



THE BRAND: SUNNY BEACH AND ALBENA, BULGARIA

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Abstract

The resorts of Sunny Beach and Albena are two key-points of the touristic development in Bulgarian Black sea coast during socialism. They were extremely popular in the country, but also abroad like in Soviet Union republics and between the members of Eastern bloc. Thus, in the period, their architectural and urban characteristics formed part of the image of Bulgaria as culture and state.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the resorts Sunny Beach and Albena from contemporary perspective and as examples of creating working touristic and at the same time (post)socialist identity of Bulgaria. We are conducting retrospective analysis of significant architectural projects, which were turned into Bulgarian Black sea trademarks, and are exploring their high level of demand and popularity. We shall also examine some of their images in the public spaces of socialism and postsocialism and we shall seek the socio-cultural traces which they affixed on today's residents and visitors.

The expected paper results are in the fields of architectural history, same as preservation and adaptation of cultural heritage.

Keywords: Sunny Beach; Albena; socialist sea resorts; sea hotels; Bulgarian architecture; socialism and postsocialism; Black sea coast line.

1. Introduction and methodology

Significant development of coastal tourism in Bulgaria is evident only in the second half of the 20th century but its beginning might be traced logically before that moment. According to a Varna library reference [10] "in 1921 Varna is officially

announced as the first Bulgarian resort. Thus, "the government had given to Varna municipality the rights to collect taxes and to acquire loans for the city future progress" and "a decision to build the first constant sea baths in the country was taken in 1889 under the mayor Krastyo

Mirski". Architect Sava Dimitrievich was the designer of these original buildings, which were first open in 1890. Also, the little village resort near the monastery "St Constantin and Elena" and Varna, was already in use in the 1930s.

The state face of socialist tourism - the company of Balkantourist was created in 1948 with government initiatives and decisions. It had to inherit the prewar travel agency and assets of Balkan [6]. In 1956 the site for the first hotel in the future sea complex of Golden sands was opened. During the next decades Bulgarian Black Sea coast line was gradually composed with tourist settlements and services and even now their structures are being (re)built and saturated with new urban spaces and elements. In the period 1948-1989 the area was meant to progress as providing "new", "group" and "organized" tourism activities. Therefore even the resort "St Constantin and Elena" was renamed as the complex of "Druzhba" [Friendship] and was specialized for important state and party figures. But other than its direct purpose - the expected huge profits from internal and international tours, Black Sea coast line development had also social functions. It was aimed to provide group relaxation and leisure options for local and foreign citizens and to assist the state health care, providing balneotherapy and various profilaxis.

Hence a great number of villas, villages, complexes, camps, youth centers and summer rest stations and locations were built one by one during the socialist regime reign. The biggest and the most popular of them even now are the resorts "Golden Sands", "Sunny Beach" and "Albena". In our article we chose to focus only on "Sunny Beach" and "Albena" for several reasons: they have great similarities in their creation, their chosen scale of

building and spaces, their significance in the second half of 20th century and now. And on the other hand, the resorts of Golden Sands and Sunny Beach share close late destinies as urban settlements, but there are some key differences between "Sunny Beach" and "Albena" current situations and their architectural development in time.

From contemporary scientific point of view, resort architecture created in the socialist period could be investigated in at least four basic perspectives:

- The first one could follow its pragmatic material essence - the ways of mastering climate and natural resources, approaches of adapting to acceptance and distribution of chosen numbers of tourists, as well as providing their service.
- The second is based on tracking the historical evolution of the industry and the region, same as the changes in social features, technology, economics and so on.
- The third one is focused on the designers and their author's presence in the period.
- The fourth may trace connections with ideological content imbued in tourist architecture. In 1967, Todor Todorov wrote "Along with its own physical image, architecture itself is an important ideological and artistic factor of the tourist propaganda." [16, p. 30]. This attitude towards any built environment was well known these and openly applied decision-making factor in the socialist period.

