

Ángel Cadarso y Manuel Aymerich en la Costa del Sol

La Ciudad Residencial Tiempo Libre de Marbella

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Más de medio siglo después de su construcción, la Ciudad Sindical de Vacaciones de Marbella (conocida hoy como Ciudad Residencial Tiempo Libre) persiste en la Costa del Sol como ejemplo, a pesar de sus modificaciones, de conjunto habitacional de baja densidad a pocos metros de la costa occidental de la provincia de Málaga. Situado a más de 8 kilómetros de Marbella hacia el oeste y a 27 de Fuengirola hacia el este, la única conexión de la Ciudad Sindical con estos núcleos urbanos es, aún hoy, a través de la Carretera Nacional 340. Esta distancia unida a su localización junto a una de las escasas formaciones de dunas y pinares que aún quedan intactas en este sector de la costa malagueña sitúa a la Ciudad Sindical como una suerte de oasis mimetizado con el paisaje frondoso de bosque costero. El proyecto, compuesto por una serie de viviendas unifamiliares con importantes espacios abiertos y edificios de equipamientos, se elabora por Ángel Cadarso del Pueyo y Manuel Aymerich Amadiós entre 1956 y 1962, y se construye en un entorno natural prácticamente inalterado, sin leyes urbanísticas que dictaran su ordenación. De hecho, no sería hasta 1961, con el proyecto de la Ciudad Sindical ya iniciado, cuando se publicaría en el BOE el primer Plan de Ordenación de la Costa del Sol, el cual no se empezó a implantar de facto hasta después de la aprobación del Plan de Desarrollo Económico y Social de la Provincia de Málaga en 1962. Si bien ya existían algunos ejemplos de edificios erigidos al albor del aumento de visitantes extranjeros en la Costa del Sol, el proyecto de la Ciudad Sindical emerge como un desarrollo urbano pionero en cuanto a aspiración de autosuficiencia, articulación de baja densidad y estrecha relación entre el interior de los espacios residenciales y el exterior natural y prácticamente virgen de su paisaje.

Este estudio analiza el proyecto de Cadarso y Aymerich desde dos puntos de vista. Por una parte, se reflexiona sobre el carácter anómalo de su implantación en el territorio de la Costa del Sol, atendiendo en especial al contexto histórico y a la densidad del conjunto. Por otra parte, a través de un análisis del desarrollo urbano del entorno, se interpreta el proyecto como precursor, anterior a normativas urbanísticas, de un orden territorial característico hoy en la Costa del Sol. El modelo de "urbanización", adoptado en el

diseño de la Ciudad Sindical y entendido como una tipología de conjunto residencial planeado y cercado, se interpreta como paradigma en esta área de asentamiento entre lo urbano y lo suburbano, lo público y lo privado, lo residencial y lo recreacional. Este enfoque pretende poner en valor a la Ciudad Sindical no sólo como ejemplo de diseño residencial con una fuerte relación con el paisaje, sino también como punto de partida, hasta ahora pasado por alto, del desarrollo urbano de la Costa del Sol.

