

Condoscape

The Architecture of Speculative Tourism in Jesolo

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INTRODUCTION

The condominium represents the most quantitatively significant phenomenon in the expansion of Italian residential urban areas over the past century. Its evolution has closely paralleled the trajectory of modernity, offering valuable insights into the architectural relevance of this increasingly monopolistic form of home ownership.

Owing to its pragmatic design and adaptability, the condominium has functioned as a key instrument in the modernisation of the urban fabric. Yet, as with many forms that attain dominance through scale and ubiquity, its widespread diffusion has facilitated a gradual shift in function—from a model of inhabitation to a vehicle of economic speculation.

The urgency of its study, however, is not merely a question of scale. While modern architecture is often framed in terms of rupture — rejecting tradition in favour of new form of dwelling — the development of the condominium has followed a different path. Rather than emerging from the avant-garde visions of renowned masters, it has largely been shaped by competent professionals working within the constraints of regulation, market demand, and standardisation. As such, the condominium occupies an ambiguous space within twentieth-century architectural discourse: positioned at the intersection of market-led production and architectural inquiry, it remains both central and curiously marginal to critical narratives of modernity.

Tourist condominiums, in particular, represent an extreme condition in which architectural form and economic substance strongly resonate. In tourist contexts, despite the condominium's inherently pragmatic character, the demand for architectural diversity and visual distinctiveness often drives substantial mutations. Drawing on Dean MacCannell's argument (1976), tourist spaces emerge at the intersection between those who offer hospitality and those who seek it — thereby generating a 'staging of authenticity.' This dynamic influences techniques, including architecture, aimed at enhancing local resources, leading places to promote their diversity, understood as the authenticity of their offerings.

To explore this extreme condition, the thesis examines the case of Jesolo — a coastal town on the Adriatic Sea, north of Venice, and one of Italy's foremost tourist destinations. Due to its distinctive urban history, significant real estate activity, and the involvement of renowned architects, Jesolo holds particular relevance for the study of condominiums at national level. It offers a crucial insight into the centrality of the condominium in post-war urbanisation and the

impact of architectural practices carried out by mid-to-high-level professionals in shaping the city.

Addressing the condominium, therefore, requires engaging with a complex and inherently contradictory architectural and social construct. At its core, the condominium is not a building typology but a legal framework, from which all subsequent manifestations — social, economic, and architectural — derive. Its concept emerged in continental Europe during the 19th century, becoming institutionalised in between the two World Wars and establishing itself in a globalised market in the post-war period. This phenomenon paralleled the speculative economic shifts that characterised the upheaval of the time, as well as the gradual leisure-oriented transformation of domestic space.

Notably, the expansion of the condominium was not confined to the urban context. Tourist destinations, shaped by the combined forces of modernisation and an increasingly leisure-oriented economy, also became key sites of development. As the middle class consolidated its dual role as both consumer and proprietor of leisure, the condominium evolved beyond its function as a pragmatic housing solution. It became an infrastructural component of mass tourism — standardised, economically viable, and yet curiously responsive to the demand for aesthetic differentiation in locations actively engaged in marketing their distinctiveness as a form of authenticity.

In one of his lesser-known novels, *La speculazione edilizia* (1957), Italo Calvino highlights the symbolic significance of the condominium within the context of holiday spaces. His work anticipates the narrative use of the condominium by later authors such as J.G. Ballard in *High-Rise* (1975) and John D. MacDonald in *The Condominium* (1977), where the building becomes both setting and metaphor for broader social tensions.

Moreover, it is the tourist condominium that lies at the heart of Calvino's narrative. Set in a coastal town in Liguria during Italy's post-war economic boom of the 1950s, the novel anticipates both the social and urban transformations that would come to define the Italian peninsula in the following decades. Through the perspective of Quinto, a young intellectual seeking to reinvent himself as an entrepreneur by building a condominium in his mother's courtyard, Calvino examines the cultural disorientation of the period. The condominium emerges not only as a central motif but as the novel's true protagonist — a potent symbol of the ways in which capitalist economic forces infiltrate everyday life and ultimately unravel the protagonist's personal trajectory.

Much like Calvino's novel, this study focuses on the intersection of tourism, real estate, and architecture. While international references such as Miami or Dubai are essential for framing the broader scope of the condominium phenomenon, Jesolo serves as the coastal terminal point in the tourist development of an inland territory. And, in doing so, it seeks to trace the fundamental elements that shape contemporary urban space.

In this context, the condominium underscores the role of architecture — and, crucially, of its authors — in introducing formal and spatial diversity within environments where speculative development tends towards homogeneity. This underscores the importance of a class of professionals whose architectural output, while not situated within the avant-garde of the discipline, plays a central role in mediating of conflicting contingencies and shaping the diversity of the urban landscape. Here, the image of the building is not confined to its singular built form but is increasingly defined by its position within broader networks of representation, circulation, and perception. Jesolo, in this regard, serves as a valuable lens through which to examine these dynamics—particularly in relation to its international references—within the conditions of a decelerated globalisation.

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This dissertation is structured into three sections, each of which complements the others while maintaining methodological independence in reconstructing the complex relationship between condominiums and the spatial dynamics of tourism. The first section establishes a framework for understanding the condominium, and is followed by a historical and architectural analysis of Jesolo's urban development, ultimately leading to a concluding section that critically assesses the outcomes and broader implications of this phenomenon.

This sequence unfolds through a form of 'syncopated historical-geographical breathing', beginning with an exploration of the genealogy and context in which the condominium emerged as a prominent Western phenomenon, followed by an analysis of its subsequent developments. It then narrows its focus — using Jesolo as an extreme case — on the city's foundation and post-war urban transformations, specifically exploring the condominium's role in shaping the spatial dynamics of tourism and, more profoundly, its 'neo-modernist' mutations. These are exemplified by the architectural production of international architects, first and foremost Richard Meier, in the early 2000s.

Finally, the analysis broadens once again to assess the recent architectural implications of these developments within an even more condensed timeframe, examining Jesolo's condition within its territory and incorporating firsthand testimonies to evaluate the broader fallout of this experience.

The concept of the condominium, as outlined in the first section, is examined through a historical reconstruction of its evolution from vertical to horizontal property ownership, which forms the legal and institutional foundation of the modern condominium. This analysis follows the broader transformation of property rights over time, beginning with the debunking of common misconceptions that trace the origins of the condominium back to Ancient Rome. Instead, the research identifies its earliest manifestations in pre-modern continental Europe, particularly within the mercantile societies of Germany, where multi-owner property structures first emerged.

Despite its early presence in mercantile jurisdictions, the condominium model faced strong opposition from pre-modern legal systems, remaining marginal for centuries. Even during pivotal moments in modern urban development, such as Haussmann's transformation of Paris, the condominium struggled to gain acceptance within prevailing property structures. This period highlighted contradictions between the modernisation of public space — characterised by large-scale urban renewal and infrastructure expansion — and the private domain, which remained constrained by traditional vertical property ownership systems, where leisure had not yet entered the domestic space of apartment buildings.

Although the architectural discourse had anticipated its emergence, it was only with the rise of the middle class and the increasing accessibility of credit that the condominium gained legal and economic recognition. This process culminated in its formalisation during the interwar period, driven by the convergence of an emerging credit system, the growing demand for urban housing, and the emerging desire for leisure within apartment living.

Focusing on the Italian context, the study examines how, despite being institutionalised between the two World Wars, it was in the post-war period that the condominium became the fundamental building block of Italy's urban expansion. Through a comparative analysis of Rome and Milan, this research traces the impact of this phenomenon by investigating the role of the key figures who helped shape Italy's condominium-driven urban landscape.

This historical trajectory culminates in the expansion of condominiums beyond Continental Europe's sphere of influence, as exemplified by the case of Miami, where this form of property governance gained new significance, evolving from retirement investments into key assets

within the global economy. The evolution of the condominium within the global market, with New York as a crucial example, demonstrates its purpose as essential driver in the development of global cities. In this context, notable architectural examples serve to position condominiums as a transformative force in urban growth, where investment in leisure and equity plays a pivotal role.

The condominium thus takes on a new significance, detached from its primary function as a dwelling, revealing a condition termed the ‘Forever Tourist’ — an unavoidable reality of contemporary society, most distinctly expressed through architecture and its interpreters. The architectural evolution of Jesolo serves as a clear illustration of this phenomenon, as documented in the following section.

The second section examines the urban history of Jesolo, tracing its transformation from a pristine stretch of sand with scattered wooden cabins and an agriculture-based economy in the 1920s to the seasonally dense tourist city it is today, with a population of 26,000 and 5.5 million annual visitors (as of 2023). The narrative is structured into chapters that chronologically divide Jesolo’s history into distinct periods, each marked by different phases of urban expansion.

New master plans, which signify strategic shifts in development, serve as key milestones in these periods, often aligning local building production with trends influenced by national real estate cycles. Additionally, references to national urban policies and economic trends provide a broader contextual framework for Jesolo’s development at national level, thereby positioning the research within an international discourse.

From informal settlements to a garden city during the pre-war period, from unrestrained post-war urbanisation to densification through the involvement of world-renowned architects, Jesolo’s transformation has ultimately been aimed at securing a position in the global tourism market. Condominiums are the underlying thread of this evolution, representing the apex of an economy that fluctuates between tourism and real estate.

Particular emphasis is placed on the urban strategy adopted at the close of the 20th century, initiated by Kenzo Tange’s 1997 master plan. This strategy marked the beginning of a new trend aimed at transforming Jesolo into an year-round venue and characterised by the involvement of globally recognised architects tasked with shaping Jesolo’s emerging skyline and attract a new clientele. Among these prominent figures — including Aurelio Galfetti, Carlos Ferrater, and Gonçalo Byrne — Richard Meier occupies a significant role, setting new standards in condominium development. His contributions serve as a benchmark for understanding Jesolo’s condominium architecture and its recent developments.

This section aims to elucidate the central role that condominiums have played in Jesolo's urban history, emphasising how the city has acted as an urban catalyst for the surrounding inland territory. This unique condition is conceptualised as the outcome of a 'Culture of Suspension' - a phenomenon emerging in holiday settings dominated by tourism, where the stark contrast in seasonal visitor occupational fluctuations between winter and summer, combined with the inherently staged nature of such environments, contributes to the detachment of architecture from its functional role. As a result, not only buildings are often perceived as 'property per se' but within this context, even in an era of eco-climatic moralism, tourism spaces offer a suspension of judgment, positioning themselves as realms of invention where elements from the real world are reassembled according to the logic of fantasy and desire.

The third and final section expands the analysis to assess the recent design implications of these developments within a broader territorial framework, focusing on the Jesolo-Veneto region over a more condensed timeframe. This section incorporates interviews with various stakeholders, including architects, local professionals, developers, and administrators, while additionally, a secondary, more informal perspective on the phenomenon is obtained from *SkyscraperCity*, one of the world's most popular real estate forums, where Jesolo's public reception as a 'schizophrenic spectacle' is prominently expressed.

The theorisation of an 'unsubordinated architecture' describes how architectural forms propagate beyond their initial design and influence lower-tier examples. Within a Post-Internet framework, this concept illustrates how architecture is not confined to his specific buildings but extends as a source of reproduction through various iterations as part of a network.

This analysis is conducted through Richard Meier's condominium and the categories of 'Mas-sarch' and 'Midarch', which reinterpret Dwight MacDonald's critique of mass media cultural production. Within this comparative framework — which also includes the identification of and references to contemporary High Architecture — the value of mid-to-high-level professional architectural production in Jesolo emerges as a catalyst for diversity and a mediator of public interest, ultimately bringing us back to the initial thesis of this research: the effect of the demand for authenticity imposed by tourism.

In conclusion, Jesolo's architecture is contextualised within a framework of 'universal provincialism', questioning the value of condominium architecture in an era of touristic reproduction. This perspective reveals the role of Jesolo as part of a broader network, functioning as a 'signal repeater' of international architectural trends — absorbing, propagating, and imposing a tourism-driven iconography. Jesolo exemplifies an imperfect form of globalisation, in slow motion,

allowing for a better deciphering of its sources and providing a basis for reflecting on the territorial repercussions of this phenomenon. This reflection is particularly relevant at a time when the boundaries that once defined tourist spaces are increasingly blurred, extending their influence across both urban and non-urban landscapes.

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Given the broad significance of the term ‘condominium’, a wide range of publications could be considered in constructing a comprehensive bibliography on the topic. However, only a limited number of works have specifically addressed its various implications. Regarding the Italian context, the existing bibliography has predominantly focused on its manifestations in Milan and Rome. In this regard, Chiara Ingresso’s article, *The Condominio: The New Housing Model During the Italian Boom* (2021), provides a foundational examination of the condominium as a housing model in post-war Italy, offering bibliographical references for both its Milanese (*condominio*) and Roman (*palazzina*) manifestations.

The book *Storie di case: Abitare l’Italia del boom* (2013), edited by Filippo De Pieri, Bruno Bonomo, Gaia Caramellino and Federico Zanfi, provides multiple insights into condominium production during the economic boom, reconstructing key legislative and construction developments of the period through significant case studies. It presents a broad overview of Italy’s housing landscape, spanning from the INA Casa plan to various examples of holiday residences. Despite the widespread presence of the condominium at international level, it has not been proportionally examined within disciplinary discourse. While there has been a renewed interest in Europe, as seen in recent studies on Greek *polykatoikia*, culminating in *The Formation of the Athenian Polykatoikia: Models and Inventions* (2024) by Panayotis Tsakopoulos, this research is limited to the Italian context as a reference for Continental Europe and instead focuses on its trajectory across the Atlantic, particularly in the United States, to explore its transformation into a global phenomenon. Of crucial importance for reconstructing its international development is Matthew Gordon Lasner’s book *High Life: Condo Living in the Suburban Century* (2012), which traces the evolution of condominium living from its origins in Miami to its broader development within the United States.

However, in our understanding of the condominium and its evolution, it is important to mention that much of the available bibliography that directly references condominiums comes from legal scholarship. Several seminal works, spanning both English and Italian literature,

have briefly reconstructed the condominium's origins. Key contributions include Robert G. Natelson's *Comments on the Historiography of Condominium: The Myth of Roman Origin* (1987), J. Leyser's *The Ownership of Flats: A Comparative Study* (1957), Bortolotti's *La proprietà edilizia e il fascismo* (1971), and Bruno Bonomo's *La proprietà della casa alle origini dell'Italia repubblicana: politica e legislazione, 1945-1950* (2020). Francesco Parisi's article *Entropy in Property* (2002) has also been particularly useful in identifying a common thread across the different evolutionary phases of the condominium as an institution.

This research examines architectural phenomena at the intersection of real estate and tourism. Discussions of the former can be found in Carol Willis's *Form Follows Finance* (1995), where the architectural developments of New York are analysed through its key figures, building regulations, and the real estate market dynamics of the time. Similarly, Reinier de Graaf's *Architect, Verb: The New Language of Building* explores contemporary architectural terminology, exposing the underlying mechanisms that shape the real estate industry.

Tourism, likewise, offers multiple references that explore its intersection with architecture, beginning with Dean MacCannell's seminal text, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976). Other key references, particularly concerning the role of architectural imagery in the tourism realm, include *Architecture and Tourism: Perception, Performance, and Place* (2004), edited by D. Medina Lasansky and Brian McLaren. Meanwhile, Virginie Picon-Lefèbvre's *La Fabrique du Bonheur* (2019) sheds light on the parallel development of condominium architecture along the French coast and provides insights into its global expansion through the example of Dubai.

In addition, this research, as part of the *Made in Italy and Villard D'Honnecourt* doctoral programme, builds upon the work of Santarossa's *Il Progetto delle Invasioni: Indagine sulla Natura Militare del Turismo di Massa* (2012), providing continuity with the same doctoral programme.

Focusing on the Italian context, understanding the historical evolution of tourism in Italy is of utmost importance. Pisana Posocco's *Progettare la Vacanza: Studi sull'Architettura Balneare del Secondo Dopoguerra* (2017) provides a crucial overview of post-war seaside architecture, while Annunziata Berrino's *Storia del Turismo in Italia* (2011) offers a comprehensive historical analysis of tourism in the country.

The fleeting mentions of Jesolo as a case study in these foundational texts are further explored in Daniela Vitale and Maurizio Gambuzza's *Jesolo: da località balneare a città ludica?*, published in *Forme e processi di valorizzazione turistica: ambiente, imprenditoria e lavoro nelle località balneari* (1993). Additionally, for an analysis of Jesolo's development in connection with the involvement of international architects, Daniele Lupo and Barbara Badiani's article *Jesolo 2012: The City Beach* (2012) provides valuable insights.

Other important bibliographical contributions to Jesolo's urban history come from numerous theses on the topic, conducted at Ca' Foscari University and, more significantly, at IUAV in Venice. Among these, notable examples include Veronica Baldassa's Master's thesis, *Progetti per Una Riqualificazione Urbanistica e Ambientale di Jesolo* (2012), developed within the Department of Art History and Conservation of Artistic Heritage under the supervision of Professor Martina Frank. Additionally, Daniela Vitale's thesis, *La politica di piano di una città a vocazione turistica: Lido di Jesolo* (1992), supervised by Enrico Ciciotti, is crucial for understanding the evolution of Jesolo's masterplan.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research benefits from the influence of several key texts that are fundamental to understanding the development of the city in relation to capital. Manfredo Tafuri's *Progetto e Utopia* (1973) establishes the theoretical framework of this study from the outset, describing the search for alternatives to capitalistic architecture as 'pointlessly painful'. Additionally, the influence of Rem Koolhaas's *Delirious New York* (1978) and Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour's *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) provides important methodological precedents for analysing urban phenomena. While the former offers insights into density-related dynamics, the latter introduces lessons derived from vernacular architecture and commercial landscapes.

Although Jesolo does not match the scale of the former or the overt aesthetic of the latter, certain overlapping dynamics can nonetheless be identified in this seaside town. On the one hand, Jesolo serves as an architectural catalyst for the surrounding inland areas, encapsulating within its tourist and leisure-oriented dimension an a-cultural alternative to Venice, while simultaneously exploiting its existing economic and logistical infrastructure. On the other hand, when compared to lower-quality developments, Jesolo highlights the value of mid-to-high-level architectural professionalism within the discipline.

Finally, this research benefited from direct communication with the Urban Planning and Private Building Offices of the Municipality of Jesolo, as well as interviews with key figures in the

city's recent history. These include Danilo Gerotto, head of Urban Planning Department at the time of Kenzo Tange's involvement, and Peter Reichegger, a developer instrumental in facilitating Richard Meier's participation.

Additionally, insights were gathered from architects such as Stefano Pujatti (*Elastico Farm*), Luciano Schiavon (*LVL Architetti*), Simone Gobbo (*Demogo*), and Giulia Antonello (*Studio Tecnico Antonello*). Beyond the architectural sphere, external perspectives were explored through interviews with real estate agent Francesco Martin (*Marina Immobiliare*) and local contractor Edoardo Marin (*Dema Costruzioni*).

THE CONDOMINIUM

1.1 Condominiums are not buildings

The term ‘condominium’ does not belong to the architectural vocabulary. It brings to mind a collection of multiple dwelling units under a common roof, but its definition escapes the visualisation of a singular building typology. This is because the word ‘condominium’ originates from legal terminology and more specifically derives from the Latin term *condominium*, which is composed of *con-* ‘together with’ and *dominium* ‘right of ownership.’¹

However, despite its Latin etymology, the historical context of this phenomenon lies in modern times. And its origins should not be erroneously linked to misleading archaeological connections with Ancient Rome but rather understood in relation to the modernisation of housing, which developed in parallel with the institutionalisation of leisure.

The condominium and modernity share a parallel historical trajectory, and their simultaneous development offers insights into the architectural significance of the former. While architectural modernity is often identified with the break from traditional construction methods and the search for new ways of living, the condominium represents one of the mechanisms through which this transition materialised in the modern city.

Marshall Berman’s introduction to *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (1982) contextualises this process, and its contradictions, in which the condominium functions as both a lubricant for ‘modernisation’ and a symbol of the ‘modernist’ values of emancipation and independence through individual ownership. To follow Berman’s word:

The maelstrom of modern life has been fed from many sources: great discoveries in the physical sciences, changing our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge into technology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, speeds up the whole tempo of life, generates new forms of corporate power and class struggle~ immense demographic upheavals, severing millions of people from their ancestral habitats, hurtling them halfway across the world into new lives; rapid and often cataclysmic urban growth; systems of mass communication, dynamic in their development, enveloping and binding together the most diverse people and socie-

Note about style: In this dissertation, the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) style is employed for all citations and references. Footnotes are used to provide detailed source information, while a comprehensive bibliography is included at the end of the document.

¹ ‘Condominium’, Oxford Dictionary [online], <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/condominium_n?tab=fact-sheet#8695417> [accessed 12 September 2024]

ties; increasingly powerful national states, bureaucratically structured and operated, constantly striving to expand their powers; mass social movements of people, and peoples, challenging their political and economic rulers, striving to gain some control over their lives; finally, bearing and driving all these people and institutions along, an ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market. In the twentieth century, the social processes that bring this maelstrom into being, and keep it in a state of perpetual becoming, have come to be called 'modernisation.' These world-historical processes have nourished an amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own. Over the past century, these visions and values have come to be loosely grouped together under the name of 'modernism'.²

This first section provides a historical contextualisation of this broad phenomenon by tracing the trajectory that led to the establishment of condominiums as one of the principal forms of real estate investment in the global market. Geographically, the analysis follows the evolution of condominiums from their origins as an institutional practice in continental Europe to their emergence as a key component of the global real estate landscape.

Particular attention is paid to the parallel development of condominiums and the increasing demand for leisure and the expansion of the tourism industry. This intrinsic relationship, driven by market demand, underscores the necessity of understanding tourist condominiums as an extreme condition in which architectural form and economic substance resonate in a distinctive manner.

This analysis serves as a foundation for the examination of Jesolo, a seaside resort town on the northern Adriatic coast, which exemplifies the centrality of the condominium both as an urban and architectural phenomenon.

Compared to other architectural themes of the 20th century, the condominium occupies a grey area between market-driven production and architectural research, more closely associated with skilled professionals than with the great masters of modern architecture.

A comprehensive historiography of the condominium does not yet exist and it is impossible to pinpoint an exact date for the emergence of this form of governance since its definition remained institutionally unregulated and closely tied to specific socio-economic contexts up until the 20th century. The demand for condominiums arose from the fundamental need to regulate the coexistence of multiple owners sharing portions of the same property.

Consequently, its evolution can be traced through the development of property legislation in continental Europe, following the formalisation of laws that allowed property to be detached

² Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), p.16.

from the ground — thus transforming single-property buildings into multi-property ones. This process spanned several centuries.

The history of the condominium is closely linked to the evolution of property rights, and particularly the shift from *vertical* to *horizontal property* which made floor property possible. The misleading references to *insulae* and Ancient Rome as the origins of the condominium are debunked at the beginning of this reconstruction, and mention is also made of how it existed in various non-institutional forms across continental Europe from the Middle Ages on. Early evidence can be found in 12th century German cities, where the mercantile class concentrated its activities and merchant law became a crucial component of the *ius commune*. This provides an initial indication of the commercial — rather than strictly residential - purpose of the condominium.

The following chapter explores how this phenomenon, developing alongside prevailing legal systems, extended its influence across Europe, culminating in its first formalisation within the Napoleonic Civil Code of 1804. This period marked the first significant attempt to regulate the co-ownership of buildings by multiple owners. While the term *condominium* had not yet been coined, the concept of property was undergoing rapid transformation in response to the technological, economic, social, and political shifts of 19th century Europe.

Crucial references in this historical trajectory are the large-scale urban transformations of the period, particularly the Haussmannisation of Paris. These developments provide critical insight into the emerging contradictions between existing property regimes and the birth of the modern city, where the first forms of institutionalised leisure and tourism were also beginning to take shape but had not yet entered the domestic space of apartment houses.

However, it was only in the interwar period that the condominium was officially incorporated into the legislative frameworks of continental European nations. While the Modern Movement advocated for functional and rational architecture, the condominium was legally recognised and institutionalised. In both cases, standardisation and replicability were key tools.

Focusing on the Italian context, where the phenomenon rapidly gained significant importance, this period was characterised by a housing crisis, demographic pressures, and wider access to credit. These factors collectively transformed real estate into a viable investment opportunity for small-scale investors and shift initiated a process in which existing single-property buildings were subdivided into multiple units, eventually leading to the construction of new apartment

buildings designed to accommodate an emerging middle class. As a result, apartment dwellers could finally become property owners, and the condominium emerged as a crucial mechanism for addressing evolving market demands — demands that would be realised in full in the post-war period.

Indeed, the definitive consolidation of the condominium as an institutionalised real estate model is particularly evident in post-war Italy, where it played a pivotal role in reconstruction efforts.

More so than in other European countries, Italy utilised the condominium as a mechanism for expanding property ownership, catering to a predominantly conservative electorate. In this context, the condominium became a central element in post-war urban planning, often associated with rapid urbanisation and speculative development.

Consequently, although the condominium, in quantitative terms, engaged a vast number of professionals beyond the strict boundaries of the architectural discipline, at the same time it also represented a significant architectural opportunity. During the same period, it provided a platform for advancing the field, as architects sought to respond to new programmatic needs, catering to an upper-middle class increasingly attentive to leisure and modern living standards.

This phenomenon is examined through emblematic case studies in cities such as Rome and Milan, where the interplay between architectural experimentation and market-driven development shaped the urban landscape in distinctive ways. In the meantime, within urban contexts modern architecture transitioned from an avant-garde movement to mainstream practice, sacrificing some of its experimental edge to accommodate market demands. This spirit of experimentation, however, found new expression within the context of tourism.

The parallel development of coastal condominiums and their definitive orientation toward tourism within Europe is examined separately, with the subsequent section on Jesolo specifically addressing this aspect. Instead, our focus shifts to their expansion beyond Europe, and to Miami in particular, where the tourist condominium evolved and adapted, paving the way for its global spread. It is in this context that the condominium gradually detached itself from its original residential function, transforming into a commodified asset driven by market dynamics and speculative investment.

This transformation — the condominium's shift from a housing solution to an investment vehicle — epitomises the dynamics of the capitalist economy. The phenomenon is analysed

through globalised condominium developments where standardised models are replicated, often by internationally recognised developers and investors, wherever capital concentration and tourism permit.

The condominium thus emerges as one of the most representative products of modernity. However, its nature as a market-driven product has often limited its theoretical and critical recognition. Labelled as ‘pragmatic’ modern architecture, the condominium’s contribution to the field can be observed in the work of architects who successfully balanced architectural quality with market logic, creating buildings that, despite commercial constraints, continue to represent meaningful spaces for urban living.

Yet, as we reach the contemporary era, the history of the condominium appears increasingly shaped — at least in legal and economic terms — by a trajectory of complete commodification. This phenomenon is particularly evident in tourism-driven contexts where the condominium functions as both a facilitator and a precursor to a reality in which being a tourist becomes an inevitable condition — here referred to as the ‘Forever Tourist.’ It is precisely within these settings that architecture can still foster experimentation within its disciplinary scope, positioning itself as a mediator of common interests and ensuring its relevance in shaping the built environment.

In the following section, we explore this topic by studying the urban and architectural evolution of Jesolo, examining the broader dynamics of commodification, tourism, and architectural experimentation.

1.2 Grounded

The tourist reflecting upon the ruins of residential areas in Ostia and Rome might well conclude that many of the buildings he sees would have been ideal subjects of condominium ownership. Besides the sprawling, detached, multi-chambered homes of the very wealthy (*domus* or *aedes*), the tourist can find the remains of attached houses connected by party walls, of once-towering blocks of flats (*insulae*), and of flop-houses (*deversoria*) for the very poor.¹

Although instances of property subdivision by floor (horizontal property) — which enables the concept of condominiums — rather than by ground (vertical property) — which precludes the possibility of multiple owners — can be traced back to earlier civilisations in the Western world, *insulae* remain the most commonly cited historical precedents when tracing the origins of condominiums.²

Insulae are incorrectly referred to as the ‘Roman condominiums’ that served as residential blocks primarily for the lower class. They functioned as complementary urban elements to the *domus*, which were town houses exclusively occupied by the upper class.