But for us, those four perspectives are interweaved in intricate cause-and-effect framework and their elements adopt mixed features. Therefore we believe that they should not be investigated separately. For example, the final material solution

of resort buildings (the first perspective) was a consequence from all the other three perspectives: the technological level of implementation and the relevant historical and social norms of habitation; the political errand for particular looks or styles; and also from its own author's concept. In each particular case, there were mixed motivations for the final visual and architectural decisions.

Also, during the socialist regime period, there were special expectations and requirements towards the leading personalities in art activities, as they had been often used to create images of socialist identity and norm. "The main ideological task at that time had been set on enhancing the social impact of chosen art creators and in drawing a certain mythical aura around true artists, as their figures, once turned into idols had to be almost associated with divine powers. People of art, had been meant to lead the common people and thus had gained an important role in the process of ideological propaganda over masses" also states Joanna Spassova-Dikova [13, p.117]. Hence key architects were also portrayed as heroes, and their projects were extensively propagated and praised. But in parallel, (although there were some exceptions) designers themselves were sincerely convinced in the values and aesthetics of socialist construction, and were proudly presenting their beliefs and works to the public. Thus, the expression of propaganda message of optimism and friendship, initially laid over the coastal complexes, was deeply affected by the objective environmental and technological context same as the chosen designer's decisions.

2. Sunny Beach and Nikola Nikolov

The main conceptual authors and also

architects of some major buildings in "Sunny Beach" and "Albena" are accordingly Nikola Nikolov (1924-1996) and Nikolai Nenov (1922-2006).

During the second half of 20th century architect Nikola Nikolov (ill.1) is known as a designer with a high professional prestige. Born in Nova Zagora, he was one of the first to take his diploma in the Higher Technical School of Sofia in 1949, and started his career in the studio of the famous Georgi Ovcharov. According the annals in Bulgarian Union of Architects [2] one by one, he became the winner of numerous awards and honors, including the Dimitrov Prize. In 1970s he was appointed as manager of "Leisure and Culture" department in "Urban Planning and Architecture" board of Sofia municipality. Architect Nikola Nikolov is the author of Sunny Beach and Nessebar urban plans and leads teams who prepare general plans for major parts of Varna, Veliko Tarnovo and Burgas.

Nikola Nikolov's works today could be defined as both modernist (as they are directly following the type and the function of a project, using the structure as an aesthetic tool) and neo-romantic (as they were built in search of an ideal national, social and human norms and features, following on purpose the chosen ideal proportions, materials or ornaments). One of his design mottos says "Use no faces, no gestures to attract the attention of passersby. Just simplicity, only honesty." But



Figure 1. Photo of Nikola Nikolov, *Arhitektura*, 2, 1994, p.5; [In Bulgarian: - сн. Архитектура]

along with it, he also stresses the high importance of "being a good person before anything." [11, p.15-16] The constant study and interpretation of Renaissance and medieval Bulgarian architecture were also notable elements of his style.

Architect Nikolov was of course not the only one working on Sunny Beach and its nearby region like the villages of Nessebar, Sozopol and others. Designs made by Georgi Stoilov, Stefka Georgieva, Stefan Orozov and others should also be marked in the period.

There is a huge difference between the original space (ill.2), functional and territory saturation in the complex of Sunny Beach and its current situation, which was reached for the last decades. In fact the constant increment of building density and height continues even today, and in some cases it could be called grotesque. Still that's the way for the tourist industry, to be relevant with the enlarged demands for new offers and services.

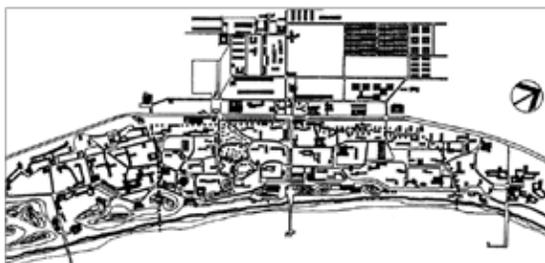


Figure 2. Original plan of Sunny Beach, Kovachev, Atanas. *Gradoustroistvo*. - Avangard Prima. Sofia, 2013, p. 304, fig. 366 [In Bulgarian: Ковачев, Атанас. Градоустройство - С., 2013]