Costa del Sol, Urbanización, Baja Densidad, Cadarso, Aymerich

Ángel Cadarso and Manuel Aymerich at the Costa del Sol

The Ciudad Residencial Tiempo Libre in Marbella

More than half a century after its realisation, the Ciudad Sindical de Vacaciones in Marbella – known today as Ciudad Residencial Tiempo Libre – stands out in the Costa del Sol as an example, despite modifications, of a low-density housing complex just a few meters from the seashore in the western coast of Malaga. Located more than 8 kilometres from Marbella to the West and 27 kilometres from Fuengirola to the East, the National Road 340 remains even today as the sole link between the Ciudad Sindical and the urban centres nearby. This distance, coupled with its location next to one of the few remaining formations of dunes and pine forests in this area of the coast of Malaga, places the Ciudad Sindical as a sort of hidden oasis amidst the lush coastal forest landscape. The project, consisting of a series of *hotelitos* with large open spaces and facility buildings, was designed by Ángel Cadarso del Pueyo and Manuel Aymerich Amadiós between 1956 and 1962. It was built in an almost unaltered natural environment, with no urban planning laws dictating its layout. In fact, it was not until 1961, with the construction of the Ciudad Sindical already underway, that the first *Plan de Ordenación de la Costa del Sol* was published in the BOE. This plan did not begin to be implemented until after the approval of the *Plan de Desarrollo Económico y Social de la Provincia de Málaga* in 1962. Although there were already some examples of buildings erected due to the increase of foreign visitors in the Costa del Sol, the project for the Ciudad Sindical emerges as a pioneering urban development in its aim at self-sufficiency, its low-density and a close relationship between the interior of the residential spaces and the natural and virtually untouched landscape.

This study analyses the project by Cadarso and Aymerich from two points of view. On the one hand, it reflects on the anomalous nature of the project's insertion in the territory of the Costa del Sol, and it pays special attention to the historical context and the density of the complex. On the other hand, an analysis of the urban development of the area is performed in order to interpret the Ciudad Sindical as a precursor, prior to urban planning regulations, of a characteristic territorial order in the Costa del Sol. The model of *urbanización*, adopted in the design of the Ciudad Sindical and understood as a planned and gated residential complex is interpreted as a paradigm of urban settlement between the urban and the suburban, the public and the private, the residential and the recreational. This approach aims to highlight the Ciudad Sindical not only as an example of a residential design compound with a strong relationship with the landscape, but also as a hitherto overlooked starting point in the urban development of the Costa del Sol.

Costa del Sol, *Urbanización*, Low Density, Cadarso, Aymerich

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The Ciudad Residencial Tiempo Libre in Marbella

The almost eighty kilometres of shoreline of the *Costa del Sol Occidental* – the southern Spanish littoral spanning from Málaga, the capital of the homonymous province, and Estepona – are now irreversibly built up. Starting in the late 1950s and continuing today, the touristic attractiveness of the area has prompted the accommodation of more than 13 million visitors before the COVID pandemic in 2019, with more than 25% of foreign residents with permanent status as of 2021.¹ What was a poorly developed area by the end of the Spanish Civil War and during the difficult first years of the Franco dictatorship, was rapidly transformed into a national and international hub for all year-round leisure activities particularly from the 1960s onwards.

Among the first buildings erected along the Coast of Málaga with the purpose of fulfilling the demands of the tourist waves, three stand out for its boldness and scale: the Parador de Montemar (1944), the Hotel Pez Espada (1959) and the Hotel Meliá (1960). Pockets of leisure for the aristocracy were also propelled by the entrepreneurship of Prince Alfonso of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, especially with the foundation of the Marbella Club in 1954, and golf clubs started to mushroom as early as the 1940s with some designed by renowned architects such as Luis Gutiérrez Soto.² All of these interventions were built thanks to the injection of private capital in the Costa del Sol, and they preceded the delineation of the first planning regulations in the region: the *Plan de Ordenación de la Costa del Sol of 1961*. With the main – and almost sole – limitation of leaving an unbuilt strip of 25 meters wide along the coast, and although the *Plan's* director, Luis Blanco Soler, would emphasize the attempt of going beyond the mere planning of growth and development of consolidated urban cores, the truth is that the *Plan de Ordenación* mostly addressed the organisation of the four main towns along the coast: Torremolinos, Fuengirola, Marbella and Estepona.³ The area in between these towns, which by the 1960s was still pretty much relying on agricultural and fishing activities, was left virtually unregulated. It was precisely in one of these almost virgin areas, 8 kilometres from Marbella to the West and 27 kilometres from Fuengirola to the East, where an unprecedented urban development in the Costa del Sol promoted by a public organism took place. Drawing upon the experience during the 1950s in the coast of Tarragona, the *Obra Sindical de Educación y Descanso* launched in 1956 a competition to design a so-called Ciudad Sindical de Vacaciones in the municipality of Marbella.⁴ Following the public endeavour of ensuring space and time to rest for the working class, the competition asked for the design of a compound of 'little hotels' – *hotelitos* – as well as supporting infrastructure such as a dining hall, a restaurant, a church, etc., to ensure the self-sufficiency of the urban complex.