Roman grandeur is frequently invoked as a reference point by architectural and legal disciplines. However, in this instance, as Robert G. Natelson explains in great detail, drawing this parallel has given rise to the ‘false myth’ that condominiums directly evolved from the prototypes of residential buildings and civil laws of Ancient Rome.³ It is true that the *insula* allowed the presence of multiple dwellers inside a single building but Roman law was highly hostile to the concept of the ‘condominium’ and thus to the idea of parcellation among various owners in the same building.⁴

As Natelson suggests, the primary legal obstacle to condominiums in Ancient Rome was the juristic stance toward horizontal property ownership. An attitude that is summed up in the frequently cited maxim ‘*superficies solo cedit*’ which, translated literally, means ‘the surface yields to the ground’, and, translated freely, means ‘the ownership of things connected to the ground is vested in the owner of the ground’, precluding the kind of airspace division necessary for condominiums. Roman property, was fundamentally ‘grounded’ in nature, thereby allowing only vertical ownership regimes.⁵

¹ Robert G. Natelson, ‘Comments on the Historiography of Condominium: The Myth of Roman Origin’, *Faculty Law Review Articles*. 43. (1987), p.22 <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/faculty_lawreviews/43> [accessed 12 September 2024]

² *Ibid.* p.20. ‘There have been allegations of horizontal property ownership in those parts of the empire subject to Greek, Syrian, or Judaic law.’

³ *Ibid.* p.17.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp.19-24.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp.26-28.

This legal principle, based on ‘vertical property’ — extending from the ground to the top — made the existence of superimposed or horizontal property, and consequently condominiums, impossible. It posed a significant obstacle to their diffusion across Europe for much of its civilised history, until the widespread *Corpus Juris Civilis* — a set of norms established by order of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I and rediscovered during the Middle Ages — was replaced by the Napoleonic Civil Code at the beginning of the 19th century.⁶

Despite the legal distinctions between the condominium and the *insula*, it is crucial to highlight certain characteristics of the *insula* to clarify its urban role within the Roman city and to draw architectural parallels with modern condominiums. Literature and archaeological evidence can be explored to find diverse architectural analogies which mainly associate the term *insula* with the image of an urban block, an isolated building, an independent property or, less often, a funerary structure.⁷ The polysemy of the term thus represents an essential challenge and common characteristic of the condominium, which also escapes any precise formal definition.

Insulae responded to the concept of vertical living and density which is central for condominiums. In Ancient Rome, the lower floors of an *insula* were typically more desirable and housed wealthier tenants, serving as *domus* or quarters for commercial establishments, while the upper floors were less accessible and often occupied by the lower classes, divided into residential units of varying sizes — from large, two-storey *cenacula* for the better-off, to tiny *deversoria* cubicles for the poor. With commercial activities still occupying the ground floor for obvious reasons, this residential stratification still persists today but has been reversed, mainly due to the introduction of the elevator. Units on higher floors, such as penthouses, are more expensive and prestigious due to the better views and the perceived status they offer, whereas lower-floor units remain more affordable.

Federico Fellini's *Satyricon* presents a dreamlike reconstruction of the renowned *Insula Felicles*, explicitly highlighting the dystopian connotations often associated with the concept of collective housing throughout history.⁸ The building is highlighted by Glenn R. Storey for its

⁶ Ibid. p.30.

⁷ Glenn R. Storey ‘The Meaning of “Insula” in Roman Residential Terminology’. *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 49, (2004), 47-84, (pp.54-55). <<https://doi.org/10.2307/4238817>>

⁸ *Insula Felicles* takes its name from its owner, Felicula. It was customary to name these buildings after their owners to symbolize their power and status.

remarkable height, as mentioned in the fourth-century AD *Regionaries*.⁹ According to Glenn R. Storey's analysis, this structure, which was considered a marvel of its time, comprised eight floors – an extraordinary achievement in an era where most buildings were limited to just one or two storeys.¹⁰

Fellini's portrayal dismantles any idealised notions of collective living, presenting the *Insula Felicles* as a grotesque, inverted Tower of Babel or ziggurat, entirely inward-facing within a confined space. Its introversion alludes not to a defensive purpose, as seen for example in the Chinese Hakka tulou fortified dwellings, but rather to an evasion of the surrounding city.¹¹

The film depicts countless anonymous, dimly lit rooms, each housing occupants engaged in various activities, often of a sordid nature. The deathly atmosphere of this house-tomb, a site of both sexual perversion and decay, culminates in the catastrophic collapse of the *insula*, reducing it to ruins and burying its inhabitants.¹²

This initial image of communal living serves as a point of reference. As will become evident in the course of this historical reconstruction, the condominium as an institution did not arise from a 'communal intention' but rather from the concept of 'forced coexistence'. It has since become the focus of numerous disparaging and dystopian narratives, as *Isola Felicles* aptly illustrates.

⁹ Glenn R. Storey, 'The "Skyscrapers" of the Ancient Roman World', *Latomus*, 62.1 (2003), p.7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.6.

¹¹ Chinese Hakka Tulou are traditional communal dwellings unique to the Hakka people in the mountainous regions of southeastern China. Predominantly circular, Hakka tulou are multi-storey structures, oriented inward, which served as residential fortresses between the 12th and 20th centuries. See: 'Fujian Tulou', Wikipedia, (2024) <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fujian_tulou&oldid=1258983236> [accessed 13 January 2025].

¹² Fabrizio Slavazzi, 'L'immagine dell'antico nel Fellini-Satyricon', in *Fellini Satyricon. L'immaginario dell'antico*, ed. by Raffaele De Berti, Elisabetta Galletti e Fabrizio Slavazzi (Milan: Cisalpino, 2009), pp.59-92, (p.63). <<https://air.unimi.it/bitstream/2434/71475/1/Slavazzi.pdf>> [accessed 12 September 2024]

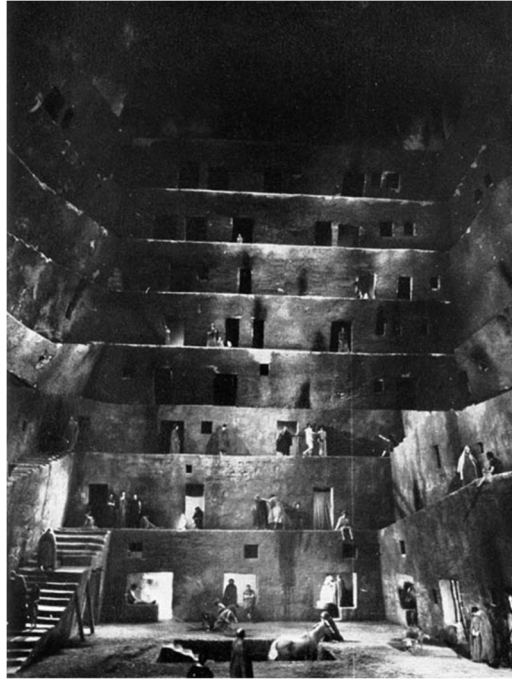


Figure 1 Insula Felicles in Fellini's *Satyricon* (1969).

The *Insulae* in Ancient Rome primarily served as rental properties, often as speculative investments, and were typically owned by a single landlord or a consortium of investors. The leasing process was commonly managed by an intermediary known as the *procurator*.

Roman society, much like other pre-industrial civilisations, was marked by pronounced economic inequalities. Only a very small segment of the population could afford to purchase even modest urban real estate, yet those who could often had the means to acquire entire *insulae*. The vast majority of the population, however, lived in poverty or near-subsistence conditions, with many depending on public subsidies to get by. The viability of horizontal property ownership, such as in multi-unit buildings, is largely contingent upon the existence of a substantial urban middle class – citizens wealthy enough to purchase portions of such buildings, but not affluent enough to own single-family homes.¹³ The absence of a significant middle class in Roman society suggests that the conditions necessary for the emergence of condominiums, as understood in the modern context, did not exist.¹⁴

¹³ Robert G. Natelson, p.47.

¹⁴ As described by Alessandro Santarossa: 'Traveling for pleasure was a concept that simply did not exist, at least until the Roman era, when the notions of *villeggiatura* (country retreats) and *feriae* (holidays) were defined. The term *feriari* referred to being on holiday, while *rusticari* meant moving out of the city for some time. The two preferred destinations were the countryside and the seaside, places where the various nobles of the time (who were, of course, the only ones who could afford the luxury of taking holidays) built their vacation villas.

The concepts of *feriari* and *rusticari* are difficult to understand without considering the Roman idea of *otium*—a period free from political and civic duties, during which one could engage in creative pursuits. In this form of proto-tourism, people did not travel to visit new places or seek different experiences but rather to retreat to their own

As emphasised in architect Elena Mattia's doctoral thesis, the fascination with the *insulae* as examples of intensive and stratified housing persisted into the modern era. This fascination influenced, in the early 20th century, an erudite architectural language aimed at the construction of public housing and, at the same time, further historicist experiments in the *barocchetto* style and in opposition to 19th-century eclecticism. Mattia highlights the influence of new discoveries in Ostia Antica and the studies by Guido Calza entitled '*Le origini latine dell'abitazione moderna*', published in *Architettura e Arti Decorative* and illustrated by the architect-archaeologist Italo Gismondi.¹⁵

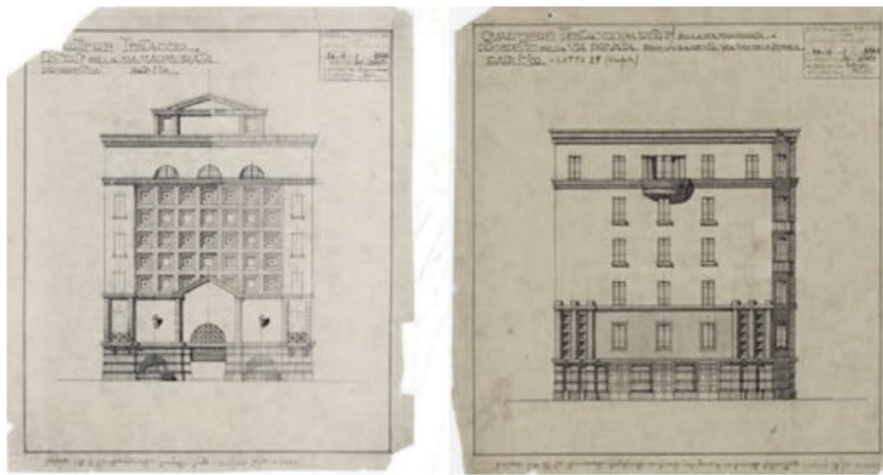


Figure 2 Innocenzo Sabbatini, ICP a Testaccio, Prospetto sulla via Mormorata - Prospetto sulla via privata (1927). From Elena Mattia's doctoral thesis.

In particular, it is the work of Innocenzo Sabbatini that, more than any other, demonstrates a renewed interest in the *insula* typology, favouring an anachronistic preference for the solidity of masonry mass at a time when reinforced concrete frame structures were gaining prominence.¹⁶ At the same time as the condominium was entering the Italian legal system, with Rome at the forefront of this phenomenon, this revivalist approach resisted the emerging spread of

villas, where they could recover from the stress of political and military life while dedicating themselves to their personal passions.' Alessandro Santarossa, *Il progetto delle invasioni: indagine sulla natura militare del turismo di massa* (Rome: Aracne, 2012), p.23. trans. by the author.

¹⁵ Guido Calza, 'Le origini latine dell'abitazione moderna', *Architettura e arti decorative*, vol. 1-2, year III (Milan-Rome: Bestetti & Tuminelli, 1923)

¹⁶ Elena Mattia, advisor Franco Purini, *Le palazzine romane di Venturino Ventura: Interpretazione della modernità: volumi espressionisti, scomposizioni De Stijl e atmosfere wrightiane*. (unpublished doctoral thesis, Sapienza Università di Roma, 2003), pp. 28-36. <<http://www.arc1.uniroma1.it/dottoratocomposizionearchitettura/Dissertazioni/27MattiaElenaLePalazzineRomaneDiVenturinoVentura.pdf>> [accessed on 15 March 2025]

horizontality and new construction systems in architecture which, as part of the Modern Movement, would soon gradually emerge.

More than fifteen hundred years after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the insula had reappeared. However, not even the grandeur of the Empire could withstand the forces of modern capitalism. This phenomenon was particularly evident in 1935 with the redevelopment of Palazzina Furmanik (1935), designed by Mario De Renzi, Giorgio Calza Bini and Pietro Sforza. This project was undertaken explicitly as a replacement for the ICP Flaminio I public housing complex, exemplifying the transformative impact of urban modernisation on traditional architectural forms.

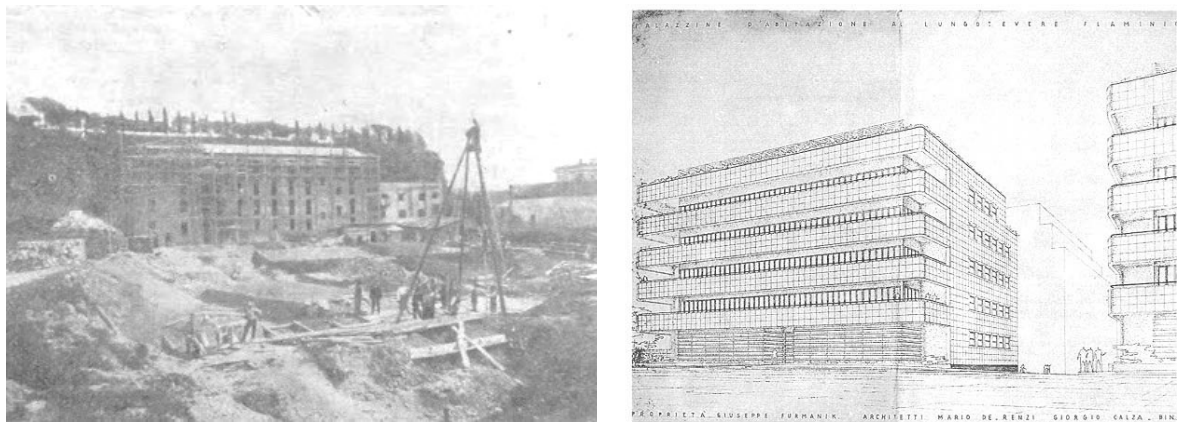


Figure 3 On the left, the ICP Flaminio I public housing complex (1905). On the right, Palazzina Furmanik (1935).

The historical evolution from Roman times to the official acceptance of the condominium marks a significant shift in property ownership, which had transitioned from a land-based system to a stratified and horizontal model. However, before property could be conceptually and legally detached from the ground, both institutional frameworks and architectural language had to overcome substantial resistance at the jurisdictional and design level.

1.3 Lift-off

According to Natelson, Leyser and Parisi, antecedents of the concept of the horizontal property system, which ultimately enabled the concept of the condominium, can be traced back to the Middle Ages. This development is particularly evident in Germany, where legal codes were less influenced by the Roman legal system.¹ Natelson supports this argument by pointing out that the German property code's recognition of the movable nature of tents and primitive German cabins fostered the notion that one could own improvements on land belonging to others.² The concept of *Stockwerkseigentum*, literally 'storey property,' emerged in the 12th century as a solution to the growing needs of the rising merchant class within urban centres, specifically by enabling the ownership of individual storeys within multi-storey structures.³ The *Stockwerkseigentum* was likely integrated into the *ius commune*, a set of norms that incorporated local territorial customs, influenced by mercantile law, as the mercantile class gained increasing prominence in large cities. However, the revival of Roman law through the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* that invested Europe in the same period rendered it incompatible, as its emphasis on the concept of 'absolute' property ultimately hindered any possibility of the adoption of horizontal property systems.

The legal scholar and economist Francesco Parisi analyses this issue further by examining 'entropy in property', suggesting a parallel between the fundamental law of physics and the fragmentation of property through history. This trajectory has its origins in a 'functional' or 'layered' pastoral conception of property, in contrast to the Romans who saw it as 'absolute' and 'spatial.'⁴ The pastoral notion, which granted multiple parties usufruct of the same piece of land, significantly influenced the feudal system. In this system, land tenure—primarily agricultural and governed by the well-known hierarchical pyramid of grants between parties—was restricted by feudal grants through the acts of licensing and title-making. As a result, possessory interests hardly resided in the same hands as those who actually made use of the land.

¹ 'From its German origin the institution spread to other parts of Europe – specifically France, Switzerland, and perhaps Italy, territories which had been part of the Roman Empire, but where the influence of Roman law had faded. Robert G. Natelson, p.29.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. p.30.

⁴ Francesco Parisi, 'Entropy in Property', *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 50.3 (2002), pp. 595–632, (p.597). doi:10.2307/841063.

However, over time, these grants evolved into hereditary holdings which, despite being subject to laws aimed at limiting their partitioning, resulted in the irreversible multi-layered fragmentation of land.⁵

Feudal laws, which generally flourished in closed agricultural economies, did not take root in urban environments, where they were not congenial either to Roman or mercantile laws. To witness their decadence, we must wait for the rise of modernity, when ‘the gradual growth of the economy made the feudal dispersion of control over property highly problematic’ and the social contingencies that sprouted with the 1789 French Revolution resulted in the collapse of the feudal system.⁶

If feudalism introduced a stratified concept of land use — one that might vaguely resemble the layered system of landlords residing on the ‘noble floor’ and subletting rooms on the higher, less valuable floors of buildings they fully owned — its decline paved the way for the rise of condominiums. This transformation coincided with the emergence of the middle class, whose presence and economic influence made such governance structures possible.

Considering recent studies by Joel Kotkin that show a gradual return to a ‘neo-feudal’ state, characterised by the concentration of wealth, religious fundamentalism and low birth rates, especially in Europe, the institution of the condominium is gaining new significance today as contemporary developments weaken the middle class but real estate property widens its public. The effects of a society with more owners and less economic wealth are considered in the last chapter of this section.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. p.602.

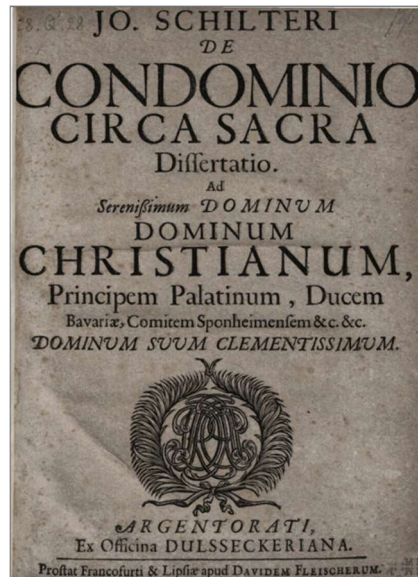


Figure 4 The cover of a legal dissertation on the condominium (not necessarily of buildings) illustrates the dissemination of the term within German jurisdictions prior to the implementation of the Napoleonic Civil Code. Jo.Schilteri *De Condominio Circa Sacra Dissertatio*. (1704).

After the French Revolution, the rationalist jurisprudence of the 18th century, along with the codifications of the 19th century, revived many key Roman property laws, reinterpreting them as general principles of civil law. However, this effort to standardise property laws was often at odds with the principles of contractual freedom required by the modern economy, resulting in a broader tension between these two concepts. A striking example of this tension can be observed in real property law where, while civil law systems imposed restrictions on the horizontal partitioning of property within buildings to maintain physical unity, parallel to formal legal frameworks, the practice of partitioning property within buildings persisted, demonstrating a resilience that could not be ignored.

It was in France that these forces led to the first partial recognition of horizontal property within the national Civil Code (1804), under pressure from those regions where this type of property had taken root more vigorously, and in particular Grenoble, Rennes, and Lyon.⁷ This Code, also named the Napoleonic Code, gives brief instructions on the duties that must be observed ‘when the different floors of a house belong to multiple owners,’ mainly restricting itself to regulating the question of the maintenance and repair of the common parts of a building (Art. 664).⁸ However, on this matter, each local jurisprudence was left to develop contingently, and it became

⁷ J. Leyser, ‘The ownership of flats a comparative study’, *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 7.1 (1958), pp.31-53, (p.34).

⁸ *Ibid.*

increasingly common for property owners to establish a *règlement de copropriété* to regulate internal disputes.⁹ Adopted by various nations under Napoleonic rule over the subsequent decades, the Napoleonic Code spread across Europe, thereby exerting significant influence on the development of other legal systems.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the term *condominium* had not yet appeared in national Civil Codes in relation to buildings, despite being present in juridical terminology concerning ownership regulation.¹¹

Moreover, as we will later see in the case of Puerto Rico, this model of governance for the regulation of construction began its development in continental Europe and subsequently extended its influence to jurisdictions shaped by European legal traditions, such as those in Latin America.¹² Horizontal property was still hindered within the Anglo-American orbit and, after its unification under the German Empire at the end of the 19th century, Germany once again definitively rejected the possibility of horizontal property, explicitly making the creation of a right of ownership impossible in any part of a building after the approval of the new civil code (*BVB*) in 1900.¹³

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ernst Rabel, 'Private Laws of Western Civilization: Part II. The French Civil Code', *Louisiana Law Review*, 10.2, (1950), pp.107-119, (p.110). <<https://digitalcommons.law.lsu.edu/lalrev/vol10/iss2/2>> [accessed 15 March 2025]

¹¹ For example, this extract dated 1855 from a booklet interpreting the French Civil Code helps contextualise the institution of the condominium within national regulations. Even more intriguingly, it reveals the distinction between two forms of condominium: one apparently associated with German law and the other with Roman law: 'Co-ownership (*copropriété*) is the ownership that belongs simultaneously to several people over one and the same thing. Co-ownership is either undivided (*Condominium in solidum, seu pro indiviso, condominium juris germanici*), or divided (*Condominium pro diviso, condominium juris romani*). In the first case, ownership belongs to several individuals in such a way that each owner is, in particular, the absolute owner (in solidum) of the thing, although the exercise of each owner's rights is limited by the co-ownership rights of others. In the second case, ownership belongs to several individuals in such a way that each owner, in particular, is considered the owner of a determined fraction of the thing, for example, one quarter. The idea of solidarity in co-ownership belonging to all members of a family, called to inherit, serves as a basis, in French law, for the rules regarding inheritance. Nevertheless, this form of co-ownership is not established in any other part of French law, neither explicitly nor implicitly.' A note to the previous text also clarifies that: 'The Civil Code does not address co-ownership in general; it only deals with the division of common property. (...) Therefore, the theory of co-ownership must be derived from the legal essence of ownership in general and from the legal provisions concerning the division of inheritances.' Zachariae von Lingenthal, C. S., Massé, G. *Le droit civil français* (Paris: Auguste Durand, 1855), p.70. trans. by the author.

¹² In Europe: Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg, Italy, Romania, Spain, Portugal. From Ernst Rabel, p.110.

¹³ 'The Bürgerliche Gesetzbuch (*B.G.B.*), the civil code for the whole of Germany entered into force in 1900, in line with its Roman law principles, as expressed in Articles 93 and 94, it made the creation of a right of ownership in any part of a building impossible. In addition, Article 189 of the Introductory Law to the *B.G.B.* expressly prohibited the separate ownership of floors (*Stockwerkseigentum*). On the other hand, floors separately owned at the time the new legislation became operational were specifically exempted from the new law (Art. 182); for such ownership arrangements, created under any of the legal systems operating in Germany before the unification and codification of its civil law, the provisions of those systems continued to apply. The regions in which the ownership of separate floors or flats was common were in the south (Baden, Württemberg) and the west (Rhineland), and in particular where the Napoleonic Code had been in force.' J.Leyser, p.34.

The great urban ferment of the 19th century, driven by nascent industrialisation and the consequent rapid urbanisation of cities, took on particular significance through major urban initiatives. Among these, rental apartment buildings became one of the primary solutions to the housing challenges faced by the lower-income urban classes. Haussmann's plan for Paris, with its *maisons à loyer*, Cerdà's *manzanas* in Barcelona, and Friedrich II's *Mietskasernen* in Berlin, each exemplified a distinct approach to the concept of densified urban living.

Despite being separated by more than a millennium, the prevailing property regimes in these examples — with cases of mixed-use buildings especially in the first two — were not entirely dissimilar to the Roman *insula*. Whereas, in the case of Paris and Barcelona, landlords often resided on the more prestigious lower floors while the upper levels housed the less advantaged working-class residents, in Berlin a more common scenario involved individual proprietors owning entire blocks specifically designated for rental housing.

Before shifting focus to Haussmannian Paris, the *Mietskaserne* in Berlin provide insight into exemplary rental properties that anticipated key aspects of apartment building architecture. One of the largest developments of its kind, *Meyers Hof*—40 meters wide and 140 meters long—was owned by Jacques Meyer, a textile factory owner who, like many others, sought to secure long-term financial wealth through rental income, exploiting the rapid urbanisation driven by industrial economic growth.¹⁴

In a context where the primary goal of these buildings was to *maximize the number of tenants*, economic efficiency became the guiding principle of their design. This is evident in the stark contrast between the decorative palace-like façade facing the street and the more modest façades of the courtyard, where architectural embellishment was entirely secondary to the imperative of maximizing capacity.¹⁵

¹⁴ Rolf Kuck tutored by John Heintz, 'Mietkaserne', *ExploreLab* 8, (2010), p.7 < <https://preservedstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Mietskaserne-1.pdf> > [accessed 16 January 2025]

¹⁵ *Ibid.*



Figure 5 Meyers Hof: Façade elevations of front building: street side (left) — courtyard side (right). From Rolf Kuck's article.



Figure 6 Meyers Hof: Section and plan. Street side on the left. From Rolf Kuck's article.

The interiors of Meyers Hof were devoid of any form of decoration, but despite their modesty, they offered tenants — whose economic activities often overlapped with their living spaces — the flexibility to adapt the building to their needs. This adaptability allowed businesses within the building to expand their spaces as required. The structural system was designed to accommodate such changes: ‘The load-bearing structure included all transverse walls except those delimiting the staircases, which could be removed without compromising the building's structural integrity.’¹⁶ While these expansions were purely spatial, they represent an early example of the internal customisation possibilities that would later be advertised by condominium developers.

¹⁶ Ibid. p.18.

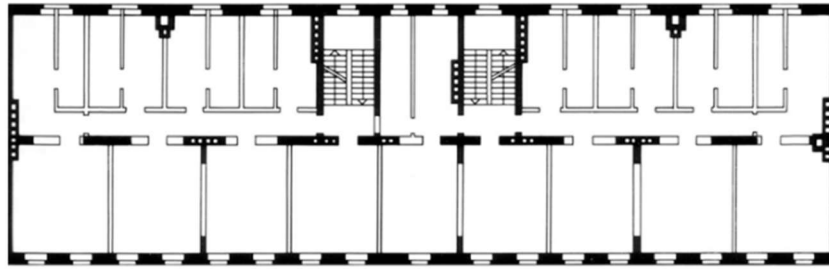


Figure 7 Meyers Hof: typical floor plan - load bearing walls are filled black. From Rolf Kuck's article.

In Haussmannian Paris — closely associated with the emergence of a modern urban framework—we can more closely observe the architectural and legal contradictions that preceded the advent of the condominium. Despite the progress made in France, legislation only gradually began to address the necessity of regulating multiple ownership within a single building.¹⁷

The epochal urban intervention of the *Grand Travaux*, carried out between 1850 and 1872, profoundly transformed the city through the use of *perceptions*—the demolition of the existing urban fabric to create new urban axes—and extensive urban expansion. Among the numerous consequences of this transformation, pursued under the pretext of improving hygiene but with the underlying effect of redefining and concentrating land rents in the French capital, two significant aspects stand out: the expansion of venues for leisure and entertainment, and the construction of new apartment buildings.¹⁸ While the former were characterised by ‘the celebration of innovation’ and ‘the value placed on public life, on the promotion of social spaces that foster and even require transparency, spectacle, mobility, and exchange,’ this had no parallel in the *interiorised* architecture of apartment buildings. Here, instead, the need for interiorisation represented a nostalgic alternative to the alienation of modernity.

This dichotomy between the modernity of Haussmannian public spaces and the surprising anti-modernity of the apartment houses of the time is the subject of study by the American academic Sharon Marcus. Who writes:

¹⁷ Adeline Daumard, *Maisons de Paris et propriétaires parisiens au XIXe siècle, 1809-1880* (Paris: Editions Cujas, 1965)

¹⁸ The large-scale renovations of the existing city aimed to establish new axes to improve urban hygiene, facilitate traffic circulation, and prevent workers from erecting barricades - tactics that had proven effective in the narrow streets during the 1848 revolution. Furthermore, looking to the industrialisation of London as its main reference, this transformation redefined Parisian modernity through changes in public spaces, including enhancements to urban infrastructure, the construction of broad boulevards, the development of a unified circulation plan, and the expansion of venues for leisure and entertainment.