But this kind of space saturation altered the complex spatial character itself. Postwar social culture and the spirit of socialist collective community had assumed harmonious joint use of many locations and structures like baths, beaches, stadiums, theaters and summer stands, gardens and squares, as well as organized group interactions in them. Those spaces and elements had then been connected with open or internal

passages, free galleries and spots - a large net structure within the whole settlement. But after the regime change in 1989, clear outlining of borders between each property were formed at many places and therefore a lot of barriers and fences were applied. Thus the accent was set on more individual and may be more luxurious way of rest and tourism, and the complex "net" space structure was gradually transformed in "cell type" formation.

In spite of the dynamic political social and regime changes during the whole period 1960-2015, and its various urban and architectural reflections, we noticed two stable tendencies in coastal Bulgarian architecture aesthetics:

for quest, presentation and (re) building of a national style and image for semiotic visual interpretation of nature and sea landscape

Supporting the "quest for national" trend, there are many known examples of architectural integration of Bulgarian Revival proportions, silhouettes, elements, materials and details which were widely applied in Black sea buildings in the period 1960-1980. (One of the beloved initial models for adaptation were Balkan vernacular houses, which then had been deeply studied and strictly classified in regions and climate divisions.) The use of this approach for inspiration and transforming interpretations was highly appreciated as a designer methodology. Regretfully, most of those first resort buildings are now not well preserved.

Nowadays the quest for national forms may be found more literal and in some cases highly imitative and excessive in its scale. There are more direct (and not always appropriate) visual borrowings from known Bulgarian Revival types and structures, and stronger accents on

“native” and “Revival” materials, elements, and stylistic decoration. Still this quest for the national style renders Bulgarian coastal architecture in unique regional image.

The expression of sea and water elements (either in general spatial solutions or by smaller picturesque details) could be found all along the Black Sea coast, but perhaps it might be fully revealed as trend in the complex of Albena.

3. Albena and Nikolai Nenov

Albena is now much more preserved as structure and density, unlike the results of the dynamic, at times spontaneous and not quite controlled, contemporary rebuilding of Sunny Beach and Golden Sands. The complex of Albena was designed in the late 1960s - about 10 years after Sunny Beach and Golden Sands - and later on had a rhythmic and stable construction history. Originally the resort was focused on family tourism and offered many attractions for children. The closeby village of Kranevo gradually turned into a resort satellite and also was growing and developing in a similar direction.

In fact Albena’s central spaces were designed in a bit different way than the same parts of Sunny Beach. (ill.3) The proposed hotel disposals were created with many solid wings, resembling firm spatial structure of tree or coral: a structure that was harder to disassemble and divide into individual plots. Hence after the regime change in 1989, the complex was set under privatization as one whole structure and later on continued its urban development in the same principle. So despite the necessary renovations and reconstructions and all the now added new gardens, beach attractions, small buildings and etc., Albena managed to retain its initial urban and touristic character.



Figure 3. Original plan of Albena, Kovachev, Atanas. Gradouostroistvo. - Avangard Prima. Sofia, 2013, p. 304, fig. 367 [In Bulgarian: Ковачев, Атанас. Градоустройство - С., 2013]

On January 18, 1968 the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and also a Bulgarian Prime Minister - Todor Zhivkov - symbolically made the first sod on the field, which marked the construction start of the settlement of “Albena” [4, p.51]. The chief architect of Albena was another remarkable Bulgarian architect and a graduate of the Prague Polytechnic, Nikolai Nenov (ill.4). For his work in the complex, he was also awarded with a Dimitrov Prize in 1971 [1], which then had been accepted as the highest of state honors.