¹ "La Costa del Sol supera la barrera de los trece millones de turistas y el 98 por ciento recomienda el destino para unas próximas vacaciones", ELMUNDO, 11 de enero de 2020, <https://www.elmundo.es/andalucia/2020/01/11/5e19b3c1fdddfb7bc8b4623.html>. "La Costa del Sol, multiculturalidad en crecimiento", La Vanguardia, 14 de febrero de 2021, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20210214/6247102/costa-sol-multiculturalidad-crecimiento.html>.

² Moreno Fernández, Francisco Javier, "Gutiérrez Soto en Marbella: Los Fundamentos del Placer". *Boletín de Arte* n° 20, Universidad de Málaga, 1999.

³ Gavilanes Vélaz de Medrano, «PRIMEROS PLANES EN LA COSTA DEL SOL (1955-1967): LA ESCALA INTERMEDIA FRENTE AL CRECIMIENTO CONCÉNTRICO.», s. f., 19.

⁴ Mar Loren-Méndez, Daniel Pinzón-Ayala, y Roberto F. Alonso-Jiménez, "From the Ciutat de Repòs to the Ciudades Sindicales de Vacaciones: Seaside Vacation City for Workers in Marbella. The Present of Modern Leisure Heritage", *Architectures of the Sun*, n.º 60 (2019): 24-33, <https://doi.org/10.52200/60.A.COIHW6CJ>. For a complete account of the history of the three developments of Ciudades Sindicales promoted by the *Obra Sindical de Educación y Descanso*, see Ricardo Carcelén González, "Cuando la clase obrera se hizo turista. Las ciudades de vacaciones de la Obra Sindical de Educación y Descanso. Estudio de un modelo inacabado 1955-1975." (Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.31428/10317/6031>.

Out of the three entries to the competition, the jury selected the proposal designed by Ángel Cadarso del Pueyo and Manuel Aymerich Amorós for the construction of a total of 190 little hotels in an extension of 32 hectares. The urban complex, categorised by Juan Antonio Ramírez within the loose framework of *El Estilo del Relax*, was indeed defined by soft and organic morphologies at different scales.⁵ The *hotelitos*, scattered around a wide area, were connected by a network of sinuous streets embracing the soft and wavy topography of the landscape, and were complemented by a series of buildings of a bigger scale that seemingly complied with a certain care in its insertion into and relationship with the surrounding context. But while the aesthetic of the Ciudad Sindical de Vacaciones in Marbella, as well as its low density, may be read as an example of respectful interaction between natural environment and touristic infrastructure, its consequences can be interpreted beyond this apparently harmless image. In this paper, I analyse the proposal for the Ciudad Sindical de Vacaciones in Marbella from two main points of view. On the one hand, I reflect upon the project's insertion into the existing landscape, and its compliance towards the emergent typology at the time of the self-sufficient *urbanización*. Drawing upon existing literature on both the proliferation of urban complexes for leisure in general, and on works discussing the promotion of *ciudades residenciales* with public capital in particular, I situate the project as a pioneering attempt for self-sufficiency that has been rather overlooked in the discussion of this kind of urban typology within the context of tourist enclaves in Spain. On the other hand, I analyse the insertion of the Ciudad Sindical de Vacaciones in Marbella within the planning regulations that were starting to take shape at the time in the Costa del Sol. By doing this, I aim to understand which role this project played in the soon-to-become unstoppable building activity along the coast. Ultimately, the aim of this paper is to understand the role of the Ciudad Sindical de Vacaciones in operating an exemplary model of self-sufficient *urbanización* that would later be endlessly reproduced, as well as of an urban complex inserted in a territory with absence of regulation and infrastructure that preceded a chaotic urban sprawl in the area.