Although this reaction against the apartment building's destruction of tradition would suggest that such buildings were deliberately built to promote modernity, both the material form and cultural perception of apartment buildings similarly reflected a reaction against modernity. After 1850, Parisian apartment buildings and the city that housed them were built and expected to be enclosed, private spaces immured to modernity.¹⁹

However, before asserting that the primary reason for this lies in the fact that these buildings were not, at that time, condominiums, it remains essential to understand their role.

Enrico Londei describes *l'immeuble de rapport* (the rental house) as 'the building type of capitalist exploitation of housing,' which was utilised throughout the bourgeois city and adapted to a range of residential classes, from the upper bourgeoisie to the affluent working class.²⁰

Despite the widespread presence of social segregation, Adeline Daumard describes the typology of tenants in these houses as follows:

With the exception of noble residences and certain buildings entirely designated for workers' housing in the more working-class districts, the majority of houses in Paris were composed of apartments of varying importance and value, inhabited by tenants who, in terms of occupation and economic condition, belonged to diverse social categories.²¹

Both Londei and Marcus identify these buildings as key elements of a new urban structure, shaped by the characteristics of the type and constructed through repeatable building systems. Londei describes these buildings as 'normally four stories high above the ground floor, with a frontage spanning four to six window bays, featuring a typically central doorway and cast-iron balconies.'²² He emphasises their crude and ostentatious aesthetic, further noting that the lines and divisions of the façade were composed in the uniformity of the *rue-corridor*, perspectival axes — where apartment buildings functioned merely as vertical elements on the edges of peripheral vision — and 'where monofunctionality and social homogeneity defined the new urban topography of social classes and functions.'²³

Hausmann's zoning practices isolated residential neighbourhoods from businesses, thereby reinforcing a view of domestic space as distinct from commercial exchange. While the emergence

¹⁹ Sharon Marcus, 'Haussmannization as anti-modernity: The Apartment House in Parisian Urban Discourse, 1850-1880', *Journal of Urban History*, 27.6 (2001), 723-745. <<https://doi.org/10.1177/009614420102700603>> [accessed 2 February 2025]

²⁰ Sharon Marcus, 'Haussmannization as anti-modernity: The Apartment House in Parisian Urban Discourse, 1850-1880', *Journal of Urban History*, 27.6 (2001), 723-745. <<https://doi.org/10.1177/009614420102700603>> [accessed 2 February 2025]

²¹ Adeline Daumard, *Maisons de Paris et propriétaires parisiens au XIXe siècle, 1809-1880* (Paris: Editions Cujas, 1965), pp. 90-91. trans. by the author.

²² Enrico F. Londei, *La Parigi di Haussmann. La trasformazione urbanistica di Parigi durante il secondo Impero* (Rome: Kappa, 1982), pp.112-114.

²³ *Ibid.* pp.54-55.

of markets, dance halls, galleries, and cafés contributed to the formation of a mass consumer public, serving as stages for social and cultural interaction, the removal of commercial functions from the streets in favour of specialised structures further increased this separation between streets as exterior spaces and apartment buildings as interior ones.²⁴

The general perception of Parisian apartment buildings at the time highlighted a stark contrast: their exteriors appeared attractive, while their interiors often lacked quality. Luxury was confined to the exterior of the buildings, as aptly captured by Alfred Delvau in *Les Dessous de Paris*, an anthology of articles originally published in the newspaper *Le Figaro*. Delvau writes:

As soon as it awakes, Paris leaves its abode [*logis*] and steps out, and doesn't return home until as late as possible in the evening - when it bothers to return home. . . . Paris deserts its houses [*maisons*]. Its houses are dirty on the inside, while its streets are swept every morning. . . . All the luxury is outside — all its pleasures walk the streets.²⁵

The profession of the architect at the time, influenced by interactions with other specialised disciplines — most notably engineering — gained renewed vigour and began to distance itself from the classical Beaux-Arts tradition. But even if substantial body of architectural books and journals from the period reflect a growing interest in apartment housing, these documents also reveal the secondary importance often attributed to this building typology.

Marcus's argument is therefore further supported by architectural testimonies that address the interiorisation of the apartment. The importance of *décor* in defining the social and public space of the time becomes evident as a means of easing the transition between exterior and interior spaces, including the shared areas between apartments as exemplified in the second volume of Léonce Reynaud's *Traité d'Architecture* (1858), which asserts:

In bringing together under one roof families between whom no other link exists, one renders those residences less enclosed, less quiet, and one deprives private life of a portion of its self-sufficiency. The stairway is a sort of public way that opens right into the very interior of the house.²⁶

However, the causes of the lack of internal decoration in apartments should not be attributed solely to the tastes of the era but also to their ownership structure.²⁷ From our perspective, the

²⁴ As Marcus points out, the effects of this division can be observed through several elements. One notable sign of the separation between living units and the city that could also be perceived as an improvement in comfort was the introduction of wood parquet flooring, which replaced the mineral *dallages* (concrete, stone or marble) slabs. Ibid. p.729.

²⁵ Alfred Delvau, *Les Dessous de Paris*, 3-5, 8, (Paris, 1860), pp.133-5. as cited in Sharon Marcus, p.734.

²⁶ Léonce Reynaud, *Traité d'architecture*, 2 (Paris, 1858), p.522. as cited in Sharon Marcus, p.736.

²⁷ To better understand the guidelines provided by the treatises of the time regarding interior decoration in residences, Sharon Marcus cites the following texts. In *Grammaire des arts décoratifs: Décoration intérieure de la*

lack of innovation in these spaces can be traced to the clear separation between landlords and tenants. As previously noted, ownership of individual apartments was not widespread, and landlords — whose socioeconomic status remained largely unchanged despite Haussmann's urban transformation — frequently did not reside in the buildings they owned, further emphasising the division between the two groups.

This distinction is evident in François Sergent's *Manuel Complet du Propriétaire et du Locataire*, which states: 'Everyone is either a landlord or a tenant. These two interests are opposed, and their contact is constant.'²⁸ The aversion toward apartment buildings is evident in the cultural ideals of the time which, as Marcus points out, rejected this form of living in favour of 'a distinctly premodern and rural ideal: the single-family house, occupied by many generations of one patrilineal family.'²⁹

Although both hôtels and apartment houses were private property, the separation of ownership and occupancy in the apartment (it was impossible to own a single apartment unit, and a building's owner usually rented an apartment elsewhere) meant that the architect could not shape a building to an individual client's desires.³⁰

The apartment house (*maison d'appartements*) therefore received less architectural and decorative attention compared to the *hôtel*, which, within the Parisian context and in a pre-tourism world, referred to a house or palace inhabited by a noble or wealthy family.

Consequently, according to architects of the time such as the already mentioned César Daly, in their attempt to satisfy 'general needs,' apartments failed to be original or unique and to create a permanent, organic unity between construction and *décor*, a requirement deemed indispensable for architecture at the time. The temporary nature of tenant occupancy was regarded as a significant obstacle to the improvement of domestic spaces, as tenants saw little reason to invest in permanent or fixed solutions.

the tenant is nothing but a transitory guest, while the landlord of a private house is on the contrary presumed to be established in his dwelling forever . . . everything around him ought to

maison (1882), Charles Blanc describes the apartment space as 'an interior where things will form a spectacle without any jolts or noise.'²⁷ Noise, perspective effects, and excessive decoration were not to intrude upon the apartment space, which was simultaneously undergoing a hierarchical organisation of its interiors - between the salon and the more intimate family living spaces; a theme that is further explored in César Daly's *L'Architecture privée au XIXème siècle sous Napoléon III* (1864–1877). Léonce Reynaud, *Traité d'architecture*, 2 (Paris, 1858), p.522. ²⁷ César Daly, *L'Architecture privée au XIXème siècle sous Napoléon III*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1864), 14-15 and from the same author *Entretiens sur l'Architecture* (1863).

²⁸ François Sergent, *Nouveau manuel complet du propriétaire et du locataire*, rev. Charles Vasserot [1826] (Paris, 1865), v. as cited in Sharon Marcus, p. 725.

²⁹ Sharon Marcus, p.724.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.737.

take on a fixed and durable character. . . Many objects that of necessity are mobile in an apartment house become favourably immobilised in a private house.³¹

Traces of criticism toward apartment buildings can also be found in the writings of one of the most renowned architects and theorists of the time, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc. Within his treatises, the topic of apartment buildings was secondary to his focus on the individual house, as evidenced by its lack of mention in his *Histoire de l'habitation humaine depuis les temps préhistoriques jusqu'à nos jours* (1875).³² Nonetheless, his reluctance toward these structures was evident, as demonstrated in the introduction to Viollet-le-Duc's *Les Habitations Modernes* (1877): 'In large cities, if rental houses are still intended to shelter many families under one roof, it is certain that each individual frees themselves from this communal living as much as they can.'³³

As ownership appeared to be an essential condition for caring about one's house, he accused these buildings (*maisons à loyer*) not only of contributing to the loss of decorum and domesticity but also of 'demoralising' their occupants by negatively influencing individual personalities and familial relationships.³⁴

The illustrated plates of *Les Habitations Modernes* resemble a compendium of dwellings accompanied by brief descriptions. While the section drawing of a *hôtel privé* demonstrates the architect's (and landlord's) care for décor and interior spaces, the section on an apartment building appears sparse, containing only internal height annotations. The only decorated area, apart from the exterior façade facing the street, is the vestibule – a transitory space situated behind the main door.³⁵

³¹ César Daly, *L'Architecture privée au XIXème siècle sous Napoléon III*, 1 (Paris, 1864), 14-15. As cited in Sharon Marcus, p.738.

³² Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Histoire de l'habitation humaine depuis les temps préhistoriques jusqu'à nos jours*, (Paris, Hetzel, 1875)

³³ Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, 'Introduction', *Habitations modernes*, 1 (Paris: A. Morel et Cie, librairies-éditeurs, 1877), trans. by the author

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. pl.62-63-64 (vol.1) and pl.196-197 (vol.2).

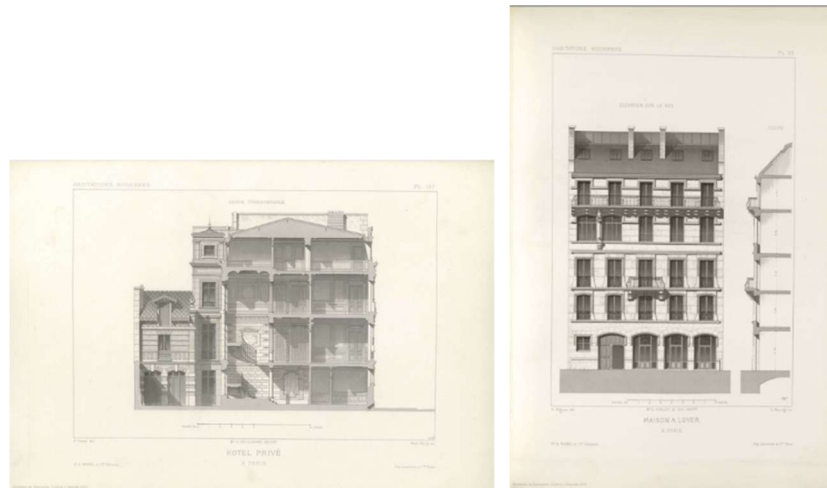


Figure 8 Comparison between Hotel Privé a Paris pl. 197 and the Maison à Loyer a Paris (Seine) pl. 63. Inside Viollet-le-Duc's *Les Habitation Modernes* (1875).

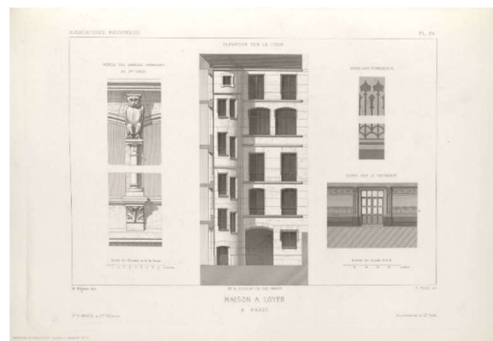


Figure 9 'Maison à Loyer a Paris', pl. 64. Drawing of the decorative system of the windows on the main façade, the bare elevation of the inner courtyard, and the decorations of the vestibule—the only interior space adorned. Inside Viollet-le-Duc's *Les Habitation Modernes* (1875).

The marginalisation of the apartment-building topic in Viollet-le-Duc's writings was also influenced by the socioeconomic conditions of the time. And despite, as shown in Adeline Dau-mard's data collection, the doubling of rental costs in the city's central *arrondissements* between 1851 and 1857 — indicating a growing demand for urban dwellings — Sharon Marcus high-lights how apartment buildings were widely perceived among professionals as being of second-ary prestige and less profitable compared to single private residential projects. This is how the American scholar describes this condition:

Professional concerns as well as an investment in individuality contributed to architects' preference for single-occupant houses over apartment buildings. Apartment houses were infe-rior sources of fees and prestige because their builders tended either to hire architects

trained outside the élite Ecole des Beaux Arts or to bypass architects altogether by copying designs from pattern books.³⁶

Moreover, Viollet-le-Duc, in his introduction to *Habitations modernes* denouncing the proliferation of ‘cardboard houses’ — new buildings constructed on the periphery of the city, which at the time also included apartment buildings — not only called for an improvement in housing conditions by finding a balance with the monumentality of grand private edifices but, more pertinently for us, also concluded his discussion by advocating, and in a sense anticipating, the development of a private credit system which in the years to come would facilitate widespread homeownership and consequently condominiums through mortgages. He remarks:

We hope to provide the elements of this wise reform, which must have the best influences on the customs of a country. It is essential to engage every citizen in maintaining public prosperity by making every citizen a creditor of the state. It is even better to provide every inhabitant with the means to have their own home.

The idea of ‘a chicken in every pot’ for every family is certainly a step forward, but every family living in its own home is an even more significant progress, one we must strive to achieve as far as possible.³⁷

The anti-modernity of apartment buildings in Haussmannian Paris provides a critical lens through which to examine one of the most significant urban transformations of the era, highlighting the growing necessity for the emergence of the condominium system in the late 19th century.

Even more relevant to this analysis is the opportunity to draw a parallel with the pioneering phenomenon of tourism, which, as Dean MacCannell suggests, finds in the French capital the origins of alienated leisure—particularly in the act of tourists observing the labour of others.³⁸ In *Un Philosophe sous les toits: Journal d’un homme heureux* (1850), Émile Souvestre, as cited by Marcus, employs the very concept of tourism to underscore the discrepancy between interior domestic spaces and the external modern city. This disconnect—a tangible expression of the tension between private dwellings and the urban environment—is precisely what the institution of the condominium would seek to bridge in the years to come.

The imaginative journey of the narrator, who observes the outside world from a garret room allows him to travel far beyond the confines of his small space.

³⁶ Sharon Marcus, p.737.

³⁷ Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, ‘Introduction’, *Habitations modernes*, 1 (Paris: A. Morel et Cie, librairies-éditeurs, 1877), trans. by the author.

³⁸ MacCannell Dean, ‘Introduction’, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, (New York: Shocketen Books, 1976).

Anyone who has only ever lived on the lower floors cannot imagine the picturesque variety of such a horizon. They have never contemplated this entanglement of peaks coloured by tiles; they have never followed with their eyes these valleys of gutters where the fresh gardens of the attic undulate, these great shadows that the evening stretches over the slate slopes, and this shimmering of glass that the setting sun ignites! They have not studied the flora of these civilised Alps, covered in lichens and mosses; they do not know the thousand inhabitants that populate them, from the microscopic insect to the domestic cat, that fox of the rooftops, always on the lookout or on the prowl. They have not witnessed, finally, the thousand different aspects of the sky—whether misty or clear—the thousand effects of light that turn these high regions into a theatre with ever-changing decorations! How many times have my days of rest been spent contemplating this marvellous spectacle, discovering its dark or charming episodes, searching, finally, in this unknown world, for the *impressions of travel* that opulent tourists seek below!³⁹

Property was lifting from the ground, shifting from a ‘vertical’ and unitary model to a ‘horizontal’ and fragmentary scheme, marking a significant shift in building governance. The origins of Haussmannian Paris document the emerging legal and practical resistance to horizontal property, embodying the broader conflict between preserving traditional property laws and accommodating emerging socio-economic conditions. It is on this tension that the foundations for the eventual development of the condominium were built.

By the early 20th century, the recognition and formalisation of condominium ownership became imperative within national legal frameworks as the phenomenon of multi-owner buildings could no longer be ignored.

This shift, propelled by multiple factors — including the aforementioned availability of private credit through mortgages — enabled the concept of condominium ownership to emerge as a practical response to the demands of urbanisation, economic growth, and the increasing need for leisure within the domestic space.

³⁹ Émile Souvestre, *Un philosophe sous les toits: journal d'un homme heureux*, (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1851), pp.42-43. trans. by the author.

1.4 Atomisation

Real estate property or, more precisely, its essential aspect real estate income, emerged at the end of fascism and in the twenty-five years that followed with characteristics significantly different to those of the house owners in the immediate post-war period. That class of renters (*proprietari*), who had seen fascism as their anchor of salvation, was actually disempowered and impoverished, while the integration between income and profit in construction companies made giant strides. An essential role in this transformation was played by the expansion and generalisation of the condominium system, along with the related expansion of real estate credit, or, in other words, by the affirmation and increasing weight of a new mechanism of capital accumulation through construction activity.¹

The process that led to the recognition of condominiums under Italian law in 1934 unfolded within the broader transformation of the legal apparatus of property ownership and the internal mutation of the category of property owners (*proprietari*).² Lando Bortolotti reconstructed the evolution of property between the two World Wars tracing the historical developments that transformed the condominium into a phenomenon that the fascist government could no longer ignore. Bortolotti identifies early evidence of condominiums at the beginning of the 19th century, starting with observations in Vincenzo Marulli's treatise *Su l'Architettura e su la Nettezza delle Città*.³ In this work, the coexistence of multiple families under the same roof, as observed in the city of Naples, is deemed inappropriate compared to the concept of a house 'exclusive from the street to the roof.'⁴ Bortolotti also mentions an article from 1919 in a specialised journal highlights the sporadic nature of property fragmentation in urban areas compared to rural ones. It points to a few exceptional and uncertain cases, such as those in Genoa and Savona, as well as a small number of insignificant examples in Turin, the city from which the author writes.⁵ At the same time, the article demonstrates both scepticism and interest, suggesting that

¹ Lando Bortolotti, 'La proprietà edilizia e il fascismo', *Studi Storici*, 12.4 (1971), 718-778, p.767. trans. by the author.

² Bortolotti reconstructs the dynamics behind the contentious relationship between fascism and property owners. The anti-urban policies of the fascist regime aimed, through coercive measures and restrictions on rural exodus, to address the housing problem in cities—an approach that ultimately proved ineffective and merely postponed the issue. In this context, it is also important to note that, initially, the property-owning class welcomed the fascist regime, hoping that the new government would provide a solution to the rent controls imposed in response to the post-war economic situation. However, despite this initial collaboration, the fascist regime could no longer overlook the growing demand for property among the middle class. In its pursuit of political consensus and social control, it increasingly prioritised the rise of a new class of property owners drawn from entrepreneurial and upwardly mobile middle-class backgrounds, rather than continuing to support the traditional aristocratic landowning elite. The transformation of the property-owning class into a true real estate industry was fundamental to the success of the condominium model.

³ Vincenzo Marulli, *Su l'architettura e su la nettezza delle città* (Florence: 1808).

⁴ Laura Bertolaccini, 'Premessa', *Su l'architettura e su la nettezza delle città*, ed. by Laura Bertolaccini (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2009) pp. 5-33, p.26.

⁵ These are cities where density is encouraged by the region's topography and natural limitations, and where the spatial compression between the sea and the mountains has historically led to high land values and, consequently, the early construction of multilevel buildings.

this phenomenon could offer ‘a new path of business for entrepreneurs and an opportunity for small capitalists to invest their money.’⁶

Furthermore, as Bortolotti reports, the condominium, conceived as a fractional form of property ownership, functioned as a potential instrument for both social order and control, not only under the fascist regime but also within the broader societal context.⁷ Numerous texts underscore the growing interest in this governance model, not solely from the perspective of property developers but also because it fostered social stability among both the working class and the petite bourgeoisie, fostering their aspirations to become landlords. These groups would channel their savings into this new form of housing, significantly contributing to alleviating the housing crisis.⁸

The ‘control’ potential of the condominium is portrayed as an ‘anti-utopia’, a social deterrent for the collective capable of neutralising more dangerous ideologies. As the anti-fascist jurist Domenico R. Peretti Griva notes:

It is intuitive that the most dangerous doctrines for the state structure, aimed at disrupting the balance and establishing, on utopian foundations, new 'orders' that should presuppose an absurd state of perfection of the human race, are all the more kept at bay and rendered harmless, the greater the number of those interested in defending an acquired position, and even more so, the greater and more moral the individual effort to achieve it.⁹

Even quantitatively, Bortolotti’s article points out how in 1930 multi-unit buildings comprised 76% of new-built residential units, and by 1933, this figure had risen to 84.48%.¹⁰ Despite the national economic crisis reaching its peak in 1929-1930, the building sector demonstrated relative efficiency when compared to other economic sectors. Rather than being negatively affected by the slowdown in the industrial and financial sectors, the real estate market benefitted from this shift by attracting a reorientation of investor preferences. Facilitated by the expansion of the credit and mortgage system, the construction sector experienced a significant rise in *società immobiliari* (real estate companies), whose numbers grew from 140 in 1913 to 2,659 in 1932, culminating in a peak of building production in 1936.¹¹ The real estate sector had adopted an industrial mindset.

⁶ D. Rostagno, ‘Il frazionamento delle case’, *Il Monitore del Proprietario*, June (1919). as cited in Lando Bortolotti, p.767.

⁷ Lando Bortolotti, p.767.

⁸ Bernardino Attilio Genco, *La proprietà edilizia nei suoi problemi e nella sua organizzazione* (Verona: 1929). as cited in Lando Bortolotti, p.767.

⁹ Domenico R. Peretti Griva, *La disciplina dei rapporti di condominio sulla casa* (Turin: UTET, 1969) as cited in Lando Bortolotti, p.767. trans. by the author.

¹⁰ Lando Bortolotti, p.768.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.769.

Within this new ethos, the condominium was perceived as a ‘new’ form of property that the entrepreneurial sector could exploit by transforming renters into buyers of the houses. Instead of facing class adversaries, they were now dealing with aspiring homeowners, unaware of the exploitation imposed on them, with the invaluable advantage of shedding the traditional, detestable role of the landlord.

In 1927, a committee was established to develop regulations that would facilitate the institution of condominiums and, consequently, the practice of freehold ownership of flats in multi-storey buildings.¹² And by 1934, the concept of the condominium was officially incorporated into the Italian legal system. The legislation emphasised the ‘necessity and urgency of issuing regulations to govern condominium relationships regarding housing’, underscoring the national importance of addressing this expanding trend. In 1939, the introduction of the new urban land registry system allowed for the taxation of individual property units rather than entire buildings or vertical sections, thereby enabling the horizontal division of properties and simplifying the transfer of single units.¹³ Finally, in 1942, the condominium system was formally codified in the Italian Civil Code.

Italy was not an exception, as other European countries were simultaneously regulating and legalising the institution of storey ownership. As Leyser notes, France enacted the *Règlement de Copropriété* in 1938, Belgium passed similar legislation in the same year, followed by Spain in 1939. In Germany, although the possibility of *Stockwerkseigentum* had been discussed since the 1920s, a formal law regarding flat ownership was not established until 1953.¹⁴

REGIO DECRETO-LEGGE 15 gennaio 1934, n. 56.
Disciplina dei rapporti di condominio sulle case.

VITTORIO EMANUELE III
PER GRAZIA DI DIO E PER VOLONTÀ DELLA NAZIONE
RE D'ITALIA

Considerata la necessità e l'urgenza di emanare norme per disciplinare i rapporti di condominio sulle case,
Visto l'art. 3, n. 2, della legge 31 gennaio 1926, n. 100;
Sentito il Consiglio dei Ministri;
Sulla proposta del Guardasigilli, Ministro Segretario di Stato per la grazia e giustizia;
Abbiamo decretato e decretiamo:

Figure 10 Extract from the Gazzetta Ufficiale in which condominiums are mentioned for the first time in Italian law (1934).

¹² Chiara Ingrassio, 'The Condominio: The New Housing Model During the Italian Boom', *studies in History and Theory of Architecture*, 9 (2021) 132-148, p.132. <<https://sita.uauim.ro/article/9-ingrosso-the-condominio-the-new>> [accessed 12 September 2024]

¹³ Ibid. p.133.

¹⁴ J. Leyser, pp.34-35.

The condominium had entered the legal framework, bringing transformative changes to the financial, industrial, and construction sectors. Regarding the latter, it is important to highlight, alongside the previously mentioned socioeconomic and legal conditions, the significant technological advancements made in the field of construction during this period.

The construction techniques used during the first years of the 20th century marked a significant shift away from the verticality of structural masonry characterised by ‘heavy’ load-bearing walls and ‘light’ horizontal partitions such as wooden floors for the upper floors and arched masonry for the lower levels. Instead, the focus transitioned to the opposite: the ‘heaviness’ of horizontal concrete slabs contrasted with the ‘lightness’ of a vertical structure reduced to its minimal elements. Pillars liberated the horizontal dimension of the space, allowing for greater customisation of individual units. It was the slab, as suggested by the well-known Domino system (1914), that became the fundamental divisive element of the structural skeleton of a building, reinforcing its central role in modern architectural design.

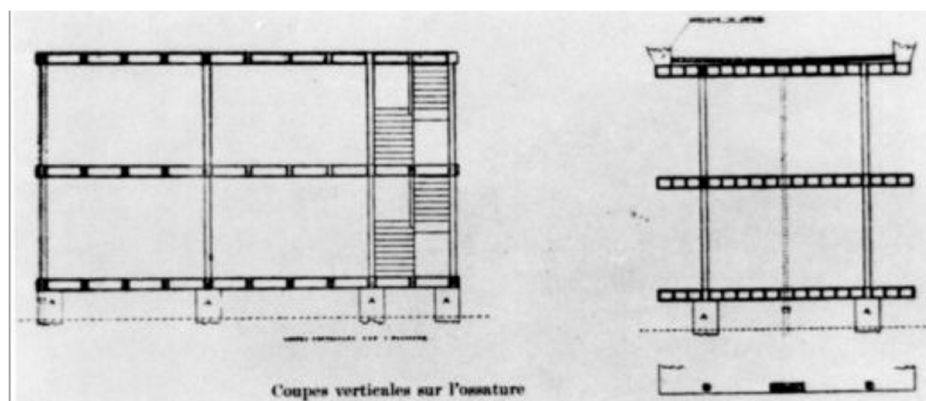


Figure 11 Domino System. From Willy Boesiger, Oscar Stonorov Eds., ‘Le Corbusier Oeuvre complete 1910-29’, vol.1, (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1995), p.23.

The horizontality of condominium governance is therefore a factor to consider in the broader diffusion of architectural designs starting from the early years of the 20th century. Horizontality, defined by Henry R. Hitchcock and Philip Johnson as ‘the most conspicuous characteristic of the international style’, had become an ‘unescapable’ logic within the architectural discourse anticipating its formal legal application.¹⁵ The consequences of storeyed construction, which naturally produce horizontality, were reinforced by the *plan libre*.

¹⁵ Henry Russel Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style*, [1932] (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), p.78.

Consequently, this condition did not apply solely to condominiums but also affected single-property buildings despite their vertical governance. In the early stages, the stubborn verticality of the first skyscrapers — which masked their inherent horizontality through decorative vertical banding, as exemplified by Louis Sullivan’s Guaranty Building (1896) — often resulted in a design that, according to the two American architects and curators, was ‘meaningless and anarchical’.¹⁶ They thought that, in most cases, this approach reflected an imitative façade rather than a genuinely functional aesthetic.

The reverse phenomenon occurred once horizontality became a dominant feature of architectural language. This same ornamental behaviour of verticality eventually influenced architects striving for horizontality for its own sake, resulting in what the two authors describe as ‘fake banding’, a ‘purely decorative scheme of tying windows together in a horizontal row’.¹⁷

Within the Italian context, evidence of the introduction of the condominium to architectural discourse can be observed in *Domus*, the most influential architectural magazine of the time, founded in 1928 by architect and designer Gio Ponti. This publication offers insights into how condominiums were represented and marketed to the general public.