The artistic reflections of the seaside environment implemented in Albena are varying in type, size and approach. Detailed interpretations of flowing lines on its facades depicted waves, streams, oval river stones, tree trunks and flowers (tulips, snowdrops, crocuses) and their fluid forms outlined an elegant contrast with the harsher modernist volumes beneath. (Ill. 5)



Figure 4. Photo of Nikolai Nenov, Archive Jekov, N: 380, UAB

Their symbolism was meant to present the complex of Albena as unique and visually enchanting part of Bulgarian coast. “As the national spirit in Bulgarian

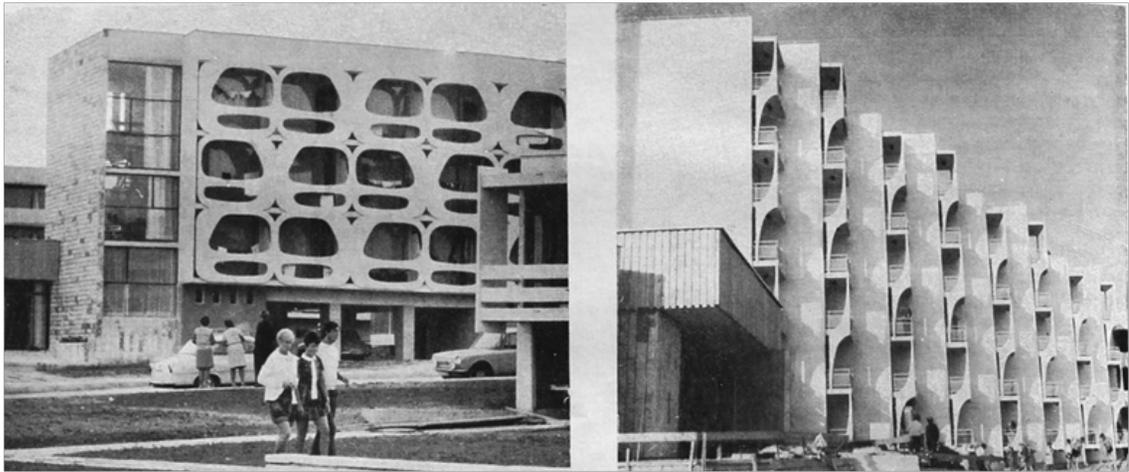


Figure 5. Albena, Third and Sixth Hotel groups, Rahnev, Ivan. Albena - прекрасна i vdahnovena tvorba na savremennata balgarska arhitektura. Arhitektura, 1, 1971, 18, [In Bulgarian: Рахнев, Иван. Албена - прекрасна и вдъхновена творба на съвременната българска архитектура. - сп. Архитектура, 1971]

architecture will be fully achieved not only following and creatively interpreting vernacular traditions in contemporary cases, but most of all with discovering and establishing of new, more aesthetically impressive and more effective architectural tools and approaches, which, also using the current structure technologies same as the artistic composition rules, to fully convey the new content, the creative wishes and the humanity of our socialist society.” explains Rahnev [12, p. 4], in the article “Albena - a magnificent and inspiring work of contemporary Bulgarian architecture”

Hence associations of nature and sea glory within the the settlement, were set in all the scales - as facade and exterior elements, as volumes and silhouettes, into the urban planning scheme, and even in the final choice of the complex name (as Albena is the heroine of an eponymous story by Jordan Jovkov and she stands for the renowned, even fatal beauty of Bulgarian women.)

In fact somehow even a romantic tradition was established, as in Albena most of the hotels were named on women or flowers, and in Golden Sands and Sunny Beach their titles followed Bulgarian rivers, mountains or other landscape markers.

4. Media, image and brand

In 1960s the high quality of tourism development were noted in the media both behind and outside the Iron Curtain. In 1960 article Samoylova was published in the magazine Architecture, where she says, “The best works in states with people’s democracies like the magnificent resorts in Bulgaria - “Golden Sands”and “Sunny Beach” or in Romania - “Eforie” and others, as a rule successfully combine functional expediency, technical excellence and greater external appeal.” [14, p. 21] In 1962 Paul Underwood entitled his article for New York Times - “Bulgaria’s ‘Florida’ by the Black Sea” [18]. And in 1966, in the same newspaper Arthur Eperon explained that “Bulgaria copies the best of western tourism”. [5]