Coastal Oasis

The Ciudad Sindical de Vacaciones in Marbella was to be located in a piece of land given by the *Diputación Provincial de Málaga* to the *Delegación Nacional de Sindicatos* at no cost by the end of 1955.⁶ A total of 32 hectares of a rectangular shape along the coast in the municipality of Marbella, and conveniently close to the National Road N-340, was about to become the first development in an area in between towns that had been up until then virtually untouched (Fig. 1). The competition brief launched by the *Delegación Nacional de Sindicatos de Falange Española Tradicionalista* asked for three differentiated areas within the complex: a residential area, a sports' area and a maritime area. The residential area would be composed by 200 *hotelitos* of different sizes to host families with or without children. This area would also include a building hosting the reception, offices, direction of the complex, visitor's room and restroom; a building including a restaurant and common areas; a water deposit, and a chapel. The sports' area would include a changing

⁵ Ramírez, Juan Antonio, Santos, D., and Canal, C. *El Estilo del Relax. N-340. Málaga, 1953-1965*. Servicio de Publicaciones del Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos en Málaga. 1987.

⁶ Carcelén González, "Cuando la clase obrera se hizo turista. Las ciudades de vacaciones de la Obra Sindical de Educación y Descanso. Estudio de un modelo inacabado 1955-1975."

room, bowling area, basketball court, *frontón*, and tennis courts. The complex would be completed with a bar-restaurant, restrooms and showers in the maritime area, as well as green spaces.



Figure 1. Aerial View of the coastal area in 1956 were the Ciudad Sindical would be built.
http://sit.marbella.es/VISOR_SITMA/

The winning entry of Aymerich and Cadarso proposed an intervention based on the qualities of the existing landscape to shape a series of streets with scattered *hotelitos* (Fig. 2). In the end, a total of 193 built objects in four different typologies were built. Both semi-detached and detached, the *hotelitos* would benefit from generous open spaces, with the outdoor terrace exceeding the surface of the indoor spaces in some cases. Most of them were equipped with two bedrooms, a small living room, a kitchen and a bathroom (Fig. 3). The image of the complex resembled that of a top-down vernacular town (Fig. 4). Following design principles successfully applied throughout the 1950 for the construction of the *Pueblos de Colonización*, the Ciudad Residencial can be interpreted as another such Pueblo, if only justified with the narrative of a leisure space instead of that of production and labour.⁷

After several modifications, the final design for the Ciudad Sindical de Vacaciones in Marbella was approved by the end of 1958, although the construction would not finish until the summer of 1962. The idea for the final version of the project was that of producing a village-like atmosphere using humble materials, positioning its image close to what one could observe in nearby traditional, organically developed small towns such as Mijas and Marbella itself. The project would become successful in its promotion after completion in specialised and renowned architectural magazines such as *Hogar y Arquitectura* in 1962 and *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* in 1964. In this sense, the architecture proposed by Aymerich and Cadarso for the Ciudad Residencial certainly aligned with current interests at the time towards the value of vernacular architecture and urbanism. It was precisely in 1964 when Bernard Rudofsky would celebrate the validity of vernacular settlements with the seminal exhibition 'Architecture without Architects' at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, followed by a publication featuring Mijas among other organic towns.

⁷ Andalucía (Spain) Consejería de Cultura e Instituto Andaluz del Patrimonio Histórico, *Pueblos de colonización durante el franquismo: la arquitectura en la modernización del territorio rural*. (Sevilla: Consejería de Cultura, 2008).