The word ‘*condominio*’ makes its first appearance in *Domus* in 1937.¹⁸ The condominium appears not in an article but in a real estate advertisement sponsored by the Milanese *Società Immobiliare AFEL*.¹⁹ The advertisement adopts the guise of an article, entitled ‘*Case in Condominio*’ (‘Houses in Condominiums’), to blend seamlessly into the magazine’s editorial content.²⁰ It addresses the topic through text, images and plans describing a ten-storey upper class apartment building in Milan designed by the architect Mario Bacciocchi.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.79.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Società Immobiliare AFEL, ‘Case in Condominio’, *Domus*, 114, (1937), p.50-51.

¹⁹ This is not to suggest that the building in question was the first condominium in Milan, but rather one of the earliest instances in which a magazine employed the term *condominio* for commercial purposes. As demonstrated in the itinerary curated by Paolo Brambilla, several earlier buildings fall within the condominium category. Among these are *Domus Carola*, *Domus Fausta*, and *Domus Julia* (1931–1933) by Emilio Lancia and Gio Ponti; *Casa Rustici* (1935) by Pietro Lingeri and Giuseppe Terragni; and the *Bonaiti* and *Malugani Houses* (1935–1936) by Giovanni Muzio. ‘Il condominio Milanese’, ed. by Paolo Brambilla in *Itinerari di architettura milanese* (2004), < <https://oami.s3.eu-south-1.amazonaws.com/media/cultura/itinerari/18-il-condominio-milanese.pdf> > [accessed 23 June 2024]

²⁰ Ibid., p.50.

CASE IN CONDOMINIO

Il primo pensiero dell'uomo previdente è quello di avere una casa propria e sistemarsi in essa la famiglia. Nelle grandi città questo intento è difficilmente realizzabile inquantochè la costruzione di un palazzo o di una villa implica l'impiego di un cospicuo capitale che soltanto pochi privilegiati possono avere a disposizione.

Il sistema di casa a proprietà sovrapposte e cioè a condominio, permette la soluzione del problema poichè in tal modo l'elevato costo delle aree e delle esigenze delle moderne costruzioni, per quanto concerne le parti comuni ed i molti servizi, viene ripartito tra vari appartamenti.

Questi palazzi divisi in proprietà successive in senso verticale, che sono regolate da opportune e precise leggi che tutelano il « condominio » in tutte le manifestazioni delle libertà in relazione con la pacifica vicinanza, sono naturalmente il risultato dei desideri e delle aspirazioni dei singoli possessori, per cui ogni alloggio è diverso dall'altro nell'organizzazione dei servizi, nella distribuzione e nella disposizione dei vari ambienti e si possono considerare tante case diverse l'una dall'altra, contenute nello stesso perimetro e usufruenti dei medesimi vani comuni e degli impianti (acqua, luce, gas, ascensori, sciacchi, ecc.).

Un palazzo in condominio quindi, presenta nella progettazione e nella organizzazione ben maggiori difficoltà di una comune casa d'affitto. Pubblichiamo appunto il progetto di una di queste case che si sta realizzando in via Manin, 33 per conto della S. A. AFELI di Milano.

Le piante che presentiamo sono tutte varianti del medesimo piano tipo, nel quale i servizi (ascensori, scala, sciacchi, canne di aereazione ecc.) sono stati piazzati in modo tale da permettere lo spostamento del gruppo « locali di servizio » in tre punti diversi dell'alloggio a seconda dell'impostazione che il proprietario vuol dare alla futura residenza.

Nella pianta tipo A i servizi sono situati nel corpo parallelo alla strada e tutti verso il cortile, tale soluzione permette lo sviluppo delle camere da letto verso il cortile stesso (da molti preferito per la maggior tranquillità nelle ore notturne). I saloni di ricevimento e di soggiorno sono allineati lungo la fronte dell'edificio che prospetta i giardini pubblici di Porta Venezia ed è rivolta a Sud-Est.

Nella pianta tipo B i servizi sono svolti nel corpo interno del fabbricato e l'accesso di servizio di destra serve l'ingresso particolare per il servizio a mezzo della balconata a Nord. Le camere da letto sono state ricavate nel corpo anteriore parallelo alla strada.

La pianta tipo C prevede lo sdoppiamento del piano in due alloggi, uno grande, che sfrutta il corpo anteriore, uno ridotto verso l'interno. Questa soluzione è richiesta da quanti in un primo tempo non hanno necessità di un gran numero di locali e possono così affittare l'appartamento interno sempre con buon profitto mentre hanno all'occorrenza la possibilità di aumentare il numero dei locali e dei servizi occupando in tutto o in parte l'alloggio secondario. Si noti il locale di soggiorno al centro della facciata, con la grande apertura panoramica chiusa da cristalli e saliscendi.

La facciata verso i giardini, completamente rivestita di Botticino lucido, ha i costoni delle finestre in Membro rosato e il basamento a botte di granito rosa di Baveno a punta di diamante.

La costruzione sarà dotata dei più moderni impianti con materiali di prim'ordine, sicura garanzia della buona riuscita di un palazzo in « condominio » tra i più signorili di Milano, eretto in una posizione della città di eccezionale interesse per una casa di civile abitazione.

Arch. Mario Baccocchi - Palazzo in condominio in Milano

Queste vedute dimostrano chiaramente quante verde circondi la nuova costruzione

50

50

51

Figure 12 'Case in condominio', Domus, 114 (1937).

An elevation image of the building highlights the façade and materiality, providing insight into its architectural character. Additionally, three smaller images contextualise the structure by showcasing the abundant greenery in the surrounding environment.

The opening sentence directly addresses the sense of responsibility attributed to the family man, emphasising that his primary concern should be securing homeownership: 'The first thought of a prudent man is to have his own home and establish his family there'.²¹

During this period, the typical response to this concern was the development of the *villini*, a standalone house that represented the initial option for aspiring homeowners. This architectural form encapsulated the aspirations of both the upper class and the burgeoning bourgeoisie, serving as a symbol of social status within cities but also marking the early stages of the 'colonisation' of coastal areas. However, with the onset of rapid urbanisation, *villini* could no longer remain the sole pathway to homeownership. The increasing density and demand of urban centres necessitated new residential solutions. The advertisement continues:

²¹ Ibid. trans. by the author.

In large cities, this goal is difficult to achieve because building an apartment or a villa requires a significant amount of capital that only a few privileged individuals can afford. | The system of homeownership with stacked properties, that is, condominium living, offers a solution to this problem. In this way, the high costs of land and the requirements of modern constructions, especially concerning common areas and various services, are distributed among multiple apartments.²²

Moreover, the advertisement asserts that the condominium, as a form of contractual agreement between owners, ensures peaceful cohabitation by regulating the shared use of communal areas – such as the main and service entrances, garages, cellars, and even anti-aircraft shelters, which became mandatory for newly constructed residential buildings in 1936.²³ Shared technical systems, including water, electricity, gas, elevators, and sewage infrastructure, are also governed under this arrangement, further promoting harmony and efficient management among residents. But the most important feature sponsored by this advertisement, and a key selling point of the condominium compared with rental houses (*case d'affitto*), lies in the potential for individual customisation by each owner. The strategic placement of technical shafts in three different positions allows owners to select between three distinct layout configurations, as depicted in the promotional materials with labelled floor plans. Notably, the third configuration offers the possibility of subdividing the apartment, thereby allowing the owner to rent out the smaller unit to provide a source of additional income.²⁴

²² Ibid. trans. by the author.

²³ This detail appears in a second advertisement about the same building entitled: 'Palazzo in Condominio' in Società Immobiliare AFEL, 'Palazzo in Condominio', *Domus*, 114, (1937). The requirement for anti-aircraft shelters became mandatory at the end of 1936, a restriction that was later removed after the end of the Second World War but which still remains in effect in some countries, such as Switzerland. The first article of the Italian law regarding this topic is reported below: 'It is mandatory for entities or private individuals constructing buildings intended for civil or public housing to provide - at their own expense - for the adaptation of part of the basement, semi-basement, or, in their absence, the ground floor, as an air-raid shelter. The obligation mentioned in the previous paragraph also applies to buildings under construction on the date of entry into force of this decree.' R.D.L., 24 September 1936, n. 2121, art.1., 'Regulations for the provision of air-raid shelters in newly constructed buildings intended for civilian or public housing.' trans. by the author.

²⁴ Società Immobiliare AFEL, p.51.

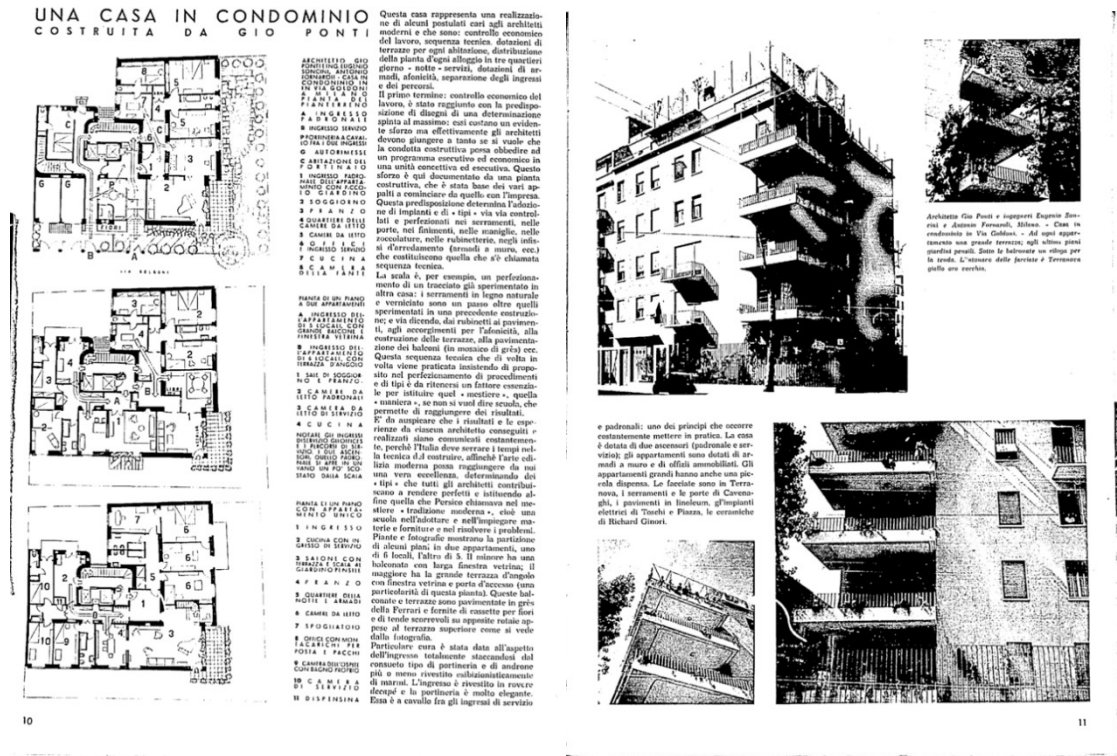


Figure 13 Gio Ponti, 'A house in condominium built by Gio Pontii', *Domus*, 126 (1938).

Other explicit references to condominium development around the time the condominium entered into law can be found in a project by the Milanese architect Gio Ponti, editor of *Domus* at that time.²⁵ Destined to become one of the most significant figures in apartment housing of the era, Ponti perfectly embodied the aspirations of the upper bourgeoisie of the time, balancing decorative elegance and functionality.

The article, which discusses a six-storey condominium building in Milan, not only presents two different potential floor plan configurations designed to meet the diverse needs of the owners, but also meticulously details the selection of finishes, materials (including specific brands), and even furnishings.²⁶ Apartment ownership had revolutionised urban living, fostering a willingness to invest in the comfort and luxury of one's own apartment, and extending this 'pleasure' to the middle class.

²⁵ Editorial board, 'Una Casa in Condominio costruita da Gio Pontii', *Domus*, 126, (1938), pp.10-16 (p.10).

²⁶ 'The façades are in Terranova, the windows and doors by Cavenaghi, the floors in linoleum, the electrical systems by Toschi and Piazza, and the ceramics by Richard Ginori.' in *Ibid.* p.11. trans. by the author.



²⁷ 'Architect Gio Ponti, Milan. - Condominium house on Via Goldoni in Milan. - Interiors of apartment R. - Other views in the living room. Fireplace in travertine, firewood holder in copper, and fireplace tools from Casa e Giardino. Above the fireplace is a beautiful painting by Campigli. In the background, the staircase leading to the hanging garden and a corner. The staircase is clad in waxed oak by Cavenaghi; steps with white linoleum treads and wooden risers.' In *Domus*, 126 (1838). trans. by the author

Two additional details are worth mentioning to fully grasp the significance of this example. The first is the repeated emphasis on economic control, as well as the professionalism and craftsmanship of the architect, whose experimental solutions were presented as the culmination of his prior experience, thereby guaranteeing their excellence. The condominium and apartment house had finally become a domain of architectural experimentation. Although these remarks may seem like a reassurance to readers of the time, when considering that the Neo-Liberty building opposite, designed by engineer Paolo Gadda, had been completed only 20 years earlier, it becomes clearer how, unlike in Viollet-le-Duc's era, the apartment house had finally attained the status of a noble and profitable architectural solution.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., p.10.

²⁸ Roberto Arsuffi, 'Milano | Monforte Acquabella – Vie belle in città: Via Goldoni', (2021) < <https://blog.urbanfile.org/2021/04/22/milano-monforte-acquabella-vie-belle-in-citta-via-goldoni/> > [accessed 17 January 2025]



Figure 14 On the left the Neo-liberty building by Paolo Gadda (circa 1912), on the right the Gio Ponti condominium (1935-37).

The second aspect is the emphasis on the inclusion of a terrace for each floor. Rather than merely functioning as a transitional (as in the case of the *case di ringhiera*) or decorative feature typically reserved for the *piano nobile*, this open and sunlit space serves as an extension of the home, offering a place for rest and leisure.

Hygiene was increasingly being supplanted by health and leisure as the central cultural values. In this context, terraces, reminiscent of those found in sanatoriums designed for heliotherapy treatments, emerged as a prominent architectural feature that contributed to the market success of residential developments. This shift was encapsulated in the concept of '*educazione solare*' ('solar education'), as articulated by Gio Ponti in his article '*Ritorno dal mare*' (1933), which underscores the exchange between leisure architecture and emerging housing trends.²⁹ The dimensions of a nascent tourism ethos began to permeate the design of apartment buildings, moving 'towards a freer and more sunlit concept of living' in which the condominium served as the primary medium for its dissemination.³⁰

The period following the end of the Second World War marked a significant shift in national housing policy, which greatly benefitted the construction sector, elevating it into a crucial component of architectural discourse. This national policy played a transformative role in shaping post-war reconstruction efforts, leading to improved housing conditions but also initiating the era of unrestrained urbanisation that came to define the subsequent decades.³¹

²⁹ Gio Ponti, 'Ritorno dal mare', *Domus*, October 1933, 70, p.547.

³⁰ Gio Ponti, 'Terrazze e piscine sul tetto', *Domus*, August 1935, 92, pp.10-12. trans. by the author.

³¹ 'In reality, the building boom, despite being potentially distorted and benefiting small groups of speculators, responded to a profound need - a deeply felt hunger for housing. For many Italians, obtaining ownership of a sufficiently spacious apartment appeared, at the time, to be an individual achievement far too valuable to consider the social costs. On the other hand, while the appearance of the most important cities decidedly changed for the worse,

Historian Bruno Bonomo offers a compelling summary of the trajectory of the national government during the years 1945 to 1950.³² This period also witnessed the formation and consolidation of power by the centrist Catholic party, Democrazia Cristiana, which would later govern the country almost uninterrupted until 1992. Its electorate viewed private property as a cornerstone of personal freedom, as underlined by the shared motto of *'tutti proprietari'* ('everyone owners').³³

Bonomo traces the origins of this trajectory to three essential legislative acts: the Ina Casa plan, also known as the Fanfani Plan (1949), the Tupini law (1949), and the Aldisio law for building expansion (1950).³⁴

After overcoming an initial emergency phase, during which the prohibition of new constructions concentrated materials and resources on the repair and reconstruction of damaged homes and on providing shelter to the numerous homeless, in 1947 Italy began taking measures to build new residential complexes. As Bonomi explains, prior to the three fundamental legislative acts mentioned above, an initial legislative measure (no. 399, 8 May 1947) saw the state actively promote the construction of public housing to be made available either for rent or, in the majority of cases, with a hire purchase option (*a riscatto*).³⁵ However, a second measure in the same year (no. 1600, 12 December 1947), is particularly significant as it reveals one of the foundational flaws in the privatisation of the Italian housing market.³⁶ As Bonomi highlights:

the interiors of homes significantly improved.' Found in: Aurelio Lepre, *Storia della prima Repubblica. L'Italia dal 1943 al 2003*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2004), pp.171-187.

³² Bruno Bonomo, 'La proprietà della casa alle origini dell'Italia repubblicana: politica e legislazione, 1945-1950', *Italia contemporanea*, 295, April (2021), pp.222-252. <doi:10.3280/ic295-0a2> [accessed 17 January 2025]

³³ The motto *'tutti proprietari'*, translatable as 'everyone owners,' distorts the communist motto *'tutti proletari'*, Italian version of the renowned communist slogan by Marx and Engels, 'Proletarians of the world, unite!'. Ibid. p.227. See also: Roberta Marcaccio, 'Tutti proprietari' in *Real Estate*, ed. by Fulcrum: Jack Self, Shumi Bose (London: Bedford Press, 2015), pp.115-120, p.117.

³⁴ Bruno Bonomo, pp.226-233. He also cites the second paragraph of Article 47 of the Italian Constitution: 'The Republic encourages and safeguards savings in all forms. It regulates, co-ordinates and oversees the operation of credit. The Republic promotes house and farm ownership and direct and indirect shareholding in the main national enterprises through the use of private savings.' The Italian Constitution does not explicitly provide the right to home ownership but merely indicates its promotion. Home ownership was conceived as a means of safeguarding savings, serving as an anti-inflationary tool for small savers who were less inclined to invest in the financial market. Additionally, it is worth noting the debate surrounding the potential application of land ownership division norms to housing. The division of large landholdings did not extend to real estate properties, leaving large property holdings untouched.

³⁵ This was achieved by financing and facilitating the issuance of loans through institutions specialising in public housing, local authorities, and public entities committed to building homes for their employees. To a lesser extent, the measure authorised financial contributions to private individuals and construction consortia willing to participate in housing reconstruction efforts, while also encouraging the stipulation of loans for prospective buyers. Bruno Bonomo, p.233.

³⁶ Behind this decree also lies the emergence of cooperative societies, a cornerstone of post-war urbanisation, one of the most notable of which was the Roman 'Società Generale Immobiliare', a company directly controlled by the General Administration of the Holy See (The Vatican). Through institutions for affordable and public housing located in the most important Italian cities, it succeeded in constructing approximately ten thousand apartments in around

This decree modified the previous one, extending the State's participation and contribution to the construction of public housing to companies established for the purpose of constructing, without profit, public housing to be assigned for rent with a future purchase agreement, as well as to cooperatives of public employees and pensioners, professionals, and members of commercial and industrial enterprises. A few months after the removal of the left-wing parties from the government, and the subsequent transfer of the Ministry of Public Works from the Communist Party to the Christian Democracy, both housing cooperatives and private companies established to construct homes *a riscatto* (hire purchase) were essentially equated, in terms of state subsidies, with public entities tasked with operating in the field of affordable and public housing.³⁷

The integration of non-speculative private initiatives with public ones was definitively formalised with the pivotal 1949 Piano Fanfani law, which established the 'INA Casa' project.³⁸ This plan aimed to construct affordable housing, stimulate the economy through public intervention supporting private development, absorb worker unemployment through the construction sector, and expand property ownership among small savers.

Subsequent laws, such as the Tupini law, reinforced this decree by broadening the scope of eligible public and private entities, further stimulating private initiative, facilitating the purchase of buildable land, and regulating the buying and selling of properties, provided that the housing met the definition of 'non-luxury.'³⁹

Finally, 1950 marked the launch of the '*Fondo per l'Incremento Edilizio*' (Fund for Housing Expansion) through the Aldisio law. This represented the final step before the subsequent speculative (and economic) boom, aiming to provide subsidised credit to a broad audience, directly financed through the ERP (European Recovery Program) or Marshall Plan — funded by the United States to support reconstruction and maintain its influence over the European continent. Italy had laid the foundations for years of unbridled urbanisation, a windfall for real estate speculation.

The brochure published in 1950 by the Central Institute for Affordable and Public Housing to showcase the first significant experiences succinctly outlines the fundamental mechanism of the rent-to-own housing system, which would profoundly influence the widespread growth of property ownership across the Italian peninsula.

fifteen cities. Its efforts focused on condominium-style housing, including developments in prestigious areas equipped with all modern comforts.

³⁷ Bruno Bonomo, pp.234-235.

³⁸ The name INA Casa was promoted by the national providence institute *Istituto Nazionale Assicurazioni*.

³⁹ Law, 2 July 1949, n. 408, 'Provisions for the increase of building constructions'.

As highlighted by Paola Di Biagi, ‘of the over 350,000 housing units constructed during the two seven-year periods (1949–1955 and 1956–1963), nearly 70% were allocated to a hire purchase system with a future purchase agreement’.⁴⁰ Although criticised as a form of ‘forced ownership,’ this system allowed occupants to eventually claim ownership of their property by paying the equivalent of rent over several decades, typically 25 years.

The diagram below illustrates the financial structure of this operation and the distribution of costs for the building. The process involved an upfront payment of half the total cost by the state, with the remaining half financed by institutions and companies that had access to state-guaranteed loans (7%). Of this financed half, one portion was offset for companies through tax revenue, while the other portion — approximately one quarter of the total — was passed on to tenants/buyers over a 25-year period with a 4% interest rate.⁴¹

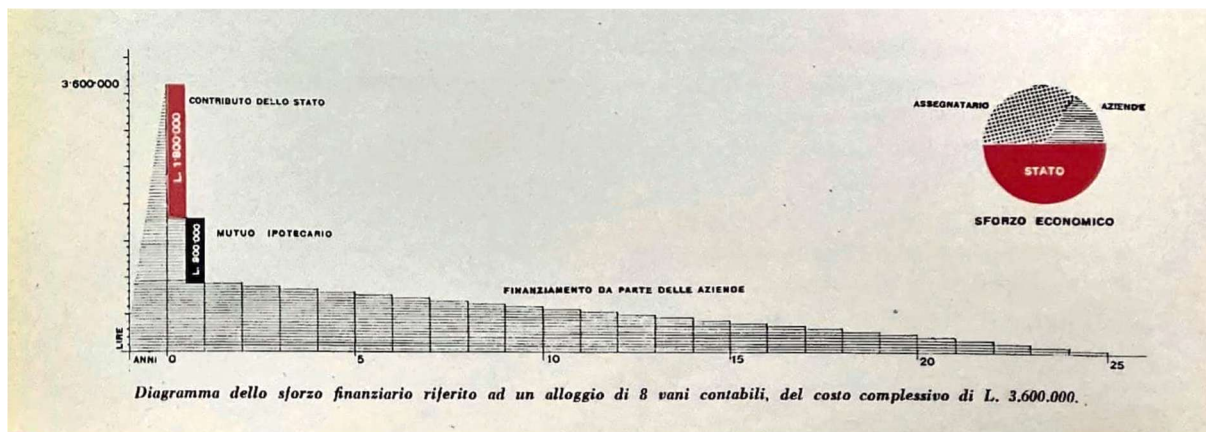


Figure 15 ‘Diagram of the finances related to a dwelling with eight accountable rooms, of a total cost of L. 3,600,000.’ From: Istituto centrale per l’edilizia economica e popolare Eds. *Stato ed aziende in cooperazione per la casa in proprietà alla famiglia*, (Rome: Istituto grafico tiberino, 1950), p.13.

Beside property, the plan strategically positioned construction — and by extension, architecture — at the service of other sectors while maintaining it at a pre-industrial, largely manual level. This approach, defined by Sergio Poretti as ‘reconstruction without technical progress’, was intended to ‘absorb’ the unskilled labour force that had remained unemployed after the war while simultaneously providing the population with low-cost housing.⁴²

⁴⁰ Paola Di Biagi, ‘Introduction’, *La Grande Ricostruzione: il piano Ina-Casa e l’Italia degli anni cinquanta*, ed. by Paola Di Biagi, (Roma: Donzelli editore, 2001).

⁴¹ Istituto centrale per l’edilizia economica e popolare ed. *Stato ed aziende in cooperazione per la casa in proprietà alla famiglia*, (Rome: Istituto grafico tiberino, 1950), p.13.

⁴² Sergio Poretti, ‘Le tecniche edilizie: modelli per la ricostruzione’, in *La Grande Ricostruzione: il piano Ina-Casa e l’Italia degli anni cinquanta*, ed. by Paola Di Biagi, (Roma: Donzelli editore, 2001), pp.113-128 (p. 113).

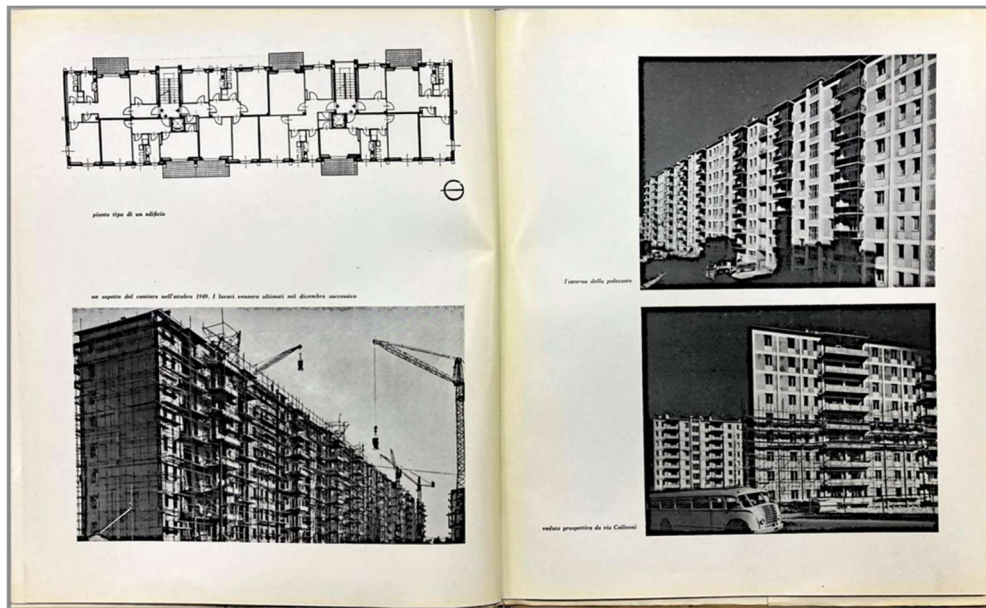


Figure 16 Via Albino neighbourhood, designed by the BBPR architects (1945–1952). From: Istituto centrale per l'edilizia economica e popolare Eds. *Stato ed aziende in cooperazione per la casa in proprietà alla famiglia*, (Rome: Istituto grafico tiberino, 1950), p. 13.

The spread of this economical aesthetic, characterised by string courses and cost-effective cladding, was not limited solely to public rental housing but was further reinforced and extended to private initiatives through the Tupini Law. This law granted fiscal incentives to buildings that adhered to a specific functional programme and design precautions.

This programme required the inclusion of a specific percentage of apartments, offices, and/or commercial spaces. Additionally, it mandated compliance with regulations that incentivised the development of 'non-luxury' housing. The law explicitly defined these various characteristics, outlining them in dedicated tables and allowing a maximum of five such characteristics per building. This regulatory framework had a significant impact on the architectural production of the time, shaping the design and function of new constructions.⁴³

Consequently, this approach was promoted even within the extensive production of condominiums aimed at the upper-middle class, referred to as '*Fabbricati Tupini*' (Tupini Buildings). These buildings typically featured commercial spaces on the ground floor and apartments and offices on the upper levels. However, the construction's parsimony often stood in contrast to the demands of the luxury market.

⁴³ Decree 7 January 1950, 'Determination of the characteristics of luxury homes'. The law provided for a 25-year suspension of the building tax. Among the specified requirements, one condition was that the property did not belong to the category of *luxury buildings*. A property was classified as such if it possessed at least five of the 19 attributes listed in an annexed table to the decree. These attributes included specific service amenities, room sizes and heights exceeding local building regulations, and the use of high-quality materials and finishes.