A part of the identity and even brand formation of the new Bulgarian Black Sea resorts was their enrichment with bigger variety of attractions and night entertainment. In 1965, in Sunny Beach was set an annual music festival named “Golden Orpheus”. For its ceremonies later on was built a new summer theater with noteworthy appearance (His author was arch. Vi. Radoslavov). Some of the Bulgarian songs winning prizes at the

“Golden Orpheus” were: “Lyubovta na Yungata” (1965) performed by Margret Nikolova, “Delfinite” (1966) by Yordanka Hristova, “Robinzon Kruzo” (1968) by Boika Naidenova. May be the most popular festive song afterwards was “Edna balgarska roza” [One Bulgarian Rose] (1970) by Pasha Hristova.¹ Her song depicted a Bulgarian rose as a farewell gift of love an memory to a leaving stranger. Participants in the Orpheus events in 1970s and in 1980s were Josephine Baker, Maria Pakhomenko, Gianni Morandi, Alla Pugacheva, Julio Iglesias, the group Mungo Jerry. The “sea” music, created for festivals, competitions or as other entertainment activities was extremely loved and even now has been often revived and remodeled.

In paralell in 1960s and 1970s popular nightclubs with their own fashion and individuality were built in several locations. One of the most recognized Black Sea building was Bar Variete in “Sunny Beach” complex which was designed by architects M. Sokolovski and Evgeni Zidarov and the engineer Ivan Panov. (ill.6) The Variete was marked as “a Sunny Beach night club, fully unique in its vision and scale” [9, p. 4] The building exists even today, though not exactly the same. The bar is partly preserved and is now imbued as a part of a different structure but sill its initial forms are used as leading point of the current composition.

Regular tourist flows were fully considered in Hristo Koev’s, Maria Mileva’s and Stefka Georgieva’s lunchrooms and dinning houses, usually planned with large open terraces and panoramic sea views.

¹ The songs are now available online as follows:
 Margret Nikolova “Lyubovta na yungata”
https://youtu.be/TUn8ye4Z_uk
 Yordanka Hristova “Delfinite”
<https://youtu.be/bB50OfqIzhQ>
 Bonka Naidenova “Robinzon Kruzo”
https://youtu.be/tuai3sh_XDQ
 Pasha Hristova “Edna Balgarska Roza”
<https://youtu.be/Nu-ZCDiEW7c>



Figure 6. Bar Variete in Sunny Beach, night view, Архитектура, 8, 1965, cover. [In Bulgarian: Барвариете Слънчев бряг, нощен изглед, сп. Архитектура, корица]

Hristo Koev’s restaurant of “Lazur” was highly praised for the use of sun-protection elements inspired from the vernacular Bulgarian house [15, p. 9]. In Sunny Beach, different concepts for dining and entertainment were implemented (as vision, architecture, service and target group) due the mixed composition of the expected tourists. Some of the facilities were focused on Bulgarian traditional food, customs and vision (restaurants “Magura”, “Boyar tent” and others. Others were directed to a cosmopolitan or even exotic reality, food and entertainment (restaurants like “Dune,” “Orient”, “Fregata” and others.).

About the same time in the territory of Golden Sands had been established the Auto Races Rally “Golden Sands”, and Albena resort had featured a beauty contest “Miss Bulgaria”, which became a model base for similar future events. Albena’s restaurants were following the already established trends in Sunny Beach,

providing various lifestyles and services.

As a successful attempt for professional branding Sunny Beach and Albena resorts received their own logos, created by the famous artist Stefan Kanchev, where Sunny Beach was represented with a sun circle made of seagulls, and Albena with a stylized with wave ornaments letter A. [8] Numerous times the sea resorts were published in various periodicals and presented in postcard albums and touristic handbooks.