Aside from the vernacular materiality pursued in the design, the project develops an in-depth investigation into the creation of organic shapes and the production of spaces in-between indoor and outdoor areas. To this end, the church and the building hosting the director's office were designed with particular care in their organic morphology and spatial complexity, with both acquiring a certain landmark condition that is nonetheless seamlessly inserted within the spatial and morphological logic of the urban complex at large. The church was shaped using a continuous wall that wrapped itself to create an enclosed yet open space for religious services (Fig 5). The openness of the building granted the church a quality of public square, an open plaza at the core of the Ciudad Sindical for all visitors to gather and fulfil their religious needs. The director's building was shaped following a similar 'wrapping strategy', with an in-between entrance space that would provide privacy and light to the offices inside the building.

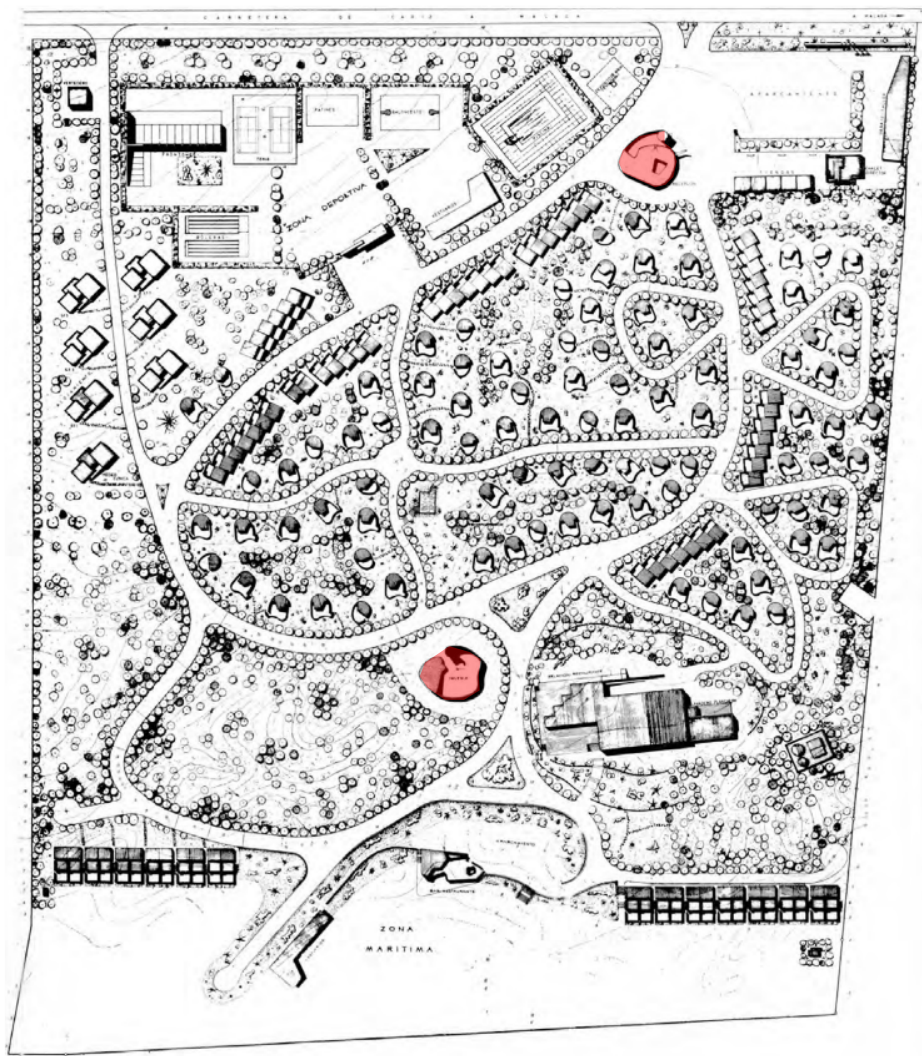


Figure 2. Site Plan of the Ciudad Residencial, with the church and the director's building highlighted in red. *Hogar y Arquitectura* (41), 1962:2.