Some of these contradictions are, for example, highlighted by architect Elena Demartini through the case of the Anelli Condominium (1951) in Milan, which was intentionally described in notarial documents as an ‘upscale yet non-luxury’ building.⁴⁴ Even more significant to our discussion is the case of the condominium complex in Rome described by Bruno Bonomi, where leisure elements, such as a swimming pool, became the focal point of a speculative operation. In this context, the luxury of a swimming pool was counterbalanced by a series of buildings characterised by a more utilitarian architectural language, without the structures themselves exhibiting any particularly refined architectural solutions.⁴⁵



Figure 17 ‘Sigi advertisement (1969)’. Found in Bruno Bonomo, ‘La vacanza dentro casa’. Un complesso con piscina al Prenestino’, p.10.

Nevertheless, as architect Carlo Perogalli observed, despite the contradictions arising from Tupini’s law, ‘condominium housing tended to differentiate itself increasingly from rental housing.’⁴⁶ It is particularly within private residential developments that the condominium exhibits its most distinctive and paradoxical architectural characteristics. These features were shaped by the growing demand for leisure driven by market forces and persisted despite the constraints imposed by building regulations. Consequently, designers were compelled to adopt innovative

⁴⁴ Elena Demartini, ‘Pratiche abitative in una casa signorile ma «non di lusso»’, in Filippo De Pieri, Bruno Bonomo, Gaia Caramellino and Federico Zanfi, eds, *Storie di case: Abitare l’Italia del boom*, (Rome: Donzelli editore, 2013). pp. 23-43, p. 27.

⁴⁵ Bruno Bonomo, ‘La vacanza dentro casa’. Un complesso con piscina al Prenestino’, in Filippo De Pieri, Bruno Bonomo, Gaia Caramellino and Federico Zanfi, eds, *Storie di case: Abitare l’Italia del boom*, (Rome: Donzelli editore, 2013). pp. 3-21.

⁴⁶ Carlo Perogalli, ‘Introduction’ in *Case d’abitazione: a schiera e d’angolo*, ed by Carlo Perogalli, (Milan: Gorlich editore, 1961), p.18.

solutions that would distinguish their buildings within a highly competitive market, emphasising their greater diversity and more elaborate programmes.

The centrality of the condominium in the architectural discourse of the post-war period is explicated in the article *The Condominio: The New Housing Model During the Italian Boom* by architecture historian Chiara Ingrosso. She defines the condominium as ‘the new housing model’ of the post-war period, underscoring the architectural importance of the condominium through its two principal forms: the *condominio* and the *palazzina*.

The distinction between these two typologies is rooted in the different urban contexts in which they emerged, analysed here through the reconstruction of their spread in two of Italy's principal cities, Milan and Rome, whose varying population densities and existing urban layouts strongly influenced the choice of building typologies adopted.

As Ingrosso describes, in Milan the term used for apartment complexes was *condominio*, which made explicit reference to their governance system.⁴⁷ Especially in central areas it was the urban fabric divided into blocks that dictated the typology of residential complexes, with internal courtyards placed side by side to create continuous curtains of homogeneous heights.⁴⁸ On a stylistic level, as highlighted by the architect Elena Mattia, the Milanese scene presented greater continuity with the themes of rationalism than the Roman context, emphasising the facade as a flat surface, with particular attention paid to cladding and the arrangement of windows, creating a curtain-wall effect.⁴⁹

This is evident in the work of architects involved in the reconstruction of buildings within central plots. One example is the production of Asnago Vender on Via Faruffini (1953–54), where the carefully designed two-dimensional composition of the facade is interrupted by isolated, protruding balconies. Another example is the evolution of Gio Ponti's work, as seen in the

⁴⁷ ‘Condominio’ was also used in Naples, where the topography and morphology of the surroundings led to a more complex relationship between the buildings and their environment, leading to buildings that typologically were more similar to the isolated block of the palazzina.

⁴⁸ Fulvio Irace, ‘Condominio milanese’, in *Milano Moderna, Città, critica, architettura negli anni '50- '60* (Milan: Motta, 1996), 50-58.

⁴⁹ In her doctoral thesis Elena Mattia also takes into account how Ernesto Nathan Rogers, editor of the magazine *Casabella* (renamed *Casabella-Continuità* under his direction from 1954 to 1965), influenced Milan's architectural language of the time by advocating for a certain continuity with rationalist codes. Elena Mattia, advisor Franco Purini, *Le palazzine romane di Venturino Ventura: Interpretazione della modernità: volumi espressionisti, scomposizioni De Stijl e atmosfere wrightiane*. (unpublished doctoral thesis, Sapienza Università di Roma, 2003), pp. 63-64. <<http://www.arc1.uniroma1.it/dottoratocomposizionearchitetonica/Dissertazioni/27MattiaElenaLePalazzineRomaneDIVenturinoVentura.pdf>> [accessed on 15 March 2025]

condominium on Via Dezza (1956–57), where the concept of the *casa italiana* is expressed through a facade design featuring a regular grid of balconies. Within this framework, according to the original plan, each condominium owner could arrange their windows and choose the colour of their section of the facade based on personal preference.⁵⁰



Figure 18 On the left: a photograph of Asnago Vender's condominium on Via Faruffini (1953–54) by Marco Invernizzi. On the right: drawings of Gio Ponti's buildings on Via Dezza (1956–57), illustrating the flexibility of the facade framework and the importance of transparency as a compositional element, particularly in the building's nighttime appearance.

Even in the case of isolated plots, however, the Milanese school did not achieve the same level of expressiveness as the Roman approach. This is evident in examples such as Caccia Dominioni's buildings in Piazza Carbonari (1959–61) or the work of Mangiarotti and Morasutti on Via Quadronno (1956–62). Despite employing different languages, these buildings emphasise their unified and volumetric character — one through the careful composition of openings, and the other through an articulated seriality.

⁵⁰ Paolo Brambilla, 'Casa d'abitazione / 1956-1957 / Gio Ponti', in *Itinerari di architettura Milanese: Il condominio Milanese*, ed. by Paolo Brambilla, (2004), pp. 24-25. <<https://oami.s3.eu-south-1.amazonaws.com/media/cultura/itinerari/18-il-condominio-milanese.pdf>> [accessed 3 February 2025]



Figure 19 On the left: a photograph of Caccia Dominioni's condominium in Piazza Carbonari (1961), highlighting the isolation of the plot as built (published in *Domus* 403, June 1963). On the right: a model of Mangiarotti and Morasutti's building on Via Quadronno (1962), showcasing the volumetric and serial approach of the design. Photo by Marco Introini.

In contrast, Rome saw the proliferation of the *palazzina*, which developed in response to the city's checkerboard land pattern.⁵¹ Catering to the tastes of the emerging middle class, the *palazzina* became more expressive and visually striking, often reflecting contemporary fashion trends. It moved away from traditional decorative elements, favouring a bold symbolism that served as a marker of social status.⁵² Elena Mattia's words justify this expressionism, referring to the theoretical framework of the time:

In this context, it is important to clarify that the great expressive originality of the *palazzina* was possible in Rome because here there was a complete detachment from the more rigorous themes of rationalism in favour of a more free-spirited expressionism, organicism, and a reinterpretation of the baroque language in line with the theories disseminated at that time by Bruno Zevi.⁵³

Among the various interpretations of the early post-war *palazzina romana*, the works of Venturino Ventura stand out as some of the most successful combinations of expressiveness and symbolic representation of the status of the Roman upper bourgeoisie. These buildings were spared from the *volgarità borghese* (bourgeois vulgarity) that, according to Bruno Zevi, often constrained the architecture of post-war condominiums.⁵⁴

⁵¹ 'The building typology of the "palazzina"' originated with Regio Decreto 16 December 1920, n.1937, 'Approval of transitional regulations for the construction of apartment buildings in Rome in areas designated for villas by the zoning plan'. Through this decree, which introduced temporary urban planning regulations, it was possible to increase building density indices on land designated for the development of 'villini' under the 1909 Urban Plan. The *Palazzina* was finally institutionalised with the following 1930 urban plan.

⁵² Elena Mattia, p.137.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁵⁴ Bruno Zevi, 'Gusto della mediocrità lussuosa', *L'Espresso*, 31 August (1954).

Notable examples of Ventura's work include the *palazzine* on Via Luciani (1958–61), Via Montanelli (1960), and Via Gomenizza (1961), where terraces become a central compositional element, enhanced through visible suspended frames or generous overhangs. The programmatic complexity of luxury condominiums, in which services play a fundamental role, is particularly evident in the façade articulations of buildings such as those on Via Bruxelles (1968) and Via Piccolomini (1968).

In these examples, vertical elements — such as service staircases, utility shafts, and chimney flues — are explicitly emphasised, highlighting their three-dimensionality. They are often employed to create projections and recesses that generate dynamic effects of light and shadow while simultaneously expanding the living space through terraces.



Figure 20 On the left: a photograph of Venturino Ventura's *palazzina* on Via Luciani (1958–61) by Fabio Don. On the right: the *palazzina* on Via Piccolomini (1968), as referenced in Elena Mattia's thesis.

The development of condominiums as a manifestation of modernity underscores the fact that modernisation is not solely the work of master architects. Rather, it emerges from a broader movement driven by a network of secondary actors. The examples of the Milanese and Roman schools illustrate how condominiums, designed to meet the needs and aspirations of the upper middle class, became significant architectural expressions in the hands of skilled interpreters. These dynamics led to some of the most refined architectural achievements of the era.

The building programmes, driven by the increasing demand for privatised leisure and services, became symbolic elements, explicitly communicated through the design and composition of condominiums.

The post-war period led to greater material prosperity and a heightened sense of individualism. Owning an apartment had become an essential marker of social status and a means of economic stability. Paul Ginsborg's observations capture the fragmentation of property ownership that

was reshaping Italian society through the atomisation of civil life and the privatisation of family leisure time. As Ginsborg writes in his description of post-war Italy in the 1960s:

The social dynamic of the ‘miracle’ helped to create the atomization of civil society. The role of the single-family unit became more important than before; the new urban structures helped to isolate families, smaller in number, in small and comfortable apartments, but offered few spaces for community life; women became the main target of the new consumerism, and the emphasis on their homely dimension accentuated their isolation; the car and television further encouraged the use of mainly privatised and family free time.⁵⁵

The *entropy of property* was becoming increasingly widespread, reflecting the evolving habits of the Italian population and introducing a new model that replaced both Catholic and Communist frameworks. This new model, inspired by the American Dream, promoted social integration through individualism.⁵⁶

If fascism, before the war, and the Catholic Church had both viewed the urbanisation of cities with scepticism, as cities are where traditional structures are most rapidly transformed, the post-war economic boom demonstrated that the forces of capital could no longer be restrained.⁵⁷

Paradoxically, while American consumerism was reshaping European society and influencing social habits, Americans were simultaneously discovering the European institution of the condominium, which had been largely overlooked until the 1950s.

The condominium soon found its next frontier in the United States, where apartment ownership made its appearance and was closely associated with leisure, expanding the cultural and economic dimensions of real estate.

⁵⁵ Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi. Società e politica 1943-1988*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), p.337.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.338.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

1.5 Entropy in leisure

The condominium emerged as a particularly successful residential form of governance not only in response to the housing needs of cities but also, during the post-war period, as a fundamental element of the European coastal tourism landscape.

Southern France and Italy, in particular, pioneered the process of tourist densification along their shores. The Italian case became so emblematic that it quickly entered public discourse and literary narratives, as exemplified by one of Italo Calvino's earliest works, *La speculazione edilizia*. In this short story, the construction of a condominium in the garden of a family villa in a picturesque seaside town serves as a metaphor for the growing phenomenon that would drastically reshape the Italian landscape in the following years.

While the evolution of coastal condominiums in Italy is examined in detail in the second section of this research — through the case study of Jesolo — it is also essential to extend this historical investigation to the condominium as a globally recognised institution. Not by chance, the rise of the tourism industry acted as a catalyst for its transatlantic spread, particularly in the United States where the condominium would ultimately become a global phenomenon.

Puerto Rico is a Caribbean island whose name originates from the period of Spanish colonisation, which lasted until 1898, when the island was ceded to the United States. Here, the influence of Spanish legal traditions established condominiums as a known institution.

According to John E. Cribbet, this popularity stemmed from three main factors. First, the island faced a severe housing shortage, exacerbated by a growing population and limited suitable building sites. Second, the strong desire for home ownership among Puerto Ricans was often obstructed by the scarcity of individual houses. Third, the cost of construction and mortgage payments for condominiums was more affordable in cooperative ventures compared to other forms of comparable housing.¹

Thanks to the influence of European institutions on its legal system, Puerto Rico was the first U.S. jurisdiction to adopt the condominium concept, enacting a rudimentary statute in 1951. However, the condominium model remained largely unknown in the rest of the United States, with only a few documented examples.

¹John E. Cribbet, 'Home ownership for megalopolis?', *Michigan Law Review*, 61.7 (1963), 1207-1244 (p.1212) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1286564>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

The expansion of condominiums on the American mainland was significantly facilitated by the United States Congress when, in 1961, it passed an amendment to the National Housing Act, allowing the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to insure condominium mortgages.² Of particular relevance to our discussion are the states that showed a greater interest in adopting condominium legislation, particularly those with defined territorial boundaries, large urban populations, or economies driven by tourism, illustrating an intertwined relationship between the rise of condominiums and density. Notable examples include Puerto Rico (1958), Hawaii (1961), Florida (1963), Illinois (1963), and New York (1964).³

Matthew Gordon Lasner, one of the few architectural historians to explore the rise of condominiums, particularly in the U.S., outlines the process by which American developers and mortgage institutions became interested in this new form of property governance.

In the chapter 'Leisure Worlds' in his book *High Life: Condo Living in the Suburban Century*, he emphasises the role of Florida, particularly Miami, as a bridge for the diffusion of condominium ownership into the U.S. landscape.⁴

Following the initial development of South Beach in the 1910s and 1920s, Miami became a subtropical counterpart to the Jersey Shore (located in the south of New York), attracting not only middle and working-class residents but also retirees, including Catholics and Jews.⁵

After the 1935 approval of the Social Security Act, which provided economic support for unemployed and retired individuals, Miami's population grew significantly, particularly with the influx of Jewish retirees. Lasner describes the rapid, mass-market construction that characterised Miami in this period thus: 'Over the next six years, an entire city was built: expedient, cheap, and sheathed in a sexy mass-market skin of ship's curves, abstract-patterned stucco, and glass brick.'⁶ While these buildings were not designed to last, by the 1950s Miami had established itself as a leading resort town, with many Northerners purchasing retirement apartments

² Robert J. Natelson, p.31.

³ The population of Greater San Juan (main city in Puerto Rico), which had expanded from 70,000 in 1920 to 170,000 in 1940, reached 430,000 by 1960. Matthew Gordon Lasner, *High Life: Condo Living in the Suburban Century* (Yale University press, 2012) p. 179.

⁴ Matthew Gordon Lasner, *High Life: Condo Living in the Suburban Century* (New Haven, Conn., London: Yale University press, 2012).

⁵ Matthew Gordon Lasner, 'Model Miami: Finding New Urban Paradigms for New American Cities', *Journal of Urban History* 38.6, pp.1121-1127 (p.1125).

⁶ Ibid.

– initially in co-ops, and later in condominiums – using the proceeds from the sale of their primary residences.⁷

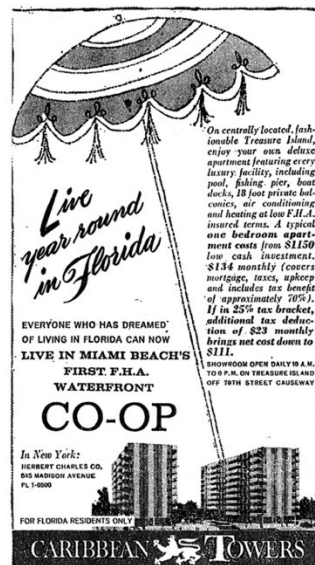


Figure 21 'Live year-round in Florida' display advertisement for Caribbean Towers, 'Miami Beach's first FHA waterfront Co-op', 'Chick' Braunstein and Robert and Samuel Lipman (developer), North Bay Village, Fla., *New York Times*, (18 December 1960).⁸

Lasner highlights the role of developers such as Brown L. Whatley, a member of Stockton, Whatley, Davin & Co., one of the largest mortgage banking, real estate, and insurance firms in southeastern U.S. during the late 1950s. Whatley became aware of the '*condominio*', as a 'co-ownership model in Puerto Rico that prioritised individual ownership rights over common rights'.⁹ As the retirement co-op market expanded in the late 1950s and early 1960s, many developers and lenders began to see the prevailing methods of co-ownership and financing as too restrictive, leading to increased interest in horizontal property ownership models.¹⁰

But the rise of the condominium came only after a period in which Miami's urban evolution was marked by hotels as the main speculative object. Revel's study highlights the significance of the evolution of hotels, tracing their transition from urban hostels to autonomous resorts.

⁷ Cooperatives, or co-ops, were the most widespread form of apartment ownership in the U.S. prior to the emergence of condominiums. Technically, with co-ops apartment ownership did not exist in the traditional sense, as residents did not own individual units. Instead, they purchased shares in the cooperative, which entitled them to live in a specific unit and granted them voting rights in the cooperative's governance. While this model allowed for greater control over resident selection and general management, it gradually declined in prominence with the increasing popularity of condominiums.

⁸ Dash Moore, Deborah, and Matthew Gordon Lasner, 'The Social Origins of the Miami Condo', *Platform* (2021) <<https://www.platformspace.net/home/the-social-origins-of-the-miami-condo>> [accessed 27 September 2024]

⁹ Matthew Gordon Lasner, p.178.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

This transformation is essential for understanding the architecture of Miami's condominiums as independent, leisure-centred buildings.

Urban hotels, or 'hostels', played a significant role in Miami's prewar boom, a period in which Miami distinguished itself among American resort cities due to its unique tourist culture of accessible glamour and affordable luxury.¹¹ During this time, 'the wealthy, and those who enjoy a vacation near the wealthy' coexisted, emulating the elite social scenes of Palm Beach and Newport, albeit without the entrenched social pedigrees of old money. Miami Beach attracted a diverse, ethnically mixed middle class who could spend their winters near the affluent.¹²

Alongside the box-and-facade architectural designs constructed during the economic depression and luxurious examples from the 1920s intended for the wealthier classes, two key urban amenities – nightclubs and luxury retail – further reinforced Miami Beach's image as 'the super playground of this country', a place where nearly anyone could vacation in a setting reminiscent of elite lifestyles.¹³



Figure 22 The Imperial Hotel in Miami clearly reveals the prominence of the front porch and its relationship with the adjoining street, as well as the contrast between the façade and the rear building mass.(c.1930).

This urban image was crafted through an environment comprising diverse yet interdependent

¹¹ In his article, Keith D. Revell refers to 'urban hostels' as accommodation facilities that were relatively inexpensive to construct in the Art Deco or Streamline Moderne styles which characterised the first type of hotel in the town. Today, these buildings are regarded as heritage.

¹² Keith D. Revell, 'From Urban Citizens to Ocean Liners: Miami Beach Hotels and the Enclosure Movement, 1935-1955', *Journal of Urban History*, 47.5 (2021), pp.1067-1102 (p.1070). <doi:10.1177/00961442209049> [accessed 12 October 2023]

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.1073.

elements. And it was within this urban fabric that a few prototypes of independent hotels emerged, foreshadowing the radical design revolution that was to come.

Rather than small, scattered plots within the city, new prototypes were developed with the intent of achieving a sense of physical and social isolation. These hotels were often located away from the most urbanised areas, typically situated on private beachfront strips. They were separated from the street by landscaped driveways and designed with inward-facing social, dining, and entertainment spaces. Guest rooms and social areas were oriented towards pools, cabana colonies, and the ocean, creating a self-contained resort experience.¹⁴

The first prominent example mentioned by Revell is the *Atlantis Hotel* (1936), located to the north of the most densely developed area of South Beach, designed by Lawrence Murray Dixon and opened in January 1936.¹⁵ The Atlantis Hotel illustrates the fundamental design elements of the independent resort, such as physical separation from the urban environment, internalised social spaces, self-sufficient recreational and entertainment facilities, and a private beach. These features conveyed the idea that Miami Beach could be fully experienced within the confines of the Atlantis Hotel, offering guests a complete and immersive retreat.¹⁶

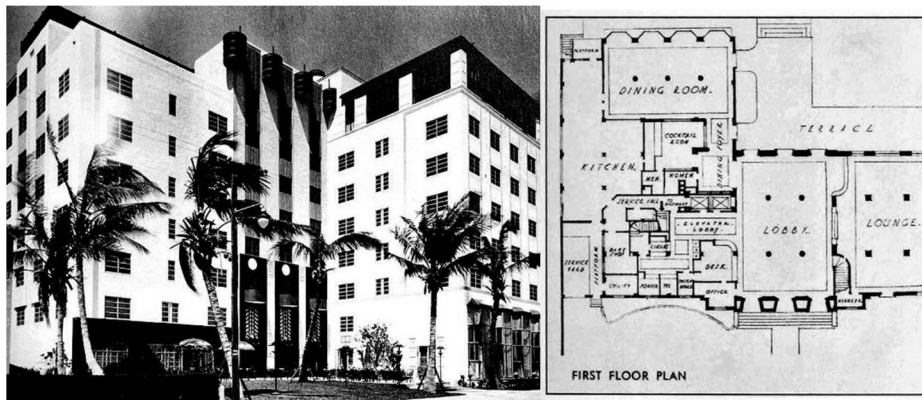


Figure 23 The Atlantis Hotel (1935), a different approach to the street frontage is evident, along with the internalisation of communal spaces through a more articulated and independent building mass.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ As described by Revell, the hotel offered a wide array of services within its eight-storey structure. Despite the absence of a swimming pool, which would soon become a staple feature in many luxury hotels, the Atlantis boasted 150 rooms and a spacious lobby with 6 metre-high ceilings. Its entrance did not have a porch or veranda that interacted with the urban context as other hotels on Ocean Drive did, but was merely an entry point. A spacious lounge provided an expansive internal social space, which extended toward the rear terrace, cabanas, and the ocean beyond. Additional amenities included a newsstand, solarium, sun lounge, recreation room, and a locker room equipped with showers for ocean bathing. The hotel's commitment to luxury was further emphasised by its highly trained staff, recruited from top-tier luxury hotels, ensuring an exceptional guest experience. The winter season was still the favoured time for the upper class to visit Miami.

¹⁶ Keith D. Revell, p.1073.

¹⁷ Jean-Francois Lejeune, Allan T. Shulman, and Lawrence Murray Dixon, *The Making of Miami Beach: 1933 - 1942: The Architecture of Lawrence Murray Dixon* (New York: Rizzoli, 2000).

Revell's text particularly emphasises how the programmatic complexity necessitated by the hotel's independence required a high degree of architectural expertise — a condition subsequently applied to the design of condominiums. This architectural paradigm was notably realised through buildings such as the Shelborne Hotel (1940), which exemplified this principle by existing as an independent structure situated on a large, isolated plot. This approach served as a precursor to the concept of the building as an 'ocean liner', a self-sufficient architectural entity.

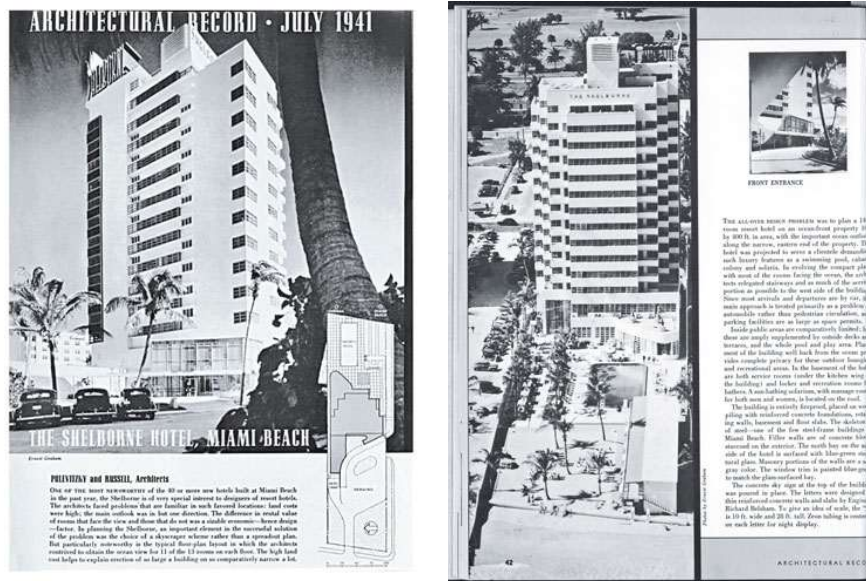


Figure 24 The Shelborne Hotel (1940) the building marks a definitive separation from the city, transforming into an ocean liner-like form.

Designed by Polevitzky & Russell and constructed in 1940 on a narrow 30x120 metre plot, this fourteen-storey, 150-room building pushed the concept of autonomy further than its predecessors. The city-facing portion of the site was a mere service space, with circulation areas for automobiles in front of the entrance, while on the opposite side there was an ocean-facing swimming pool and extensive entertainment facilities. These amenities were carefully designed to keep guests engaged on-site, preventing them from having to leave the premises, whether day or night, and insulating them from the surrounding urban context.

The new model for such hotels was not rooted in the urban realm but rather in the concept of the urban 'ocean liner', self-contained, immersive spaces that introduced a new form of spatial entropy within the city. And after the hiatus caused by the Second World War, the enclosure

movement reached its zenith during the highly competitive post-war period, shaping a new urban paradigm in which the condominium would rise to prominence.¹⁸

As hotels became self-contained entities, offering all amenities within their walls, urban nightlife and luxury retail struggled to maintain their relevance. The overdevelopment of ‘ocean liners’ during the 1950s contributed to the decline of South Beach as a glamour area and led to the conversion of numerous hostels into apartment buildings, while a new form of property was beginning to parallel co-ops on the Miami Real Estate market, helped by the occupancy transition from seasonal tourist to residents.¹⁹

Matthew Gordon Lasner identifies three primary factors that the condominium model, as imported from Puerto Rico, addressed within the housing economy in comparison to the already prevalent cooperative (co-op) system. The first and most significant factor was financing. As Lasner states:

Lenders, even in metro New York, were accustomed to issuing mortgages only for houses. As a result they believed that the only true proof of ownership was a unique title. The emphasis on common rights in co-owned buildings — and perhaps even the very term ‘cooperative’ — did little to persuade them to think differently. As a rule, then, they regarded proprietary leases as not proprietary enough.²⁰

A second issue was the cumbersome restrictions on resales. One of the most appealing aspects of co-ownership in the United States had always been the exclusivity of the environment, which allowed both sellers and buyers to influence the composition of the community. Many homebuyers believed that such restrictions were essential for maintaining the social status of the estate and, consequently, preserving resale values.

Access to the housing market was not only a financial challenge but a social one. By the 1960s, condominiums emerged as a solution to this inconvenient condition, which had previously hindered market accessibility. A particularly striking example is the case of the Jewish retiree

¹⁸ In fact, amid the isolated grand hotels of the 1920s, the box-and-façade urban hostels, and the varied mix of small and large hotels, new developments increasingly drew inspiration from the ocean liner concept. As a consequence, dense towers began to appear, ‘docked’ along routes primarily functioning as corridors for automobile traffic, contributing to the transformation of the leisure landscape.

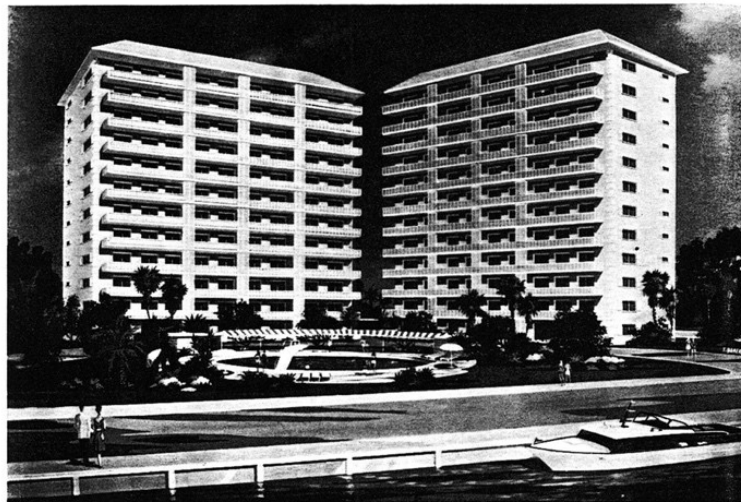
¹⁹ Devoid of accessible glamour and luxury, the city was reduced to a transient destination for visitors whose primary activities occurred outside of Miami. This situation was exacerbated by the opening of Disneyland in Orlando, which diverted tourism away from the city. As a result, tourists found little to do aside from staying in their hotels. These circumstances prompted a shift in investment from tourist accommodations to high-rise residential buildings. No new hotels were built between 1959 and 1961 and following the opening of the Statler-Hilton Plaza in 1967, hotel construction ceased entirely until 1996

²⁰ Matthew Gordon Lasner, p.181.

community, which found in Miami's condominiums a viable alternative to the restrictions imposed by the more exclusive residential buildings in New York or even by some hotels in Miami.²¹ It was during this period that a growing number of low-income retirees began residing in these 'urban hostels', causing the median age in South Beach to rise from 44.5 in 1950 to 68.2 in 1970.²²

Finally, Gordon Lasner points out how another limitation that the condominium solved was emotional, since 'condominiums promised homeowners individual deeds for their suites, and deeds held tremendous symbolic value.'²³ An alternative to the ideal of the Levittown had entered the American market, answering the needs of the modern 'resident tourist'.