In 1970s and early 1980s, Black sea resorts gain more and more fame also as part of the movie and TV productions. Four of the most ever popular and loved Bulgarian movies of those period chose them as their stage. These were the youth story "Petimata ot 'Mobi Dik'" created in 1970 by Grisha Ostrovski and Todor Stoyanov (screenplay Boris Aprilov), and the social comedies "Kit" [Whale], again in 1970 directed by Petar Vasilev and (screenplay Cheremuhin), "S detsa na more" (1972) written by Bratya Mormarevi and directed by Dimitar Petrov and "A nameless band" written by Stanislav Stratiev and directed by Lyudmil Kirkov in 1982². The third production was filmed in Sunny Beach and was a powerful tool to imbue in the Bulgarian public a popular model for luxurious and fun life on the summer seaside. In 1986, the love of the sea and its coastline inspired the creation of adventures kid TV series called "Vasko da Gama ot selo Rupcha" again written by Bratya Mormarevi and directed by Dimitar Petrov (1986), telling the story of boys living in Varna and their friend Vasko, escaping with his father - a sailor.³

Thus the life in the tourist coastal settlement could be traced as a major

theme in all the medias presenting socialist art and "sea" architecture was both its scenography and its organizational distributor. The influence of those "sea" design for us is still present today.

5. Conclusions.

In 1960s and 1970s Black Sea resorts in Bulgaria were a huge state project that draw a lot of creative energy and experimental inspiration. The used structures, styles, materials and designs were expected to represent "socialist" novelty and beauty. In Sunny Beach a charming contrast symbiosis between severe concrete (a bit brutalist high-rise) buildings and smaller brick-made and vernacular hotels and restaurants was implemented. In Albena (ill. 7) Nenov was experimenting with modules, ready elements and industrial technology to combine panels and artisan-like facade detail. (According to Dimitrov, Albena was even the first Bulgarian urban experimental building case where unified, modular, prefabricated systems were fully applied [3, p. 84].)

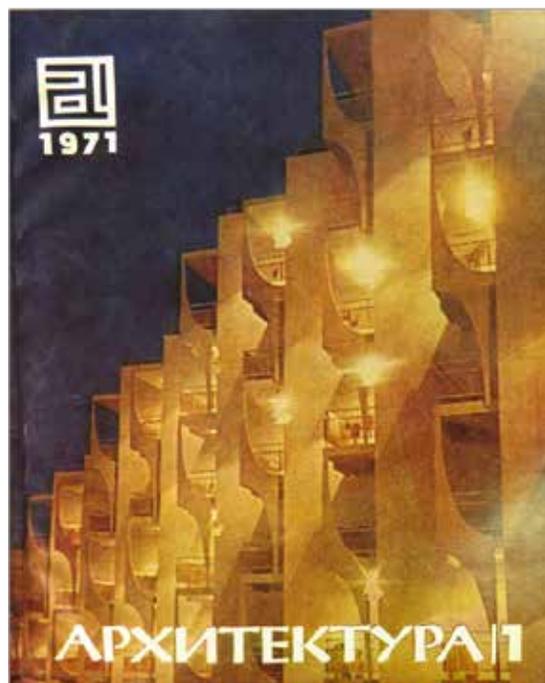


Figure 7. Albena, Facade, Night view. - Arhitektura, 8, 1971, cover. [In Bulgarian: Албена, фасада, нощен изглед, сп. Архитектура, корица]

² The movies are on IMBD as follows: Petimata ot 'Mobi Dik', 1970, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0174116/>; Kit, 1970, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0289728/>; S detsa na more, 1972, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0326098/>; A nameless band, 1982, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0205306/>;

³ Vasko da Gama ot selo Rupcha, TV Series, 1986, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0289728/>

In the beginning of the 1980s, as marked by Kovachev [8, p. 302-303], a new phase of the Black Sea Coast urbanization processes was presented - it was building of smaller "two- or three- level settlements with romantic appeal". Later on, after some political changes in the late 1980s the state gradually is withdrawn from control and rearrangement at the Black Sea, and there are two decades of private building initiatives with varying success.