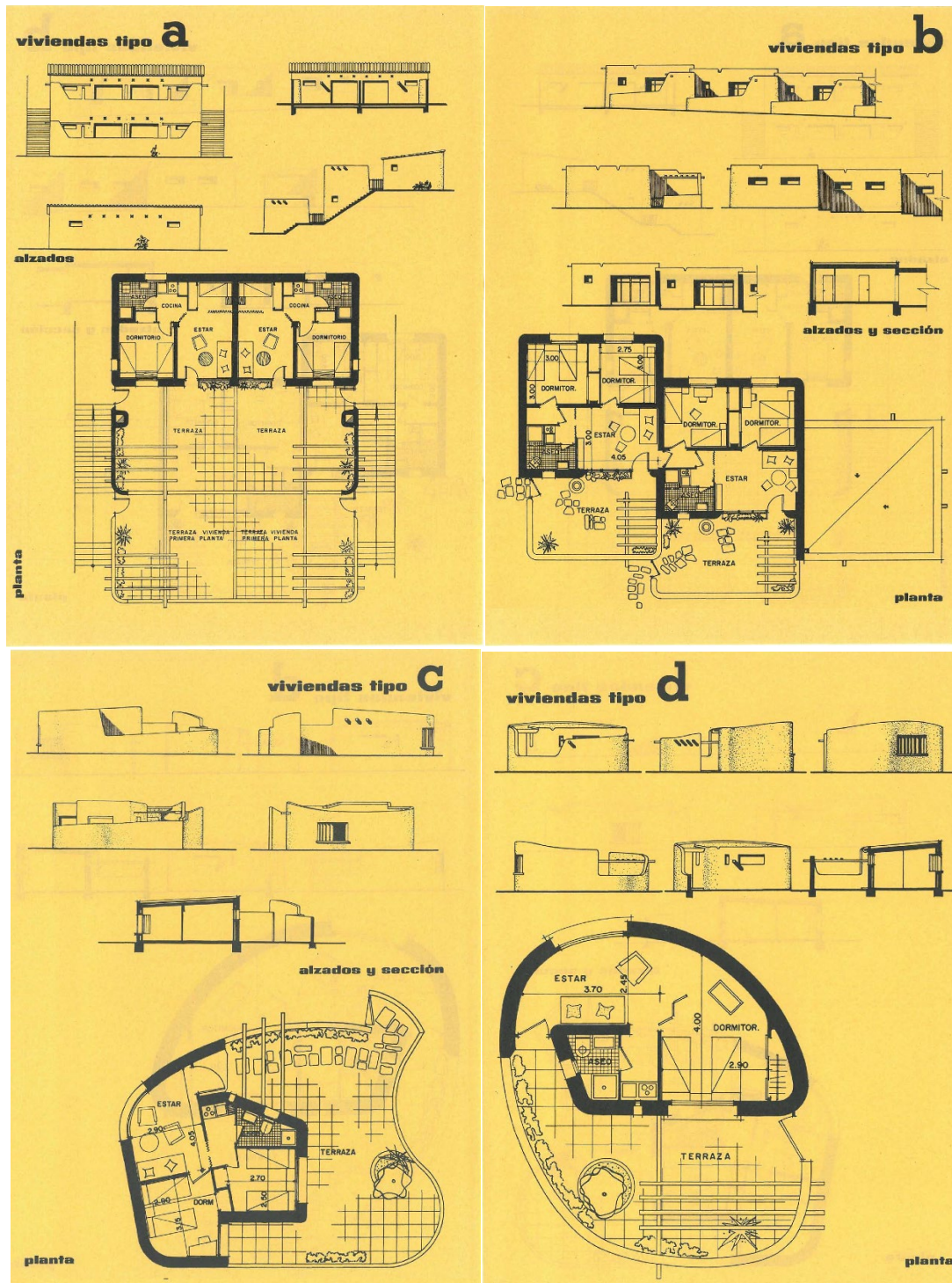


Figure 3. Types of 'hotelitos' in the built proposal by Cadarso and Aymerich. *Informes de la Construcción*, Vol 16, nº 157. January-February 1964, 47-59.



