the most attractive tourist zones on the Adriatic coast. In our opinion, both examples represent an unacceptable form of reconstruction of existing nature-embedded hotels, highlighting the problem of treating nature as a tourist 'resource'. The transformed environment, as Ante Marinović – Uzelac⁹ points out, becomes irrelevant as a reason for a tourist visit.

The pressure of tourist demand has exceeded the capacities of the historic core and indicates the need to expand the physical and functional structures in the area of the urban center and beyond. We consider the lack of implementation of central functions along the development axis; historic core – extension of the decumanus to be a mistake. The solution to the problem was offered by the urban planning competition “Peškera” from the year 2000.¹⁰ (Figure 6) Unfortunately, it all ended at the planning stage. A similar fate befell the competition for the urban design of the subcenter of the city of Poreč / Špadići – Veli – Mali Maj from 2011.¹¹ (Figure 7)

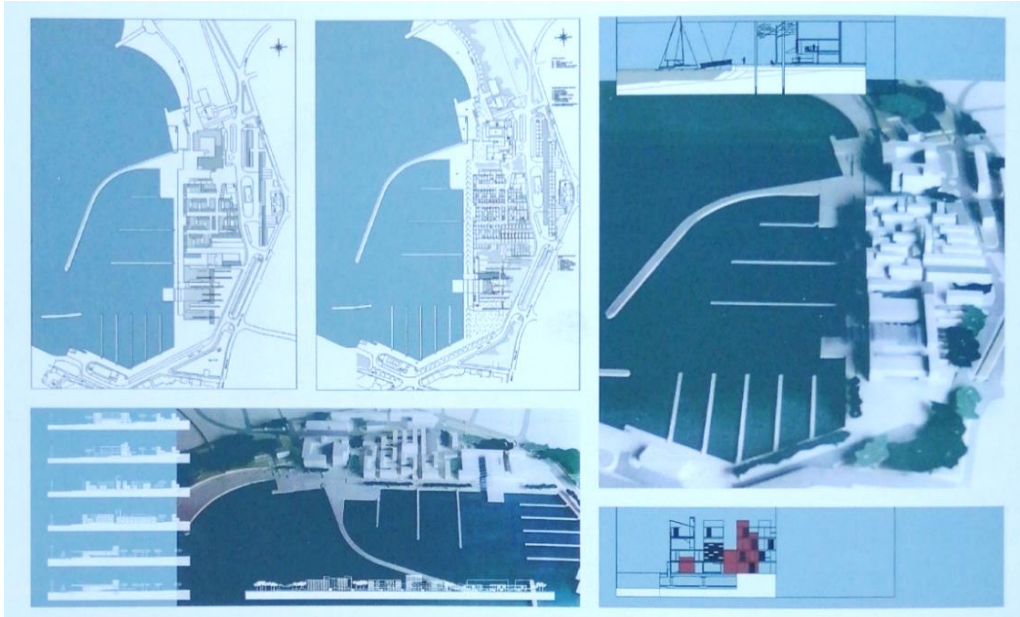


Figure 6. Peškera, Poreč, Competition entry 2000 (author: Geng, M.)



Figure 7. Subcenter of the city of Poreč, Competition entry, 2011 (authors: Dusparić, V., Šepić, S.)

The observed errors and shortcomings of the urban structure can be corrected or mitigated through careful spatial planning and timely implementation of the missing necessary facilities, all aimed at protecting the public interest in the area.

3 Discussion

This paper is written with the general aim of changing the paradigm of planning (spatial) processes, from which qualitative lessons need to be drawn, such as the case studied in Poreč, and the understandable reality of the current state of space in (non)time of widespread touristification. Such lessons would relate not only to established planning foundations with residents who live in the city but also generally to all those who work and stay there seasonally. Additional planning processes must take into account and assess a tenfold increase in pressure on infrastructure and public spaces during the peak summer season from June to September. This change in the planning paradigm sets as a starting point the average values along with extreme winter (minimum) and summer (maximum) quantification of basic indicators within the primary structure. It further includes all additional totals and densities of habitats (the proposed dynamic model of population structure) in the territory of the subject area, with optimizing relative indicators of transport network density and the concentration of central facilities and activities within them. Poreč is an urbanly sensible, acceptable, directed potential expert model for a pilot urban analysis of a new generation of spatial planning documents that considers the state and status of the difference between what happens in reality (*de facto*) and what is officially recognized and prescribed (*de jure*). The aforementioned must necessarily be linked to the principles and recommendations of relevant agenda^{12,13} regarding heritage protection and the enhancement of urbanity so that, in this sense, it can also serve as a recommendation for further development.

4 Conclusion

The urban identity of the tourist destination Poreč relies on valuable architectural heritage and the interweaving of the city and nature at its edges. The existing urban structure of Poreč points to shortcomings that, in our opinion, relate to fragmented structures. Residential areas and multi-apartment buildings have emerged following the prevailing practice of modern urbanism, with a break in the continuity of the block layout as part of the urban identity. The fragmentation of the urban structure is also contributed to by tourist facilities that occupy large parts of the urban coastline in a punctuated manner. We consider unacceptable the reconstruction of existing hotels immersed in nature, which, by increasing accommodation capacities and facilities, consume nature. The observed mistakes can be avoided by a careful approach to spatial planning in the city of Poreč, aimed at protecting the public interest in the space.

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