This shift is exemplified in John D. MacDonald's novel *Condominium* (1977), which reconstructs the managerial and residential challenges of the Golden Sands condominium and culminates in the arrival of a hurricane. The novel highlights the anxieties of property owners in apartment buildings — a population whose lives in retirement (despite their age and occupation) revolved around swimming pools and tennis courts.



CONDOMINIUM . . . at last a way to really own your apartment home in Florida

Figure 25 'Condominium...at last a way to really own your apartment home in Florida'. Detail of display advertisement for the Landmark, Halifax Enterprises, Daytona Beach, Fla., Florida Trend July 1962. From Matthew Gordon Lasner, p.182.

²¹ Ibid., pp.183-184.

²² Keith D. Revell, p.1093.

²³ Matthew Gordon Lasner, p.184.

In contrast to the European context, the Miami condominium landscape developed primarily in response to market demands and desires rather than residential needs. Within this framework, we can observe the early stages of the detachment of the institution of the condominium from its residential function, a process that reached its peak in the 1980s.²⁴

This transformation was driven by the evolving economy of Miami, which established itself as both a financial hub connecting the United States and Latin America and an international tourist destination. Investors prioritised funding residential high-rises, following models that perpetuated the trend of enclosure. As a result, Miami gradually transformed into a high-rise suburb at the expense of its iconic ocean-liner hotels — a shift exemplified by the bankruptcy of one of its most renowned establishments, the Fontainebleau, in 1977.

According to John Beverley and David Houston, Miami had become 'the capital of this post-modernism of the Right'. They elaborate further: 'With little productive capital of its own, the city is locked into the circuit of money capital, serving as both a headquarters, trade entrepôt, and an accumulation centre for key sectors of Latin American and Latin America-oriented capital.' Miami had thus evolved into 'a safe haven and investment platform for post-nationalist Latin American capital'. And as a result, the architectural developments of this period were primarily speculative, a trend underscored by Beverley and Houston:

Despite the construction boom of the early eighties, there are few first-class contemporary buildings in Miami – nothing, anyway, that can even come close to matching the best late-modernist and postmodernist buildings in Chicago, for example. It is rather in private housing and in interior decoration that the real originality and achievement of its architecture has been deployed. This reflects again the 'low-road' character of Miami capitalism and the speculative nature of real estate and construction.

Among these speculative developments, it was within the realm of condominiums that the most intriguing architectural projects emerged, as exemplified by the work of the Arquitectonica studio.²⁵ The Atlantis Condominium (1982) perfectly epitomises Miami's rising condominium architecture, merging the aesthetics of the 'ocean liner' with the glass curtain wall characteristic of global multinational buildings.

²⁴ Revell outlines how before the 50's the influence of Miami's real estate market stemmed from the influx of capital, primarily sourced from Chicago, Boston, and New York, alongside a small cohort of successful local businessmen. A report by the Miami Hotel Association offers valuable insights into the region's tourist trends. In 1949, approximately 40% of winter hotel visitors were from the New York area, with a notable concentration of business owners and executives. Keith D. Revell, p. 1086

²⁵ Founded in Miami in 1977 by Bernardo Fort-Brescia and Laurinda Spear, both of Latin origin (Peruvian and Cuban American, respectively), the studio has since evolved into a global entity. Its works are recognised as being among the leading examples of late American postmodernism.



Figure 26 Arquitectonica's The Atlantis condominium (1982), Miami. From the firm's website.

The Atlantis is a 20-storey, 96-unit condominium apartment building located south of downtown Miami. The structure extends between Brickel Ave and Biscayne Bay as a long, slender building. Its northern and southern façades are distinct in character: the north side features a glass curtain wall, while the south side is marked by a series of terraces enclosed within a blue square grid framework. Notable for its the use of primary colours and recognisable, archetypal elements, the building culminates in a large semicircular glass wall which encloses the living rooms of one of the six apartments on each floor.

However, the most iconic feature of the Atlantis is its distinctive 'sky court', an open void within the structure that is defined by three striking elements: a whirlpool, a red spiral staircase, and a palm tree, all set against a wavy yellow wall.²⁶

Defined as a 'vertical town' by its designers, the building distinguishes itself from the purely speculative developments of the time, which were 'built solely for the view from one's own balcony'. Instead, it establishes a relationship with the city through a careful adherence to zoning regulations, occupying the lot in a linear manner, in contrast to the average overbuilt, massive, and soulless condominiums. Additionally, it seeks recognition for the role of high-rises in shaping the city's image. Its large-scale, colourful façade stands out as a distinctive urban landmark within Miami's Biscayne Bay, interacting with the openness of the surrounding landscape.

²⁶ Arquitectonica Architecture, *The Atlantis* (2024), <<https://arquitectonica.com/architecture/project/the-atlantis/>> [accessed 7 February 2025].

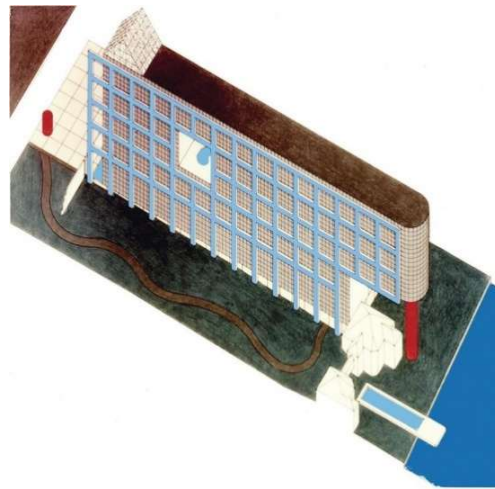


Figure 27 Arquitectonica's Atlantis on Brickell. GA Houses, 'New Waves in American Architecture: 1', 8 (1981), p.106.

Arquitectonica itself draws attention to the 'provocative' and 'photographic' nature of this building, whose impact on the city's image is evidenced not only by its numerous awards but especially by its appearance in popular media.²⁷ Its iconic status was solidified and further amplified by its inclusion in the opening credits of the iconic TV series *Miami Vice*, a true media catalyst for Miami's revival in the 1980s.²⁸

An axonometric view of the building recalls Madelon Vriesendorp's illustration *The City of the Captive Globe*, which is based on Rem Koolhaas's architectural axioms for New York: the grid, lobotomy, and schism. However, the absence of a granite elevated base here is justified by the words of a character in David Reiff's book *The Exile*, the architect Ricardo Ruiz, as quoted in Beverley and Houston's article. This reference underscores the perceived shoddiness and precariousness of Miami's architecture: 'In New York or Chicago, when a corporation puts up a major building, the sidewalks are granite; in Miami, by contrast, they use poured concrete.'²⁹

However, the case of Arquitectonica represented an exception of progressive architectural experimentation and urban awareness within Miami's broader context of speculative development. Since it was founded, the city has been characterised by disposable buildings, often of low architectural and construction quality, as exemplified by the dramatic collapse in May 2021 of the three-storey Surfside Condominium (1981), built at the height of the condominium boom.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Matthew Gorgon Lasner, 'Model Miami: Finding New Urban Paradigms for New American Cities', *Journal of Urban History*, 38.6 (2012), 1121-1127 (p.1125).

²⁹ John Beverley and David Houston, 'Notes on Miami', *boundary 2*, 23.2 (1996), 19-46 (p.38).

³⁰ Leisure had been absorbed by the global market, accelerating its entropic process of atomisation and capital accumulation through real estate, often at the expense of the community and public space.



Figure 28 Daniel Sorkin's unrealised project 'Condo Mondo', Miami (1994). From the architect's website.

The American architect and writer Daniel Sorkin reflects on this topic through his unrealised project Condo Mondo (1994), a proposal for a condominium complex in one of Miami's most prestigious areas, where he seeks to mediate in favour of the citizenry and urban space. The project is described as follows on the architect's website:

Several hundred condos on Biscayne Bay called for reconciling the competing claims of cars, density, view, and a water table that made construction below grade prohibitive. We wanted to keep as much of the ground plane as possible free as a recreational amenity for the project and to tie the development into its neighbourhood by offering a green opportunity to bring people from inland to the bay shore. Each unit commands a view of the water and is cross ventilated to reduce cooling loads.³¹

Miami, as the epitome of a postmodern economy — primarily financial and tourism-based, and thus lacking a stable working class — foreshadowed the detachment of condominium production from its original dwelling function, ultimately transforming residential architecture into a mere commodity. However, despite this commodification, architecture — perhaps more than any other discipline — should be tasked with identifying and exploiting loopholes capable of negotiating back to the community what private initiatives have appropriated. This context also presents an opportunity for architecture to engage with speculation in a way that ultimately contributes something valuable to the city.

³⁰ The building faced the ocean and was located next to Renzo Piano's condominium Eight Seven Park, completed in 2019. Wikipedia, 'Surfside Condominium Collapse' (2025), <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Surfside_condominium_collapse&oldid=1273221619> [accessed 10 February 2025].

³¹ Michael Sorkin, Andrei Vovk and Peter Kromer, *Mondo Condo* (1994), <<http://www.sorkinstudio.com/mondo-condo>> [accessed 10 February 2025].

1.6 Global singularity

No escape from capitalism should be sought in this research. As Slavoj Žižek famously asserts, ‘it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism.’¹ Similarly, in *Architecture and Utopia* (1977), the architect and historian Manfredo Tafuri addresses the ideological crisis of his time in relation to the overwhelming capitalist system, writing:

Modern architecture has marked out its own fate by making itself, within an autonomous political strategy, the bearer of ideals of rationalization by which the working class is affected only in the second instance. The historical inevitability of this phenomenon can be recognized. But having been so, it is no longer possible to hide the ultimate reality which renders uselessly painful the choices of architects desperately attached to disciplinary ideologies. ‘Uselessly painful’ because it is useless to struggle for escape when completely enclosed and confined without an exit. Indeed, the crisis of modern architecture is not the result of ‘tiredness’ or ‘dissipation.’ It is rather a crisis of the ideological function of architecture.²

For Tafuri, the city — first in its traditional form and later as a metropolis — is a site of political and social contradictions. At the same time, it serves as a terrain for a critique that seeks to transcend itself, moving beyond the disciplinary boundaries of architecture, sociology, and semantics. Similarly, the condominium, as a juridical product of the same society, offers, through its contradictions, opportunities for disciplinary development.

Far from endorsing the *superioridad estética* of capitalism, as proclaimed by the Argentine anarcho-capitalist politician Javier Milei during a public talk in which he illustrated his argument with an image of the Manhattan skyline, we should instead recognise that a capitalist aesthetic is not necessarily superior, but rather the only one possible.³

As previously described, Miami played a pivotal role in the development and globalisation of the condominium. First, it provided the ideal conditions for condominiums to meet the rising demand for leisure-related property ownership. Second, it transformed the condominium into a global commodity, serving as a testing ground for emerging global leisure cities, particularly for New York, from which most of its visitors originated.

Condominiums entered the Manhattan real estate market in the latter half of the 1960s, a period when cooperative housing was the dominant governance structure.

¹ Sentence attributed to both Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek in: Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley: O Books, 2009), p.9.

² Manfredo Tafuri, *Progetto e Utopia. Architettura e Sviluppo Capitalistico*, (Bari: Laterza, 1973). trans. by Barbara Luigia La Penta in Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia, Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT press, 1976), p.181.

³ ‘Javier Milei: La Estruendosa Superioridad Del Capitalismo’, *TEDxSanNicolas*, online video recording, YouTube <https://www.ted.com/talks/javier_milei_la_estruendosa_superioridad_del_capitalismo> (min.18:27) [accessed 4 November 2024].

The name of New York's first documented condominium — the Saint-Tropez — constructed in 1965 at 340 East 64th Street, just one year after the state approved the Condominium Act of 1964, is particularly significant in tracing the historical link between condominiums and leisure. Named after one of the world's most renowned tourist destinations, despite its urban setting and limited amenities (real estate advertisements mention only a small rooftop swimming pool) the Saint-Tropez exemplifies the intrinsic connection between condominiums and the imagery of vacations, even within dense metropolitan contexts. Although occupational reports from the time indicate that initial sales were slow due to the public's greater familiarity with cooperative housing models, the Saint-Tropez ultimately marked the beginning of the condominium's proliferation in New York City.⁴



Figure 29 Saint-Tropez condominium in New York City (1965). Despite its urban and almost austere appearance, and the limited amenities, the building's name reveals a connection to the world of tourism and leisure. Image from CityReality.com.

The 1970s witnessed a major shift in the housing landscape of New York, which transitioned from predominantly cooperative housing to condominiums. And this shift culminated in a significant boom in the 1980s, driven by rapid real estate development and changing housing demands.

⁴ Michael H. Schill, Ioan Voicu and Jonathan Miller, 'The Condominium versus Cooperative Puzzle: An Empirical Analysis of Housing in New York City', *The Journal of Legal Studies*, 36.2 (2007), 275-324 (p.278). <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/519421>> [accessed 12 January 2024]

The cultural impact of this shift is exemplified in the popular 1980s film *Beetlejuice*, in which the character Mr. Deetz, a real estate broker seeking refuge from the fast-paced environment of New York City, expresses the sentiment, 'May your building go condo', reflecting the widespread trend of condominium construction and conversions during that period.⁵

Despite the relative resilience of New York cooperatives compared to the rest of the United States, the rapid growth of condominiums proved unstoppable. The number of condominium units occupied increased more than tenfold between 1976 and 1999, whereas cooperative units merely doubled during the same period. This trend culminated in condominiums surpassing cooperatives in total units by 2007.⁶

The proliferation of condominiums, however, contributed relatively little to meeting the residential needs of the local population, as their commodification transformed them from living spaces into investment assets in global cities. Rather than alleviating the housing shortage, this shift exacerbated property inaccessibility.

Contemporary real estate advertisements emphasise 'luxury,' reflecting a market orientation toward elite buyers rather than addressing broader concerns of housing affordability and accessibility.



Figure 30 Extract from the movie *Beetlejuice*. 'May your buildings go condo' says one of the main characters of the movie.(1988).

⁵ *Beetlejuice*, dir. by Tim Burton (Warner Bros Pictures, The Geffen Company, 1988).

⁶ Despite their rocky start, condos caught on in the city. In 1976 there were just 3,200 owner-occupied condo units compared with 102,800 owner-occupied co-ops, but by 1999 the number of condos had swelled to 46,600 while the number of co-ops had doubled to 208,500, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's annual housing survey. And in 2007, for the first time, there were more condo sales in Manhattan than co-ops, according to a report from Prudential Douglas Elliman covering 1998 to 2007.

The Real Deal, *This Month in Real Estate History* (2009), <<https://therealdeal.com/magazine/new-york-february-2009/this-month-in-real-estate-history-frjan3016011305002009/>> [accessed 11 February 2025].

Considering extreme cases, New York presents a distinct trajectory. As described by Derek Thompson, who highlights the stark contradiction between the demand for housing and the vacancy of newly built condominiums, real estate, although seemingly one of the world's most localised industries, has shifted its focus.⁷ These luxury condominiums were not built solely for local residents; they were also designed for wealthy foreign investors – Russian oligarchs, Chinese moguls, Saudi royalty – seeking second or even seventh homes. This trend, coupled with the gradual decline of the middle class, historically associated with condominiums, has led to a significant market imbalance. By 2020, approximately half of the luxury condominium units constructed over the previous five years remained unsold. While these so-called 'safety deposit boxes in the sky' create potential housing space, they have increasingly become a burden on urban residentiality.⁸

432 Park Avenue stands as a prime example of modern luxury high-rise architecture. Designed by renowned architect Rafael Viñoly, it was completed in 2015 and, at the time, became the tallest residential tower in the world. The building soars 425.5 metres (1,396 feet) above ground, with 85 floors housing 147 apartments, 122 of which classified as luxury residences. Reminiscent of Hilberseimer's concept of the vertical city, Viñoly's skyscraper pushes the tendency toward a neutral and functional architectural language to its extreme, ensuring broad market appeal. At the same time, its sheer scale has amplified its media prominence and influenced a wave of similarly dramatic extrusions in the New York skyline.

Also referred to as the 'mausoleum of the rich,' the building is known for its low occupancy rates, as many of its wealthy owners rarely reside there, and therefore remains largely empty for most of the year.⁹

⁷ Derek Thompson, 'Why Manhattan's Skyscrapers Are Empty', *The Atlantic* (2020), <<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/american-housing-has-gone-insane/605005/>> [accessed 14 September 2024].

⁸ Jake Offenhartz 'Groundbreaking" Ruling Will Force Developers To Demolish Floors Of UWS Luxury Tower', *Gothamist* (2020), <<https://gothamist.com/news/groundbreaking-ruling-will-force-developers-demolish-floors-uws-luxury-tower>> [accessed 28 September 2024].

⁹ Marc Pitzke, '432 Park Avenue in New York: Höchster Luxus-Wolkenkratzer der Welt', *Der Spiegel* (2015), <<https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/432-park-avenue-in-new-york-hoehster-luxus-wolkenkratzer-der-welt-a-1010675.html>> [accessed 28 September 2024].



Figure 31 432 Park Avenue designed by Rafael Viñoly. In 2015 it was the tallest residential building (and condominium) in the world.

However, it would be an oversimplification to blame condominiums and real estate developers for all urban housing issues. As M. Nolan Gray aptly states, it is important to remember that ‘luxury’ is primarily a marketing term. Gray explains that ‘developers and real estate brokers are not in the business of modesty – they’re in the business of building, leasing, and selling homes, which inherently involves a degree of hyperbole.’ The distinction between marketing language and actual urban realities is critical.¹⁰ And despite the occasionally misleading promotional strategies employed by the real estate sector, condominiums remain a viable housing solution in contexts characterized by high density.

Moreover, research indicates that the development of new high-end housing can also contribute to moderating local housing prices. This, in turn, alleviates pressure on the housing market, potentially reducing the displacement and eviction of existing residents.¹¹

¹⁰ M. Nolan Gray, ‘America Needs More Luxury Housing, Not Less’, *The Atlantic* (2021), <<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/theres-no-such-thing-luxury-housing/618548/>> [accessed 25 September 2024].

¹¹ The papers referred to are: Brian Asquith, Evan Mast and Davin Reed, ‘Supply Shock Versus Demand Shock: The Local Effects of New Housing in Low-Income Areas’, *Upjohn Institute Working Paper* (2019), 19-316, <<https://doi.org/10.17848/wp19-316>> [accessed 23 February 2024]. And: Kate Pennington, ‘Does Building New Housing Cause Displacement?: The Supply and Demand Effects of Construction in San Francisco’, University of California, (2021), < Pennington, Kate, Does Building New Housing Cause Displacement?: The Supply and Demand Effects of Construction in San Francisco’, *UC Berkeley* (June 15, 2021), <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3867764>> [accessed 23 February 2024]

Of more interest to us is a phenomenon connected with housing economics, that is, the process through which a housing unit becomes more affordable as it ages, known as ‘filtering’ or ‘inverted gentrification.’¹²

The implications of ‘gentrification’ on localities affected by it are well known today. Generally propelled by the purchase of second homes or the displacement of the existing residential population by more affluent groups, gentrification typically results in an increase in property prices, rendering the local real estate market inaccessible to long-standing residents. This shift not only transforms the urban landscape through the introduction of new services but also generates instability within the community.

In tourist destinations, this effect is particularly pronounced, as these second homes are often occupied only seasonally, which exacerbates issues related to seasonality and service provision. Challenges which extend to fluctuations in water and energy consumption, street and parking infrastructure usage, and the strain on tourism-dependent facilities and public services such as waste management.¹³

On the other hand, ‘filtering’ can occur in markets with adequate housing supply, where properties command the highest prices and rents when newly constructed but tend to depreciate as they age. Consequently, living in what was once considered luxury housing from a previous era is more common than often realised. It relates to what Aldo Rossi would describe as the *permanence* of architecture—in this case, not independent from its function, but rather independent from its occupation.

Aristocratic residences, such as the 18th century Palazzo San Felice in Naples, have historically been repurposed into apartment buildings for the lower classes. Similarly, in contemporary times, numerous condominiums originally designed for the emerging middle class have been reoccupied by diverse, multiethnic communities. A notable example is the Hotel House (1968) in Porto Recanati, a middle-class holiday condominium built in the late 1960s, which has since transformed into a multicultural residential complex.¹⁴

Although often associated with the architectural failures of outdated ideals and the formation of ghettos, these buildings demonstrate that vibrant communities can thrive beyond the confines

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Chris Paris, *Affluence, Mobility and Second Home ownership* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011) in Marianna Filandri, Manuela Olagnero and Giovanni Senni, *Casa dolce casa? Italia un paese di proprietari* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2020), p. 81.

¹⁴ Adriano Cancellieri, *Hotel House, Etnografia Di Un Condominio Multietnico* (Trento: professional Dreamers, 2013).

of luxury. This means that some intrinsic qualities of these structures, originally developed through private investment, retain their value over time. While luxury may not last forever, real estate, with all its contradictions, proves its permanence.

Returning to design concerns, as anticipated by *Arquitectonica* in Miami, the aesthetic of global condominium production today is increasingly aligned with that of corporate buildings, characterised by glass curtain walls. As Brian Potter highlights, the origins of this trend are primarily economic, driven by the priorities of developers. Potter writes:

Glass curtain wall buildings were cheaper to erect than their masonry predecessors, and they allowed developers to squeeze more rentable space from the same building footprint. Ornate, detailed exteriors were increasingly seen as something tenants didn't particularly care about, making it harder to justify spending money on them. And once this style had taken hold, rational risk aversion encouraged developers and builders to keep using it.¹⁵

Unlike other building typologies, where the architect and end-user often share an implicit dialogue, the primary client of a condominium is not the inhabitant but rather an investor, a real estate company, or a financial institution. This dynamic primarily drives economic efficiency, repetition, and standardisation, reinforcing a pre-established preference for neutrality.

However, in contrast to corporate buildings, the frequent presence of terraces shaping the façade has become an essential characteristic of most condominiums. In many cases, these terraces not only define the architectural identity of the building but effectively become its façade. This element is essential for panoramic sightseeing tourism and serves as a status symbol for its residents, who act both as spectators and participants in the tourist phenomenon.

The fact that the global condominium essentially functions as a terraced corporate building is exemplified by the work of the Swiss firm Herzog & de Meuron, which has explored this theme across various locations, including New York, London, Beirut, Miami, West Palm Beach, and Tokyo.¹⁶

In New York, 305 56 Leonard Street (2017), a tower that, according to its authors, 'acts against anonymity and repetitiveness,' achieves this through the pixelization of its units, providing individualised and varied conditions in each apartment, reinterpreting different typologies found

¹⁵ Brian Potter, *Why Skyscrapers Became Glass Boxes* (2024) <<https://www.construction-physics.com/p/why-sky-scrapers-became-glass-boxes>> [accessed 21 January 2025].

¹⁶ Herzog & de Meuron, *Residential* (2025) <<https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/projects/?filter=residential&view=list>> [accessed 14 March 2025].

in the surrounding neighbourhoods.¹⁷ This expressive strategy reaches its peak at the top of the tower, where ten penthouses are located, while the base is defined by the insertion of a large public art piece by the acclaimed artist Anish Kapoor. This rather cynical attempt to intervene in the public space with a distinctive element — one that simultaneously enhances the building's commercial value — exemplifies the complex relationship such structures maintain with their urban surroundings. A relationship that remains primarily financial, rooted in land value.



Figure 32 Herzog & de Meuron's 305 56 Leonard Street (2017). From the architect's website.

Moreover, among the condominium projects by the two Swiss architects, Beirut Terraces (2016), a 119-metre-tall tower, stands out as the most prototypical, as it precisely adheres to five design principles outlined by the architects themselves: 'layers and terraces, inside and outside, vegetation, views and privacy, and light and identity.'¹⁸ In addition to these five fundamental architectural features, the architects identify four additional characteristics: the modularity and flexibility of the structure, the integration of apartments of varying sizes and types, the inclusion of generous amenities, and the accessibility of the building through underground parking.¹⁹

Serving as a catalyst for capital in the developing Middle East, this tower is, in essence, the ideal blueprint for the global condominium — one designed to meet the demands of a market consistently categorised as 'luxury.'

¹⁷ Herzog & de Meuron, *56 Leonard Street* (2016), <<https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/projects/305-56-leonard-street/>> [accessed 11 February 2025].

¹⁸ Herzog & de Meuron, *347 Beirut Terraces* (2011), <<https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/projects/347-beirut-terraces/>> [accessed 11 February 2025].

¹⁹ *Ibid.*



Figure 33 The Beirut Terraces by Herzog & de Meuron (2011). From the architect's website.

The features identified by the architects originate from the demands imposed by the real estate market, and it is precisely within these rigid constraints that both the general homogenisation of condominiums and the challenge to the architect emerge. These limitations are one of the key reasons why condominium projects are rarely counted among the most significant works of even internationally recognised architects.

Ultimately, the architect is invited to 'sign' the building's envelope, navigating the tension between market imperatives and architectural expression. It is within these forces that the architect's role finds its position. And if the condominium becomes an expression of this form of 'pragmatic' modernity, we can refer back to Tafuri's detachment from ideology — the condominium stands as the most representative building of this paradigm.

Marshall Berman's argument thus returns to our attention, now with a clearer understanding of the condominium not only as a lubricant of capital and modernisation but, above all, as the principal residential form of modernity.

From a Marxist perspective, the condominium emerged as a mechanism for the total rationalisation of contemporary living and governance. At the same time, it served as a key promoter of

what Marx — and later Benjamin — identified as the ‘necessary illusion’ of a world shaped by the commodity form and its fetishism.

Therefore, the condominium, considered both as an instrument of production and a product of modernity, is destined for continuous transformation. Today, we can observe that these mutations primarily emerge from its intersections with the tourism sector. As a capital-driven mechanism tied to the middle class, Marx’s words inevitably come to mind:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and with them the relations of production, and with them all the relations of society (...) Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation, distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.²⁰

The following and final chapter examines the consequences of this illusion, particularly within the context of the tourism industry, where the condominium has become even more relevant. It is precisely in these settings that architecture, strengthened by its privileged relationship with capital, can continue to foster experimentation within its disciplinary scope, interpreting programmatic evolutions linked to the ‘revolution’ of production systems. In doing so, it positions itself as a mediator of common interests, ensuring its continued relevance in shaping the built environment.

²⁰ Carl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>, p.16. [accessed on 2 February 2025]

1.7 Forever Tourist (*Turista per sempre*)

Tourism represents an essential and growing component of the global economy. To illustrate its significance, in 2023 the travel and tourism sector contributed 9.1% to global GDP, amounting to over \$9.9 trillion, solidifying its position as one of the most profitable industries of the contemporary era.¹ The same study documents that by 2034 nearly 12.2% of the workforce will be powering ‘this vibrant sector’, showcasing ‘Travel & Tourism’s’ pivotal role in global employment. The socio-economic consequences of this growth have had a significant influence on the urban environment and on the cultural factors involved in its realisation.