Figure 4. View of the Type D housing area. Base de Datos Patrimonio Inmueble de Andalucía.



Figure 5. Still frame of the documentary 'Felices Vacaciones', aired by the NO-DO in 1968

The formal emphasis in the design of buildings like the church and the director's office, however, also denotes an attempt to put forth the presence of both religion and the authorities as the outstanding powers ruling the Ciudad Sindical. The self-sufficiency of the complex was undoubtedly meant to provide good service for families and children, but at the same time it promoted a surveilled and controlled environment with set rules and a codes of behaviour. The propaganda of the regime further emphasized the fact that families would find in these 'cities' all they needed for their wellbeing and rest, even postal boxes 'like in any

other city'.⁸ In addition, the vernacular appearance of the complex, recalling the image of a traditional village, diffuses the fact that the complex is a top-down intervention on a natural landscape. Far from the organic urban settlements highlighted by Rudofsky, the Ciudad Sindical appropriates the vernacular language to infuse a sense of familiarity, belonging and comfort. Their commonalities may rather be seen in their absence of urban regulation, albeit their insertion radically differ in their timespan and purpose.

An Unregulated Territory

While the call for proposals for the Ciudad Sindical de Vacaciones was launched in 1956, it would not be until more than a decade later, in 1968, that the first *Plan General de Ordenación Urbana de Marbella* was approved. Up until then, the planning proposals that attempted to regularise the territory of the Costa del Sol had miserably failed in their endeavour. A combination of public and private interests, as well as a deficiency in the expertise on the part of the municipalities to interpret and adopt the regulations dictated by the planning laws contributed to such failure.⁹ Indeed, by the time the first hotels and golf clubs were opening their doors to tourism in the 1950s at the Costa del Sol, the only active law with the purpose of regulating the built environment was the *Ley del Suelo* of 1956. This regulation was preceded in the Costa del Sol by the *Estudio para la Ordenación de la Costa del Sol* in 1955 promoted by the *Dirección General de Turismo* and the *Secretaría General para la Ordenación Económica y Social*. The *Estudio* emphasized the need to understand the urban logic of the coast beyond the historical urban settlements. However, neither the *Estudio* nor the *Ley del Suelo* were effective regulatory tools to manage the rampant development of the coast. Moreover, the *Plan General de Ordenación de la Costa del Sol*, approved in January 1961 was born 'with no life', and it would not be until a year later, with the approval of the *Plan de Desarrollo Económico y Social de la Provincia de Málaga* in 1962 when this plan started to be slowly implemented. As described in '*Las urbanizaciones particulares. La ley del Suelo ante el fenómeno turístico*', this succession of failing plans and postponed implementations prompted the development of a great number of private *urbanizaciones* along the Costa del Sol that were, at all effects, illegal.¹⁰

To this lack of effective regulation, one needs to add the lack of basic infrastructure to ensure service and efficient transportation systems in the region, and the absence of institutional powers to accommodate the infrastructural demands that the increase of population in the area was requiring. The National Road N-340, running along the Coast of Málaga almost in parallel, was in 1960s the only mayor infrastructure of the region, and would become indeed a crucial component for the development of the littoral in the following years. This lack of management and resources on the part on the municipal, regional and national institutions further promoted the creation of private urban developments whose self-sufficiency was not only founded in their aim of providing a contingent village-like environment in the middle of the countryside, but also in their necessity of granting the infrastructure, privately supported, for these pockets of urbanisation to exist. It is within this framework of regulatory and infrastructural limbo that the *urbanización* emerged as a typology for

⁸ In 1968, the NO-DO aired a documentary on the Ciudades Sindicales, highlighting the family values they propelled as well as the services and infrastructures provided in each of the complexes.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmRa6mnZ7aY&t=194s>.