Despite some errors and inconveniences with the complexes' infrastructure and their dynamic expansion, strong wishes to enhance the quality and comfort in the offered rooms, food and service, and to satisfy individual clients and their relevant target groups were also present all the time. The approaches towards this goal were of course different during the decades. In 1971 the most important concept given by Tonev [17, p. 236] (and explained as "the main realistic course") in sea resort design was the "full render of natural beauty and resources". Today the beach beauty is also traced and exposed but the concept is not

that imperative, as there are new aesthetic accents on full climatization, style and service development or even sustainable design. Still in all the years after the resorts creation, there are also two stable design trends: of representing Bulgarian style and of interpreting the natural environment with architecture.

All the Black Sea resorts gradually were getting specialized as service and style and now Albena retains its family profile, while Sunny Beach is dispersedly segregated into small areas for different types of tourists - Bulgarian and international, individual, group and family, youth and mixed, each aiming for deluxe or more economical solutions.

Today we can sense the need of people to accept all parts of the history as possible formation of their identity, and not to exclude anymore some inconvenient or unpopular experiences. Black Sea was never unpopular, and its development now is seeking connections with its origins and past. Therefore new and detailed researches in this directions are expected.

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БРЕНД: ШУАҚТЫ ЖАҒАЖАЙ ЖӘНЕ АЛБЕНА, БОЛГАРИЯНЫҢ ТАБЫС ТӨЛҚҰЖАТЫ

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Аңдатпа

Социализм кезеңіндегі Қара теңіздің болгарлық жағалауындағы туризмді дамытудағы негізгі екі нысан болған Шуақты жағажай мен Албена шипажайлары. Олар, ел ішінде, сондай-ақ, кеңестік республикалар мен Шығыс одағының мүшелері арасында үлкен сұранысқа ие болды. Осылайша, бұл кезеңде олардың архитектуралық және урбанистикалық ерекшеліктері, Болгарияның мәдениет пен мемлекет ретіндегі келбетін қалыптастырды.

Аталмыш жұмыстың мақсаты, Шуақты жағажай мен Албена шипажайлары және Болгарияның еңбек туризмінің қалыптасуы мен (пост) социалистік біртектілігін заманауи көзқараста зерттеу болып табылады. Біз, болгарлық Қара теңіз сауда маркаларына айналған белгілі архитектуралық жобаларға ретроспективті сараптама жүргіземіз, және олардың жоғары сұранысқа ие болуы мен танымалдылығын зерттейміз. Сонымен қатар, олардың жалпы социалистік және постсоциалистік кеңістіктегі кейбір ұғымдарымен танысамыз, және де олардың қазіргі тұрғындар мен қонақтарға таңған социомәдени белгілерін бақылаймыз.

Күтілетін нәтижелер сәулет, тарих және мәдени мұраны сақтау және бейімдеу саласына үлес қосу болып табылады.

Трек сөздер: Шуақты жағажай; Албена; социалистік теңіз шипажайлары; теңіз қонақ үйлері; болгар архитектурасы; социализм және постсоциализм; Қара теңіз жағалауы.

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Аннотация

Курорты Солнечный пляж и Албена – это два ключевых пункта в развитии туризма на болгарском побережье Черного моря в период социализма. Они пользовались огромной популярностью как внутри страны, так и среди советских республик и среди членов Восточного блока. Таким образом, за этот период их архитектурные и урбанистические особенности отчасти сформировали облик Болгарии как культуры и государства.

Целью данной работы является исследование курортов Солнечный пляж и Албена с современной точки зрения и в качестве примеров формирования трудовой туристской и в то же время (постсоциалистической идентичности Болгарии). Мы проведем ретроспективный анализ значимых архитектурных проектов, которые превратились в торговые марки болгарского Черного моря, и исследуем их высокий уровень востребованности и популярности. Мы также изучим некоторые их представления в общественном социалистическом и постсоциалистическом пространстве и пронаблюдаем социокультурные следы, которые они закрепили на сегодняшних жителях и гостях. Предполагаемые результаты работы лежат в областях истории архитектуры, а также сохранения и адаптации культурного наследия.

Ключевые слова: Солнечный пляж, Албена, социалистические морские курорты, морские отели, болгарская архитектура, социализм и постсоциализм, побережье Черного моря.