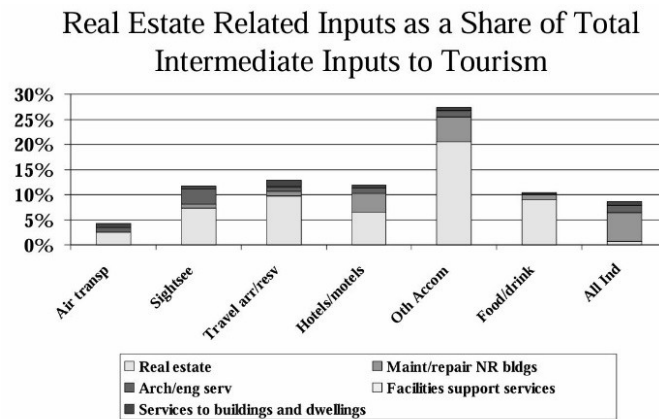
According to Bardhan, Begley, Kroll, and George, the growing transnational business base and market integration are increasingly blurring the lines between tourism and real estate. As they note, ‘Hotels serve as long-term residences and offices for an itinerant business workforce, while leisure communities provide both residential and recreational services to an international population.’²

Real estate, in the form of building structures, represents the largest component of capital investment in tourism-related industries. On average, structures account for just over 40% of total capital investment across all industries.

More broadly, the role of real estate-related products and services as an intermediate input varies significantly across tourism sectors. In particular, design services — including engineering and architecture — play a crucial role in the development of tourist attractions (sightseeing), hotel design and, most notably, alternative forms of accommodation including condominiums.

¹ World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), *Travel & Tourism set to Break All Records in 2024, reveals WTTC* (2024) <<https://wttc.org/news-article/travel-and-tourism-set-to-break-all-records-in-2024-reveals-wttc>> [accessed 9 October 2024].

² Ashok Bardhan, Jackie Begley, Cynthia A. Kroll and Nathan George, *Global Tourism and Real Estate*, unpublished paper delivered at the ‘Industry Studies Conference’ (Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, Boston, 1-2 May 2008) <doi:10.2139/ssrn.1126837>, [accessed 2 January 2025].



Source: Authors from Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1997 Benchmark Use Data.

Figure 34 Real Estate Inputs as a Share of Total Intermediate Inputs to Tourism (1997).

Within the global scope of this phenomenon, Italy serves as a paradigmatic example in which tourism and property ownership intersect. This is not only due to its historical and territorial overlap with the epicentre of the condominium’s emergence and development, but also because of the socio-economic impact that this form of living has had on the architecture and landscape of the Italian peninsula — effectively becoming the ‘building block’ of 20th century urban planning.

This claim is supported by recent surveys on homeownership in Italy, which clearly indicate that most Italians own the homes they live in.³ In Italy, fewer than half of all families owned their homes in the post-war period, but by 2020, 75.6% of families were homeowners. Within this broader context, condominiums have become the dominant form of housing in Italy with 62% of the population living in such dwellings by 2016.⁴

Although this figure is significant, it is more widespread than often perceived, closely aligning with the average in Europe where, according to Filandri, Olangero and Semi, with the exception of Switzerland, Germany and Austria, homeownership rates across Europe exceed 60% in most

³ Within the Italian context, we have observed how, since the end of World War II - and to some extent even earlier - these values have emerged from public policies that promoted homeownership as a means of fostering social inclusion and securing full social citizenship. During the same period, this approach has also ensured a stable electorate for the major conservative political parties.

⁴ Marianna Filandri, Manuela Olangero and Giovanni Semi, *Casa dolce casa? Italia un paese di proprietari*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2020), p.37.

countries, with Romania (96%) and Lithuania (90%) leading the way.⁵ Closer to Italy, 92.1% of all dwellings in Slovenia are owned by private individuals, for example.⁶

This socio-economic transformation has been closely intertwined with the financialization of homeownership, turning housing into a key arena where inequalities are both reproduced and restructured. While the credit system has facilitated access to homeownership primarily through mortgages, indebtedness has been shown to exacerbate inequalities, particularly among low-income populations. According to Sassen, the integration of a broad segment of the population into financialization processes — despite their lack of economic stability — represents a new frontier of value extraction.⁷ This can potentially lead to systemic collapses, as witnessed during the 2008 financial crisis.

Regarding homeownership, when focusing on its economic value, according to Headey, property primarily represents an asset capable of producing ‘imputed income’ – the rent one would otherwise pay if the property belonged to another.⁸ This form of income can supplement earnings from employment and mitigate periods of unemployment or irregular work. And while this is true for primary residences, it becomes even more significant in the context of second homes, which not only represent consumption goods but also investments.

Unsurprisingly, the ownership of second homes is predominantly associated with the upper classes and when rented they generate income, thus transforming them into economic investments.

In 2023, second homes accounted for nearly 18% of all real estate properties in Italy.⁹

The motivations driving the acquisition or maintenance of these secondary homes, whether purchased or inherited, are effectively summarised by Chris Paris in seven key categories. And

⁵ In these countries, together with Croatia, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, the collapse of the Soviet Union sparked a surge in homeownership.

⁶ Republic of Slovenia Statistical Office, *The number of occupied dwellings up* (2021), <<https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/en/News/Index/10265>> [accessed 12 February 2025].

⁷ Saskia Sassen, *Espulsioni. Brutalità e complessità nell'economia globale* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015), in in Filandri, Olagnero and Semi, p.73.

⁸ Bruce Headey, *Housing Policy in the Developed Economy*, (London: Croom Helm, 1978) in Filandri, Olagnero and Semi, p.76.

⁹ Maurizio Festa and Isidora Barbaccia, *L'utilizzo delle abitazioni in Italia* (2023), <https://www.agenziaentrate.gov.it/portale/documents/20143/5768425/2+L_utilizzo+delle+abitazioni+in+Italia.pdf/ab5ff83c-dc5d-8420-fe34-8afb34110f9f> [accessed 9 October 2024].

these motivations include, among other things, leisure or status purposes, with the sixth motivation of most interest to us: investment strategies, with the goal of capital accumulation, securing rental income, and minimising or evading taxation.¹⁰

This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in economies where income derived from property ownership, such as dividends or rental income, becomes a primary source of financial support or income replacement.¹¹

As a result, the traditional notion of working to afford a home is increasingly being replaced by the idea of owning property as a way to avoid the need for continued work.

In a country like Italy, where between 1995 and 2016, the economy underperformed not only in historical terms but also, more significantly, compared to its main Eurozone partners, certain trends stood out. Since 1990, Italy's industrial and manufacturing productivity has experienced a significant decline, while the services sector — particularly tourism — has flourished, with the construction industry remaining relatively stable.¹² Considering Italy's aging population, one could argue that the country is on the path to becoming the 'Florida of Europe.'¹³

Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote that tourism is also known as the 'art of disappointment.'¹⁴ This observation becomes particularly relevant when considering that, while tourism aims to suspend workers from their means of subsistence, within condominium production, it results in a premodern rigidity—one that is property-oriented and manifests as a highly sought-after source of income, now detached from actual labour.

From an architectural perspective, it is intriguing to consider how the shift toward owning property as a means to reduce or replace the need for labour might influence building design. If this paradigm shift is indeed occurring, we must ask ourselves how, and to what extent, architecture will be impacted as a result.

¹⁰ Chris Paris, *Affluence, Mobility and Second Home ownership* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011) in Filandri, Olagnero and Semi, p.81.

¹¹ Italy has stood out negatively among European countries since 1990 as wages have not increased, making home ownership a reasonable investment to supplement personal income.

¹² Comparison between Italy's GDP categories in 1990 and 2023. Istituto Nazionale di Statistica ISTAT, *Prodotto interno lordo e principali componenti* (2024) <http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCCN_PILN>

¹³ 'If in 2024 one in four Italians is over the age of 65, by 2040 we can expect a radically different demographic composition. (...) Individuals over the age of 50, beyond their reproductive years, will make up approximately half of the population, while those over 75 will account for 20% - or one-fifth - of the total population.' Daniele Vignoli, Elisabetta Barbi and Anna Paterno, 'La demografia dell'invecchiamento. Una lettura positiva', *Il Paese più vecchio d'Europa. Il Mulino*, 528.4 (2024)

¹⁴ He said 'Sightseeing is the art of disappointment' in: Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Silverado squatters* [1884] (New York: J.W. Lovell company, 1888), <<http://www.loc.gov/resource/calbk.132>> [accessed 30 September 2024]



Figure 35 *Turista per sempre* (Forever Tourist) scratch card.

Stefano Massini shares a compelling anecdote to highlight this socio-economic trend, referencing the changing profile of scratch card winners over time. He notes:

Today, our scratch cards, both morally and substantially heirs to Totocalcio, even bear titles with a radically different flavour like ‘Forever Tourist,’ ‘Caribbean,’ ‘Crazy for Shopping.’ Faced with that ancient religion of labour, it almost seems blasphemous. And if we pose to our contemporaries the same question as that old survey, it's incredible how every reference to the world of work has been swept away: the primary aspiration of a big win today is precisely to quit one's job, a prelude to the subsequent ‘living off dividends,’ ‘travelling,’ ‘buying properties,’ and so on. What once would have been reason for excommunication (ecclesiastical, of course, but also social), today is a collective ambition. Perceived either as a synonym for ‘useless effort,’ or for ‘social injustice,’ or for ‘unpleasant submission,’ or for ‘unequal comparison with technology,’ the word ‘work’ bears all the scratches of a confused era. Idolised by our grandparents and chastely loved by our fathers, today work has long ceased to be a place of expectations or confirmations, loading itself with all the possible anxieties of a supreme uncertainty.¹⁵

According to Massini, being a ‘Forever Tourist’ has become today's new collective ambition. Condominiums not only facilitate this aspiration but also embody, through their architectural design, the consequences of this new ideology of absolute leisure.¹⁶

¹⁵ Stefano Massini, *Lavoro* (Bologna: ilMulino, 2016), p.131. trans. by the author.

¹⁶ On the opposite side stands Vitaliano Trevisan's book *Work*, which testimonies how ‘work’ is not only a necessity but an unavoidable condemnation. Vitaliano Trevisan, *Works* (Turin: Einaudi, 2016).

However, this may, in reality, be less of an ideological shift and more simply an inevitable condition of the coming decades. The working classes are first destined to be subject to the decentralisation of labour, transforming them into ‘forever tourists’ without ceasing to produce, and then subsequently to the automation of labour, where being a tourist becomes an unavoidable condition, as illustrated by Jeremy Rifkin.¹⁷

If we consider Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of work in a ‘liquid society’, we see that it is gradually abandoning its traditional social utility and shifting toward its own aestheticisation — a mechanism that underpins much of the tourism industry and which is skilfully exploited in architecture. A prime example of this is the Australian property development firm Molonglo, which has facilitated the hybridisation of architects into developers. Through their refurbishment projects on *polykatoika* (Greek post-war condominiums), they create spaces tailored to the new global working class of ‘forever tourists’ while simultaneously acting as an architectural catalyst by involving renowned professionals.¹⁸

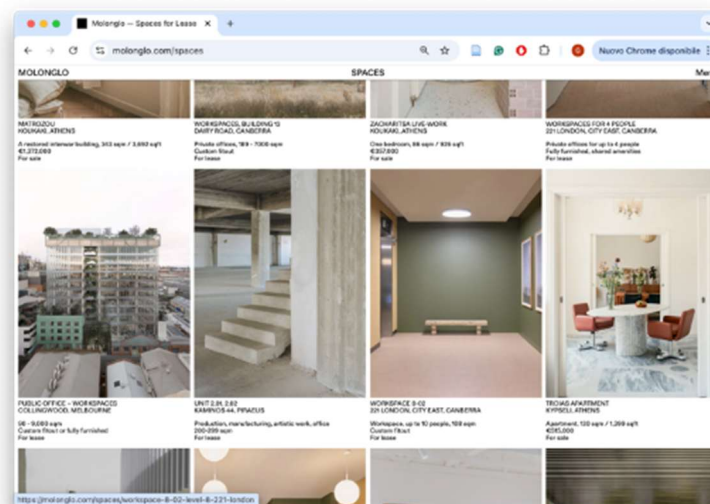


Figure 36 Molonglo’s properties listed on their webpage (2023).

But most importantly, when considering the condominium as an instrument of production, we can observe that its mutations today primarily emerge from its intersections with the tourism sector. The condominium, therefore, is constantly subject to new developments, with a notable

¹⁷ Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work, the Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995).

¹⁸ Molonglo, ‘about’ landing page, <<https://molonglo.com/about>> [accessed 22 October 2024]

contemporary outcome of this trend being the emergence of hybrid governance structures such as *Condhotels* — a residential development model that allows individual unit owners to rent their properties to short-term guests, functioning in a similar way to hotels.¹⁹

These properties feature amenities typically associated with hotels, including check-in and check-out services, housekeeping, concierge services, and various other hospitality offerings.²⁰ In this model, condominium and hotel regulations intersect, creating a novel hybrid framework. This phenomenon exhibits multiple facets, not only providing owners with a parallel source of income through short-term arrangements but also enhancing building occupancy throughout the year and generating funds for the renovation of the building.²¹ Some examples coexist alongside traditional hotels, facilitated by the independent sale of hotel suites and the sharing of amenities with adjacent condominiums. Similar to the so-called *multiproprietà* and *residence* models, Condhotels place particular emphasis on their amenities, and it is no coincidence that they primarily emerge in tourist contexts.

This said, contexts in which the absence of work is already a reality can, therefore, serve as precursors to possible future trajectories. For instance, in the case of Miami, the economy driven by retirees provides the conditions for the emergence of condominiums and fosters intriguing developments within this labour-free living paradigm.

A particularly extreme example of this phenomenon is the cruise ship *Villa Vie Odyssey*, a ‘cruising condominium’ where individuals can purchase ownership of a cabin, thereby realising the dream of continuous travel as a way of life.²²

Among the advertised services of the ship are public amenities, including unlimited access to the cabin, medical support, housekeeping, and high-speed internet, allowing residents to work remotely from anywhere in the world. However, ownership in this context actually entails the

¹⁹ The term ‘Condhotel’ was introduced into the Italian legal system in 2014. Following restoration work, a building must include at least seven rooms, excluding residential units, while ensuring that the total area allocated to residential use does not exceed 40% of the overall surface designated for hotel rooms. Law Decree 12 September 2014, n.133, ‘Urgent measures for the opening of construction sites, the implementation of public works, the digitalization of the country, bureaucratic simplification, the hydrogeological instability emergency, and the recovery of productive activities’ or ‘Sblocca Italia’.

²⁰ Federico Migliorini, ‘Condhotel: cosa sono e come funzionano’, *Fiscomania* (2024) <<https://fiscomania.com/condhotel/>> [accessed 12 February 2025].

²¹ Giovanni Cagnassi, ‘Alberghi a Jesolo, Si Cambia: Spazio Alla Residenza Con i “Condhotel”’, *La Nuova Venezia* (2024) <<https://www.nuovavenezia.it/regione/alberghi-a-jesolo-si-cambia-spazio-alla-residenza-con-i-condhotel-u4nb0yvt>> [accessed 13 February 2025].

²² Villa Vie Residences, *Ownership program: Your home with an ever changing backyard* (2023) <<https://villavieresidences.com/residences/>> [accessed 12 February 2025].

The Condominium

exclusive use of a cabin for a period of 15 years, starting at \$129,999, with additional ‘condominium fees’ starting at \$1,999 per person per month.²³

This example illustrates how Le Corbusier’s fascination with mechanical efficiency — epitomised by his admiration for the transatlantic *Aquitania* and his maxim of architecture as a *machine à habiter* — has shifted towards Foster Wallace’s vision of an ‘unarmed marvel’ in the *Celebrity Cruise’s Nadir*, where architecture is increasingly a form of entertainment and consumption.²⁴

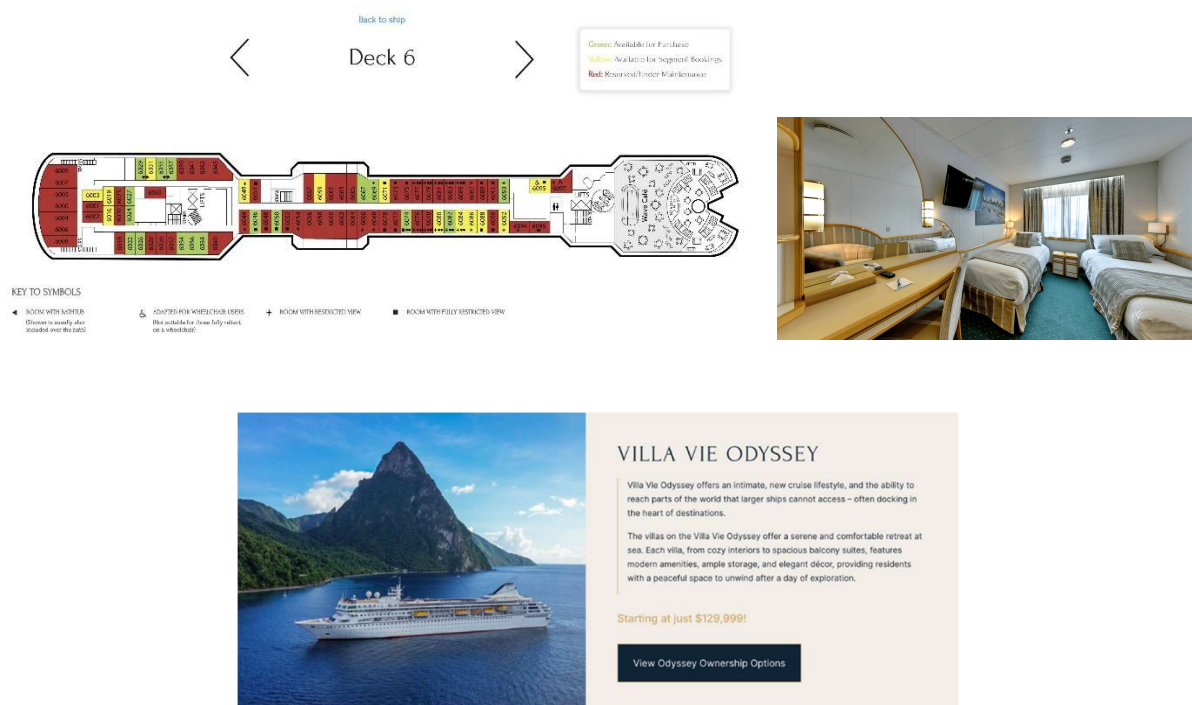


Figure 37 Villa Vie Odyssey online advertisement (2024).

From a disciplinary perspective, tourism appears to be the field in which architecture will play a decisive role in redefining the concept of occupancy within our cities. Virgil Abloh, in conversation with Rem Koolhaas, highlights the potential emerging from the intersection between the ‘holy layer’ of purists and the profane one of tourists—whom he defines as ‘people who are authentic to themselves.’²⁵ This underscores the role of the *profane*, which, when mindfully following trends, embodies the necessary condition of suspension that enables the free influence and transformation of its own discipline.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ David Foster Wallace, ‘Shipping Out’, *Harper’s*, 292.1748 (1996), 33-56.

²⁵ Virgil Abloh and Rem Koolhaas, ‘No one owns anything anymore’, *System*, 10 (2017), 82-89 (p.85).

Thus, architects, in particular, seem destined to embrace their touristy essence, as indicated by Marc Wigley. Quoting the words of the American historian:

What kind of feel do they have for the place? Can it be anything other than the superficial feel of the tourist? Even if it is the earnest tourist who deliberately wanders away from the guided tour to take snaps of unadvertised local colour? Tourists, like any other kind of invaders always leave their mark. Architects simply want to leave huge marks.²⁶

Since architects were detached from the medieval *cantiere* in favour of the Grand Tour, they have assumed the role of a tourist — perpetually a foreigner in the contexts where they work. However, while their value is often assessed on their ability to entertain and amuse those who seek sensations and collect experiences, architecture still plays a fundamental role in shaping the public design of the city.²⁷



Figure 38 'I forgot everything about work in Jesolo' Postcard from Jesolo (c.1980).

In conclusion, in contexts that promote abstract property, the very factors theorised by Bauman lead to an architecture driven more by aesthetics than by utilitarian purposes — one that is amusing, entertaining, and devoid of ethical vocation. However, it is essential to recognise that analysing the tourist condominium means examining an extreme condition where form and

²⁶ Mark Wigley, 'Local Knowledge' in *Phylogenesis*, ed. by Foreign Office (Barcelona: Actar, 2003) pp.101-109 (p.101).

²⁷ Ibid.

economic substance resonate in a unique way. This is particularly evident in how condominiums offer a glimpse into the near future of our cities, where the boundary between tourism and residential living is expected to gradually dissolve.

Under these circumstances, the high quality of speculative projects takes on increasing significance — whether by influencing the discipline, enabling high-level design practices to experiment, or demonstrating the capacity to redirect private investment toward the public interest in terms of services and spatial quality.

The case of Jesolo, explored in the following section, expands on these reflections by tracing the evolution of an urban environment where condominiums have played a central role. In Jesolo, tourism not only reinforces the trajectory toward a commodified architecture, as illustrated by the history of the condominium, but also demonstrates its capacity to drive disciplinary evolution and enhance spatial quality. As a catalyst for the leisure needs of a vast territory, this architecture absorbs, propagates, and imposes a tourism-driven iconography on the surrounding landscape, exemplifying a broader trend toward the concept of the ‘Forever Tourist’ in the architectural field.

JESOLO LIDO

2.1 Zero to Hero: An Introduction to Jesolo's urban history

This section aims to elucidate the central role that condominiums have played in Jesolo's urban history, highlighting how the city has acted as an urban catalyst for the surrounding inland territory. The architectural evolution of Jesolo Lido, from an average tourist destination with scattered wooden cabins, villas, and hotels lacking architectural ambition to a trendy location where 'signature architecture' becomes a defining feature, is primarily conveyed through the development of condominiums.

This unique condition is conceptualised as the outcome of a *Culture of Suspension* — a phenomenon emerging in holiday settings dominated by tourism, where the stark contrast in seasonal visitor flows and occupational fluctuations between winter and summer, combined with the inherently staged nature of such environments, contributes to the detachment of architecture from its functional role, transforming it into *property per se*.

Within this context, tourism spaces create a suspension of judgment, positioning themselves as realms of invention where elements from the real world are reassembled according to the logic of fantasy and desire.

The urban history of Jesolo dates from a pristine stretch of sand with scattered wooden cabins and an agriculture-based economy in the 1920s to the seasonally dense tourist city it is today, with a population of 26,000 and 5.5 million annual visitors (as of 2023). This section is structured into chapters that chronologically divide Jesolo's history into distinct periods, each marked by different phases of urban expansion, with condominiums serving as the underlying thread of this evolution. They represent the architectural apex of an economy that fluctuates between tourism and real estate.

The story begins with Cavazuccherina being renamed Jesolo. This locality, which today corresponds to the historic inland centre of Jesolo, is examined through its territorial and economic origins, shaped by the reclamation of vast marshlands for agricultural use. In a context severely affected by World War I and long burdened by malaria as a persistent stigma, the first wooden cabins began to appear along the coast, attracting early day-trippers to the area.

The following chapter examines the period from 1927 to 1942, reconstructing Jesolo's early urban experiences of pioneering tourism, particularly health-oriented retreats (*colonie*) and seasonal leisure (*villeggiatura*), with the *villetta* emerging as the predominant building typology, reflecting an urban conception reminiscent of the garden city model. Although this phenomenon experienced a partial decline due to World War II, the chapter also highlights the first signs of coastal building density, marking the initial transition from *villeggiatura* to a new, more democratic dimension of the *vacanza*, which served as a precursor to mass tourism.

The period between 1942 and 1977 encompasses the years of Italy's postwar economic boom and the rise of mass tourism, which saw Jesolo described as an 'American beach' by none other than Pier Paolo Pasolini. This era coincides with a series of unsuccessful urban planning instruments, known as *piani regolatori*, ranging from the failed proposal by Chirivi and Gentili in 1968 to the eventual approval of the regulatory plan in 1977.

This chapter documents a period of uncontrolled urban growth, during which the *condominio* became the primary object of speculative development, while building density emerged as the dominant urban planning parameter. Various documents, including urban analyses from the regulatory plans as well as architectural drawings of key projects, provide significant evidence of the urban and architectural evolution of this period.

The description of the first urban plan, drafted by Barbin and approved, is addressed in the chapter covering the period from 1977 to 1997. This era marks the peak of residential construction, leading to the saturation of the coastal zone. The high demand for construction, which clashed with the city's settlement capacity, spurred a renewed interest in the immediate hinterland for the development of communal entertainment facilities, thereby expanding and diversifying the town's offerings.

The following chapters narrow their temporal scope, documenting in detail two key episodes: the urban plan designed by Kenzo Tange (1997–2003) and the urban marketing project *Jesolo Lido 2012 Design District* (2003–2012). Confronted with urban saturation and the poor quality of its built environment, Jesolo sought to revitalise itself through a new urban plan. The objectives pursued by Kenzo Tange aimed to transform Jesolo into a city that was not only a seasonal destination but also a place suitable for year-round living. Particular attention was paid to strategies for the renewal of the waterfront, where the condominium model — through the replacement and expansion of existing volumes — became a key mechanism for architectural and urban improvement in the area.

In the subsequent period, the legacy of the plan, which was formally enacted into law, was carried forward through the involvement of internationally renowned architects, led by American Pritzker Prize laureate Richard Meier. This chapter marks the conclusion of the historical and urbanistic review of Jesolo and serves as an introduction to a more in-depth analysis of the approval and design processes, as well as the architectural projects associated with these notable condominiums.

Previous research on Jesolo's role in architecture has primarily focused on its urban transformation rather than isolating the individual buildings involved in this process. Among the various contributions, the work of Daniela Vitale stands out, first through her Master's thesis supervised by Enrico Ciciotti at IUAV (1992) and later through her co-authored essay with Maurizio Gambuzza, *Jesolo: da località balneare a città ludica?*, published in *Forme e processi di valorizzazione turistica: ambiente, imprenditoria e lavoro nelle località balneari* (1993).

Daniele Lupo and Barbara Badiani's article, *Jesolo 2012: The City Beach* (2012), provides valuable insights into Jesolo's architectural developments, beginning with Kenzo Tange's masterplan, and offers an in-depth perspective on the approval processes of some of the city's key buildings. In this regard, Veronica Baldassa's Master's thesis, *Progetti per Una Riqualificazione Urbanistica e Ambientale di Jesolo* (2012), developed within the Department of Art History and Conservation of Artistic Heritage under the supervision of Professor Martina Frank, also offers extensive information on the planning tools and urban procedures essential for understanding Jesolo's architectural development, providing detailed reconstructions of its key buildings and the architects involved. Other IUAV Master's theses are also referenced throughout this chapter, as the topic has been the focus of various final laboratories from 1983 to the present.

2.2 Rebranding: Year 0

Cavazuccherina was the name of the small inland town that was later renamed Jesolo.¹ The original name derives from the word ‘cava’, which means ‘water channel’ in Venetian, and ‘zuccherina’, a tribute to Alvise Zuccherini (or Zuccarini), who built the canal during the 16th century.²

From a territorial perspective, the landscape that lies between two significant rivers of the Veneto region — the Sile to the south, a navigable waterway connecting directly to Treviso, and the Piave to the north, originating in the Alps near the Austrian border — was once predominantly characterised by swamps and reclaimed wetlands. This area was marked by a fragile socio-economic condition with low agricultural productivity and widespread illness among its inhabitants.

The intense land reclamation activities carried out in the early 1900s, made possible by technological advancements, led to profound environmental transformations, paving the way for economic revitalisation and the rise in interest in land value enhancement, which also influenced the burgeoning development of local tourism.³

Despite a temporary halt caused by World War I, especially during the 1920s and 1930s, the region underwent a comprehensive reorganisation.⁴ This reshaping of the territory also redefined ownership structures, creating opportunities for new initiatives in land speculation.⁵

During this period, landowners, many of whom resided in Venice, began selling their properties to land market operators eager to capitalise on the opportunities presented by the reclaimed wetlands. One notable example was Earl Ottavio Frova who, in 1908, owned the western part of the coastline extending from the mouth of the Sile River over more than half the total length of the coastline. Frova subdivided and sold much of his property to private buyers, retaining

¹ ‘Cavazuccherina’, in *Enciclopedia Treccani* [online] <[https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cavazuccherina_\(Enciclopedia-Italiana\)](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cavazuccherina_(Enciclopedia-Italiana))> [accessed 4 September 2024]

²[Anon.] review of A., *Cenni Storici Sull'antica Città Di Jesolo, e Sulla Origine Della Cava Zuccherina* (1885), *Archivio Storico Italiano*, n.s., 2 (1855), p.258.

³ Maurizio Gambuzza and Daniela Vitale, ‘Jesolo: da località balneare a città ludica?’, in *Forme e processi di valorizzazione turistica: ambiente, imprenditoria e lavoro nelle località balneari*, ed. by Maurizio Gambuzza and Mariano Sartore (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1993), 159-191 (p.159).