⁹ Nasarre Alastruey, Rafael. *Las Urbanizaciones Particulares. La Ley del Suelo ante el fenómeno turístico*. Editorial Montecorvo, 1972.

¹⁰ Ibid.

building up the territory of the Costa del Sol, with the Ciudad Sindical becoming not only one of the first, but also the only one to be the result of a public enterprise.¹¹

The Ciudad Sindical was inserted in a virgin area within the coast for which the sole guidance of its urban development was timidly included in the *Plan General de Ordenación Urbana de la Costa del Sol* of 1961. According to this regulation, only bungalows and chalets were allowed in the 'intermediate' spaces between the consolidated urban areas. However, this law seems to contradict the competition brief, where they are calling not only to housing units of different scales, some of them of a considerable size, but also to buildings dedicated to facilities that cannot have the scale of a bungalow. Indeed, when looking at the general view of the Ciudad Sindical, one realizes that, although most of the plot is occupied by low dense construction, the areas close to both the National Road N-340 and the seashore accommodate buildings of a greater scale (Fig 6). Aside efforts to design the Ciudad Sindical as a low-density scheme, with special attention to the blurring of boundaries between interior spaces and natural landscape, the project results problematic at both the level of both its architectural composition and its territorial legality.



Figure 6. Overall view of the Ciudad Sindical, with large buildings facing the seashore.
<http://marbellaimagenesdelpasado.blogspot.com/2011/01/la-ciudad-sindical.html>. Author unknown.

Green Light to build up

The Ciudad Residencial Tiempo Libre in Marbella presents itself as a built contradiction. While the municipal, regional and national governments were doing efforts to dictate, discuss and approve compelling regulations, it was the same government who was promoting the creation of a self-sufficient urban complex without abiding to any regulatory guidelines. Well before specific laws were dictated to structure the urban growth that the region was irrevocably facing, a competition brief issued by a public institution was launched with no account on territorial regulations. An area between towns with the sole infrastructure of a National Road

¹¹ For a complete account on the sprawl of *urbanizaciones* in resort enclaves in general, and in the Costa del Sol in particular, especially within the context of permanent residency for older population, see Deane Simpson, *Young-Old: Urban Utopias of an Aging Society* / Deane Simpson. (Zürich, Switzerland: Lars Müller, 2015).

was designated as the starting point for the proliferation of self-sufficient *urbanizaciones*. Indeed, the public enterprise of the Ciudad Sindical would be responsible for literally placing the first stone in a territory that was, until then, almost untouched. This pioneering intervention endorsed by the public administration arguably provided green light for private developers to come. Although most of the coast has been built up thanks to private investments, the Ciudad Sindical presents itself as an exemplary intervention opening up the gates for the colonisation of the natural environment along the seashore.

However, the design of the Ciudad Sindical by Ángel Cadarso and Manuel Aymerich, despite not complying to regulations, adopted a landscape sensitivity and vernacular aesthetic that would result in a spatially rich articulation. In particular, the organic adaptation of the *hotelitos* into the landscape conformed a tranquil composition where a strong relation between indoor and outdoor spaces became a driving force in the complex. The area in which the Ciudad Sindical is located is defined by a particular environmental richness, with dunes and pine trees spread along the coast that ought to be preserved. Indeed, this area of the Costa del Sol is not the one with the greatest construction density. Other territories closer to Fuengirola and Torremolinos had a less hopeful fate. It seems that the pioneering role of the Ciudad Sindical may have influenced the urban development of the Costa del Sol at two different levels: on the one hand, it was seen as a sensible intervention within a naturally rich area, and arguably propelled the production of low-dense developments in the surrounding plots; on the other hand, despite this sensibility, it arguably prompted the creation of unregulated urban developments to the point of almost building up the 80 kilometres of seashore spanning between the city of Malaga and Estepona.

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Biography

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