⁴ Due to its unfortunate location on one of the main defensive frontlines, few historical buildings survived the siege of the German and Austrian army, the same two countries that would ironically provide the most foreign visitors to the area.

⁵ Gambuzza and Vitale, p.161.

only a one-and-a-half-kilometre strip at the easternmost end, which was either sold or donated to charitable organisations and religious institutions.

This decision contributed to enhancing the area's image as a seaside resort, driving up the value of land allocated to private buyers. At the same time, it also hindered the initial development of the current pine forest area, favouring the growth of the beachside areas to the west and influencing the urbanisation of the coastal area.

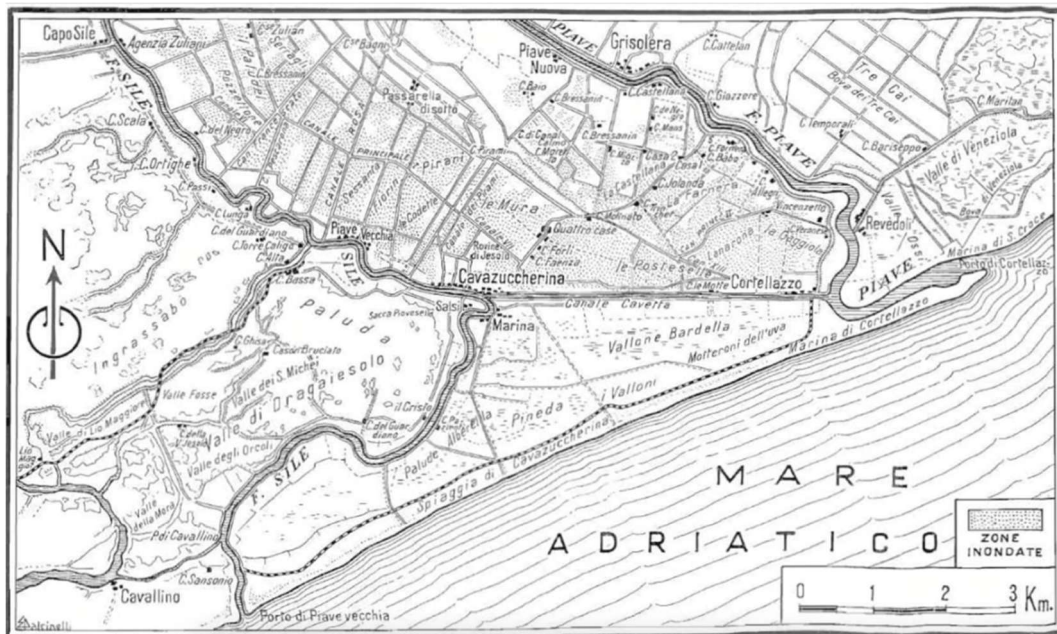


Figure 39 Map of the area between the mouths of the Sile and Piave rivers, later occupied by Jesolo Lido. The original settlement of Cavazuccherina, located inland, is surrounded by a landscape of marshes and reclaimed agricultural land. Interestingly, the 'Spiaggia di Cavazuccherina,' (Cavazuccherina's Beach) now Jesolo Beach, is traversed parallel by a short railway line. (c. 1920).

The agricultural and artisan economy developed within the inland territory had radical transformed the area, leading to an increase in the population from 3,951 inhabitants in 1901 to 6,010 in 1911 and 12,006 in 1936. The area could count on the proximity of different urban centres that in subsequent years were transformed into one of the primary industrial zones in the region. At this time the beach presented scattered wooden cabins.

Following the first development initiatives, Cavazuccherina sought to erase the stigma of a territory only associated with wetlands and malaria and in 1930 changed its name into Jesolo, a new toponym named after a Roman settlement in the area.⁶

⁶ Regio Decreto 28 August 1930, no. 1436, 'Autorizzazione al comune di Cavazuccherina a modificare la propria denominazione in quella di "Jesolo"'.

A rebranding that would give it the dignity it deserved and a bright future based on the ruins of its Roman ancestors.



Figure 40 View of Jesolo Beach occupied by the wooden huts that served as changing rooms and shelter from the sun for the first bathers. (c. 1920)

Part of this renaming operation lies in the importance of the term 'lido', that has its roots in the literal meaning of 'seashore' and has evolved to denote seaside resorts, initially built based on British models, situated directly on the beach. Venice Lido likely played a pivotal role in shaping this term, as the pioneering transformation of this coastal area from defensive and agricultural purposes to a tourist destination must have significantly contributed to the adoption of 'lido' as a toponym for beach towns. The use of this term developed concurrently with the emergence of the first resorts in the 19th century and became more prevalent with the growth of mass tourism and the establishment of equipped beaches.⁷

Coastal tourism had developed during the 19th century thanks to the beneficial effects on health associated with the seaside air and water, following the example of thermal and climatic tourism.⁸ The sea had become a space of liberation from the oppressive burdens of civilisation and

⁷ Other relatable initiatives, that mainly took place only after World War II, include different but meaningful case studies. The Lido di Ostia, situated near Rome, where post-war urbanisation engaged numerous renowned architects of that era, or smaller venues such as the Lidi di Comacchio, also facing the Adriatic Sea, where construction only began during the sixties.

⁸ Annunziata Berrino, *Storia del turismo in Italia* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2011), p.118.

the relentless pace of urban life. It offered a place for rest and restoration, where individuals could tend to their health. Simultaneously, maritime culture began to evolve into a recreational practice.⁹ During this period, such activities were primarily reserved for the wealthy and upper-middle classes, as the majority of the population lacked both the financial means and leisure time to travel. Private transportation, particularly automobiles, had not yet reached the level of development or accessibility needed to support the rise of mass tourism, which would transform the area after the Second World War

⁹ Ibid.

2.3 Holidays for a few: 1927-1942

The urban history of Jesolo Lido can be summarized as one century of land development. It began with the first private speculative endeavours that took form in 1927, when the idea of a beach town named after Treviso – one of the principal cities in the region – gave birth to the first private masterplan following the construction of the *Colonia Dux* – one of the many institutes for heliotherapy treatments, aimed particularly at children, that were built during the Fascist era.¹ The economic conditions that shaped Jesolo's initial seaside development existed within a broader context of national economic crises, particularly the 1929-1930 downturn. This crisis, paradoxically, stimulated construction activity by making financial investments less attractive, thereby redirecting capital towards real estate ventures. In this context, the development of the *Colonie* can be interpreted as an early manifestation of the speculative processes that would, in the following years, profoundly transform Italy's coastal regions.

The *Colonie* became extraordinary opportunities for architectural experimentation, offering prominent and emerging architects the possibility to play around with various building typologies. For us, these buildings represent a testing ground for the scale of the condominium by the beach, with multistorey buildings facing the sea instead of small villas. This parallel becomes clear looking at the examples of Giuseppe Vaccaro in Cesenatico (1936-38) and Eugenio Faludi in Cervia (1938), where five storey rationalist buildings face the sea through numerous and generous windows, or Vittorio Bonadè Bottino's tower in Massa (1933), precursor of high-density design by the sea.

Moreover, the impact of the *Colonie* on the architectural discipline already extended beyond single buildings and leisure venues. Concepts related with a 'salubrious life' were extended to the urban context of the city, where the need for new dwellings fostered a lifestyle conducive to the well-being of their residents through the implementation of houses with solutions borrowed from the architecture of the sanatorium and the leisure lifestyle.² Gio Ponti's 1934 article on *Domus* already parallels these two typologies (home and sanatorium), explaining how the presence of terraces or balconies became an essential requirement for a healthier house, which

¹ The complete name is '*Istituto marino balneoterapico del consorzio di Treviso provinciale presso Cavazuccherina*' (Marine Balneotherapy Institute of the Treviso Provincial Consortium at Cavazuccherina), showing the already existing idea of Jesolo as seaside extension of the inland city of Treviso.

² Gio Ponti, 'Ritorno dal mare', *Domus*, 70 (1933), p.547.

needed to offer sun and open air also within the city.³ A distinct and positive shift towards integrating leisure-inspired design principles into the broader fabric of the city.

Back in Jesolo, *Colonia Dux* does not have any architectural relevance compared with the above-mentioned and other contemporary examples. The building is composed of a central pavilion with a porched façade and two symmetric wings that protrude towards the seashore where waves crash just one hundred metres away. Its conversion into Red Cross facility preserved it from demolition and replacement by the private sector. In front of the building and the nearby hospital stands one of the few stretches of public beach in Jesolo. Despite its relative architectural relevance, this building meaningfully marked the beginning of Jesolo Lido's urban aggression; an outpost built on the sand, precursor to the subsequent colonies owned by ecclesiastic, charitable and private institutions like Stella Maris, Santa Caterina, Monte Berico, Maria Assunta and Villaggio Marzotto.

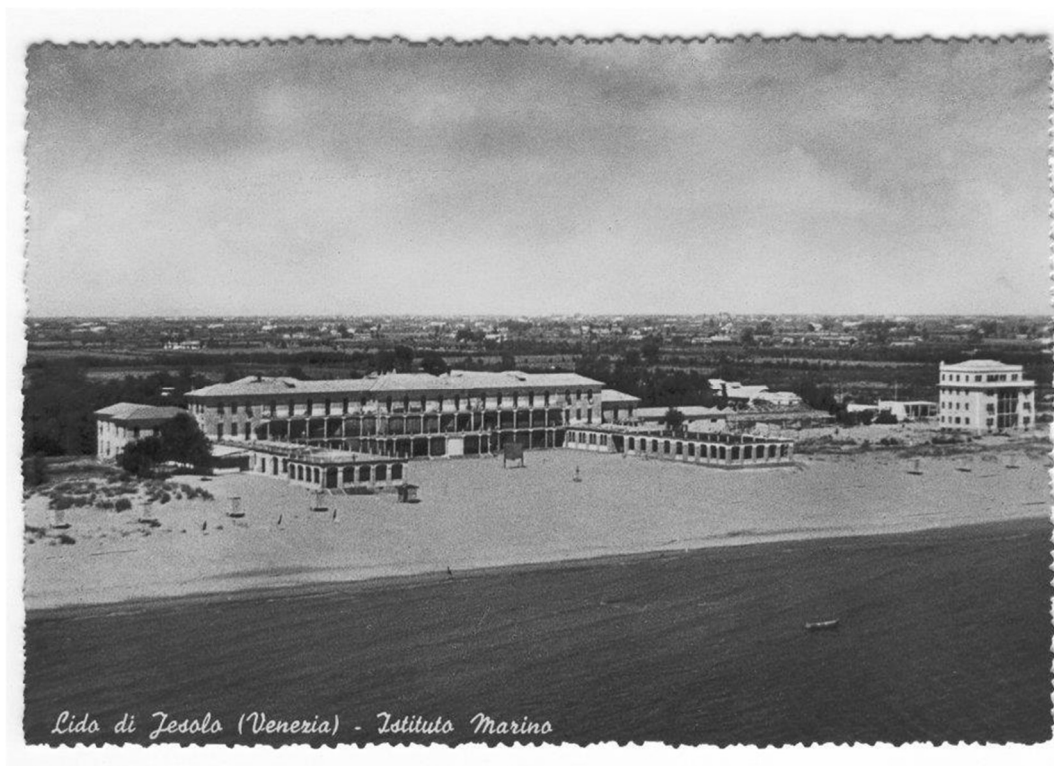


Figure 41 View of the Colonia Dux (Istituto Marino Elioterapico), now Jesolo's hospital. Built directly on the beach, this complex legitimized the subsequent urban encroachments that would come to define Jesolo's coastline in the years to follow (1927).

³ Gio Ponti, 'La casa e i sanatori', *Domus*, 78 (1934), p.1.

While Jesolo as a toponym did not exist yet, the name of the first masterplan proposals was *Lido di Treviso*, hinting at the origins of the investors involved in the operation and the customers interested in spending their holidays or weekends at the closest beach. The *Lido di Treviso* dates to 1927 and occupied an area that stretched between today's Piazza Marconi, close to the *Colonia Dux*, and Piazza Mazzini. A 3.5-kilometre-long street connects the beach to the inland old town and continues westward towards the main inland transport infrastructure, including the city of Treviso, which is about an hour's drive away.

The masterplan was designed by Enrico Silvestri, a Trevisan engineer and representative of the '*Società Bagni Jesolo*'. No plans of this private lotting are available, just an advertisement in a regional magazine, dated May 1929, which shows a picture of a group of bathers sitting on the sand while precise indications on the left and on the right of the image point out the availability of construction plots, villas or *villini* for sale and for rent; investors are welcome to develop their activities on a beach front with a 'bright future'.⁴



Figure 42 Advertisement inside the magazine *L'illustrazione Veneta* (1929). On the left, the ad reads: 'Land for sale | villas and small houses for sale and rent'; on the right: 'Designs and estimates | special permits | seafront land plots.'

⁴ *L'illustrazione Veneta* (1929). Image found in: Camillo Pavan, *Sile. Alla scoperta del fiume: Immagini, storia, itinerari* (self published book), (Treviso: 1989).

The first set of drawings describing the subdivision of land into plots for private investors in Jesolo Lido dates to the *Lido Dei Lombardi*: located on the south side of the *Lido di Treviso*, this second initiative took place only two years later, in 1929. The *Lido dei Lombardi* proposed to develop an area located between the *Lido di Treviso* and the mouth of the River Sile owned by a group of investors from Brescia, in Lombardy, from which the development took its name. The company was headed by Tommaso Nember and Giovanni Gorio, entrepreneurs and politicians that invested in the cultivation of reclaimed wetlands. The planning was assigned to Giuseppe Alberti, engineer, who converted the pre-existing fields and dunes into distinct construction plots based on an orthogonal grid reminiscent of the Garden City movement.

The initiative was comprehensively detailed in an article featured in *Le Vie d'Italia*, the monthly magazine of *Touring Club Italiano* — an esteemed historical tourism association that has played a pivotal role as a significant monitoring body for tourist flows over the years.⁵ Reflecting the pervading climate, a patriotic rhetoric pervades the entire article, describing the rise of this project as a ‘daring and picturesque initiative.’ Post-war reconstruction, reclaimed wetlands, and modern infrastructures (for cars in particular) are claimed as the starting point of this new space for leisure, while a certain sustained humility reflects the populist intentions of the operation.⁶

‘The location, despite being served by the major Paris-Milan-Venice-Trieste-Constantinople international railway line through the San Donà station, which is, as we mentioned, eighteen kilometres away, and being easily accessible by water from Venice with a vaporetto service along the coast and canal, rightly aims at more convenient vehicular access. Indeed, the new road, integrated into the existing streets, will make the influx of guests from all directions particularly smooth.’⁷

The masterplan shows a plot defined by the River Sile to the north and the Adriatic Sea to the south, a main road coming from Venice and heading to Trieste traversing the entire map, dividing it in two parts: one dedicated to agriculture inland and one to leisure toward the sea. The latter is composed of an orthogonal structure of four rows parallel to the beach, approximately three hundred fifty metres deep and three kilometres wide. The urban settlement is laid ‘on a gently sloping plane to ensure that everyone has a view of the sea’ while the inland territory is dedicated to greenery and vegetable gardens.

⁵ Ulderico Tegani, ‘Il Lido dei Lombardi. Un’iniziativa ardita e pittoresca’, *Le Vie d'Italia. Rivista Mensile Del Touring Club Italiano*, Anno XXXV.4 (1929), pp.301-209.

⁶ To contextualise this period, the article was published just one month after the 1929 elections—the first ‘single-party’ elections, held in the form of a referendum—which marked the full consolidation of the fascist totalitarian regime and the completion of the fascistisation of the state.

⁷ Ulderico Tegani, p.305.

From the seafront heading inland, each row is tagged with different building typologies which decrease in prestige the further away they are from the sea: the front row is assigned to ‘luxury villas’, than just ‘villas’, than ‘small villas’ and finally ‘small houses’. Two exceptions evade the grid: a central area with hotels and beach resorts, and an area for sports activities facing the mouth of the River Sile. The beach is dotted with a series of booths facing the sea. No particular attention is devoted to public spaces, the seafront consisting of just a long narrow linear pathway.

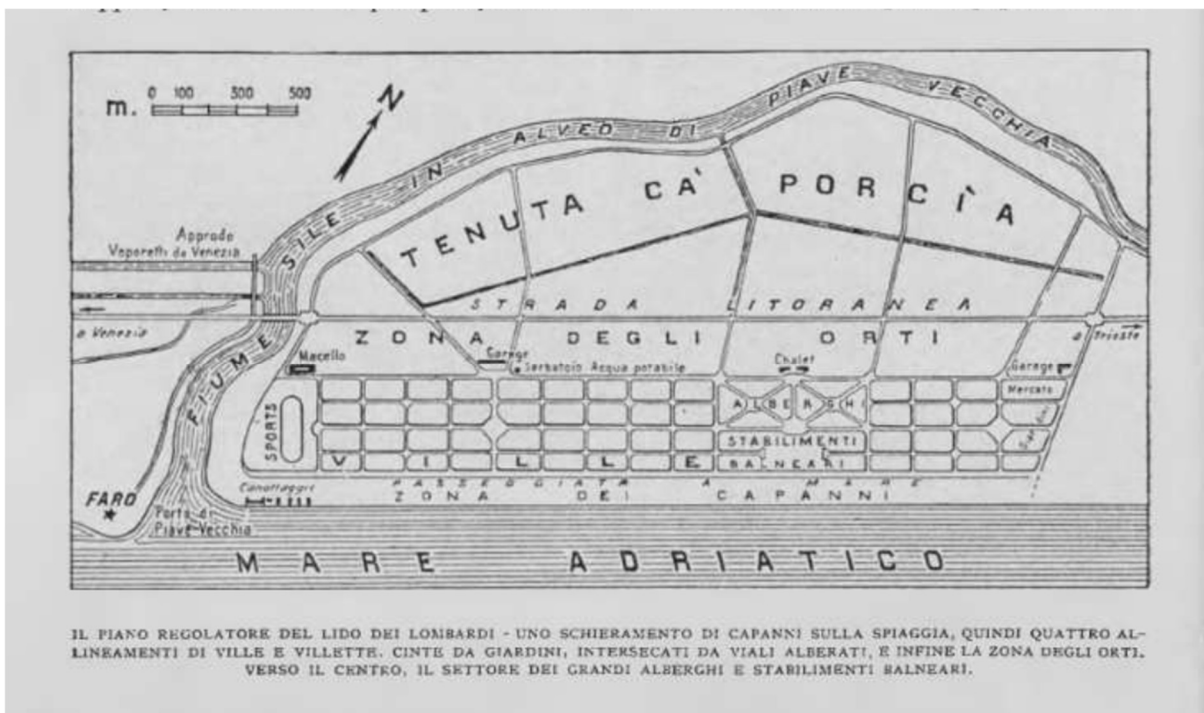


Figure 43 Masterplan of the *Lido dei Lombardi* (1929). The caption reads: ‘The master plan of Lido dei Lombardi – a row of beach huts along the shore, followed by four alignments of villas and small houses, enclosed by gardens and intersected by tree-lined avenues, and finally by vegetable plots. Towards the center, the area of grand hotels and seaside bathing establishments.’ From: ‘Il Lido dei Lombardi. Un’iniziativa ardita e pittoresca’, *Le Vie d’Italia. Rivista Mensile Del Touring Club Italiano*, Anno XXXV.4 (1929).

Neither *Lido di Treviso* nor *Lido dei Lombardi* was fully realized, although their urban layouts remain clearly identifiable in aerial imagery today. Notably, these developments make no reference to apartments, building blocks, or condominiums, as leisure and property ideals at the time were still closely tied to the concept of the single-family detached house. Both masterplans, initiated by private developers, preceded any form of public intervention—a dynamic that would become a recurring feature in Jesolo urban history. By acting in advance of the public sector, private actors were able to impose their own conditions, shaping subsequent developments, infrastructure, and regulatory efforts.

At that time, urban law dated back to 1865. This law only instituted the adoption of the *Piano Regolatore* — the Italian legal term for masterplan — for towns of more than 10,000 inhabitants, numbers that Jesolo only reached at the end of the ten-year period between 1921 and 1931.⁸ This urban tool served mainly as guideline for the expropriation of land and the salubrious expansion of existing towns, with no particular attention to the surrounding territory or single buildings.⁹ The *Piano Regolatore* should have ‘regulated’ the allocation of lots and the construction of basic public infrastructure, directing the demanding encroachment of the existing private initiatives along the shoreline.¹⁰ Instead, it is in its long-postponed definition and approval that Jesolo’s ‘original sin’ lies. A town where the persistent pursuit by the private sector — driven by the lack of effective public oversight — ultimately gave rise to Jesolo’s distinctive pattern of urban fragmentation.

Jesolo’s urban history can be divided in two periods: one before 1977 and one after.

Veronica Baldassa’s and Federica Vitale’s researches accurately reconstruct the municipal attempts that accompanied the former period of unbridled urbanisation which defined Jesolo for 45 years: from 1932, when the municipality adopted a set of local building regulations to guarantee the order and hygiene requirements of the former *Lido di Treviso*,¹¹ until 1977, when Jesolo eventually adopted and officially translated into law the *Piano Regolatore Generale* — an urban tool described in the fundamental Italian urban law of 1942 which, although designed

⁸ Romano Chirivi and Giorgio Gentili, Table ‘Variazioni demografiche dal 1871 al 1961, in *Il Piano Regolatore Generale*, (unpublished report) (Jesolo: 1964), p.21.

⁹ At that time the existing urban legislation dated back to 1865 (law 25 June 1865, no. 2359). The law only instituted the adoption of the *Piano Regolatore* for towns above 10,000 inhabitants. The masterplan had a 25 year duration and served as a guideline for the expropriation of land and the salubrious expansion of existing towns, with no particular requirements in terms of relations with the surrounding territory. It is no coincidence that Jesolo reached that population between 1921 and 1931, when the developments described above were presented, counting 10,438 inhabitants at the end of that period. The hygiene requirements for new constructions and refurbishments were ruled by law no. 5849/1888 art.39, R.D. 636/1907 and finally in 1934 by R.D. 1265/1934. These laws delegated to the local mayor the approval of the conformity of the project but no direct relation existed between the single unit and the urban plan.

¹⁰ Only in 1942 did Italy adopt its ‘fundamental’ urban law (still valid today): Law 17 August 1942, no.1150. The law defined and introduced for the first time in Italy a genuine planning system, establishing a consequential hierarchy of planning levels, among which the *Piano Regolatore Generale*. A tool that was aimed not so much at renovations and additions, like the regulatory plans in force until then according to the 1865 law, but at the complete redesign of the entire municipal territory based on rational criteria (Giaino C.). At the beginning the *PRG* was made compulsory for a series of select municipalities but these did not include Jesolo. For those for which it was not mandatory a lighter version, named *Piano di Fabbricazione* was requested, which consisted in a graphic attachment to the local building regulations, indicating the areas to which different rules applied. This law, furthermore, did not specify the technical rules for the development of plans and gave free initiative to municipal administrations and their authorities.

¹¹ Veronica Baldassa, advisor Martina Frank, co-advisor Francesco Vallerani, ‘Progetti per Una Riqualficazione Urbanistica e Ambientale Di Jesolo’ (unpublished master thesis, Università Cà Foscari, 2011)

to guide the growing expansion of cities, aimed to limit an existing phenomenon run by private initiative instead.

Three proposals for a *Piano Regolatore* were put forward before the one approved in 1977, all without success: Pancera's in 1939-42, Augusto Morini and Paolo Cristofoli's in 1953-57, and a 1964 masterplan by the architects Romano Chirivi and Giorgio Gentili. None of these masterplans were enacted into law.¹² Only the *Piano Regolatore Generale* of 1977 was the apparent conclusion of the period of indiscriminate urbanisation. A period which can be summarised by quoting Danilo Gerotto: 'If you had the money, you built'. For years, the private sector exploited numerous loopholes in urban regulations, facilitated by the deliberate inconsistency of the municipality. The local government, driven by the increasing demand for tourist accommodations - especially residential units — responded to the desires of the new 'Jesolani' residents, who were eager to capitalise on the growing tourism industry.

The building regulation of 1932 aimed to define a set of hygiene rules and construction norms, such as distances from the borders and building heights, to guide the growing demand for tourism. Jesolo had yet to formulate an urban vision but the municipality adopted a building regulation (*regolamento edilizio per la disciplina e l'igiene della spiaggia*) aimed at improving sanitary conditions. At the time, the town had only four hotels, 47 licensed guesthouses, and 24 retail establishments.¹³

Its application appears to 'acknowledge' rather than to guide the private initiative within the former *Lido di Treviso*, an area that after the 1930 renaming of Cavazuccherina as Jesolo, had officially become the centre of the growing Jesolo Lido.¹⁴

The first attempt to adopt a *Piano Regolatore* dates back to 1939.¹⁵ As noted by Veronica Baldassa, the plan developed by Pancera—the engineer tasked with its design—could not yet anticipate the future scale of the tourism industry. Instead, it proposed an integrated development between the inland settlement and the beachfront area.¹⁶ More importantly, the plan confirmed Jesolo Lido's principal trait that still persist today: the absence of a street between the first row

¹² Comune di Jesolo, *Regolamento edilizio per la disciplina e l'igiene della spiaggia (1932)*

¹³ Veronica Baldassa, p.51.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.52.

¹⁵ The masterplan was completed in 1938 and formally adopted the following year by Resolution No. 84 of 22 July 1939. However, this did not mean the plan acquired legal force, as it still required approval from the central government in Rome—an approval that was never granted.

¹⁶ Daniela Vitale, 'Strumentazione urbanistica attuativa nel territorio: normativa e procedure per la lettura del futuro urbanistico di Jesolo', unpublished paper delivered at the conference 'Presentazione del Masterplan 2015' (Comune di Jesolo, 2015).

of dwellings and the beach, in contrast to the requests of the Venice public work office.¹⁷ The final version was submitted to Rome for approval in 1942, after modifications by Ing. Fausto Morini and architect Paolo Cristofoli to include necessary beach defence measures. However, the plan was never implemented due to the intensifying World War and the resulting setbacks in the construction sector during the Allied intervention in Italy.

Jesolo was left without a clear urban strategy, and after the war, when a new masterplan needed to be confirmed, the municipality realised that Pancera's plan could not adequately address the growing leisure demands of the masses.

The part of Jesolo's urban history told so far resembles the concept of leisure of that time. An idea of holidays that was intricately linked to their positive effects on health, drawing individuals to locations where well-being could thrive amidst natural surroundings such as the sea, mountains, or countryside, away from the confines of the city.

The term employed for this kind of holiday was *villeggiatura*, a precursor to *vacanza*, which gradually gained prominence post-World War II. *Villeggiatura* carries dual connotations, echoing both the notions of 'villa' and 'village.' A concept that seamlessly aligns with the envisioned masterplan described above, where properties are conceived as detached units with their own gardens.

Property and holidays found their common ground in the building typology of the *villino* – the architectural definition of which is described in design manuals of the era – aligning with the discerning preferences of the emerging tourism demand among the bourgeoisie and upper-class.¹⁸ Even in their hometowns, the upper-class perceived villas and *villini* as building typologies capable of representing and enhancing their social status.¹⁹ The same perception that would later shift towards apartments and thus condominiums.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gemma Belli, 'Progettare la città per le vacanze in Italia tra teoria e pratiche, 1900-1950' in *Architettura e paesaggi della villeggiatura in Italia tra Otto e Novecento* ed. by Fabio Mangone, Gemma Belli, and Maria Grazia Tampieri (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2015), 15-30 (p.17-18). Valter Balducci (see following footnote) also highlights the role of contemporary building manuals (*manualistica*) in shaping the design of *villini* during that period, underscoring their influence on architectural practice in early twentieth-century seaside development: Icilio Casali, *Tipi originali si casette popolari e villini economici* (Milan: Hoepli, 1909) and Alessandro Schiavi, *Le case a buon mercato e la città giardino* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1911).

¹⁹ Valter Balducci, 'Città nuove balneari in Italia, 1900-1964' in *Architettura e paesaggi della villeggiatura in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, ed. by Fabio Mangone, Gemma Belli and Maria Grazia Tampieri, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2015), p.31



Figure 44 Postcard depicting the typical *villini* of *Lido dei Lombardi* (c.1950).

The urban implementation of these masterplans, especially *Lido dei Lombardi*, was influenced by Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement, conceived as a new masterplan form, self-sufficient towns removed from the noise and squalor, whose ideals would have been highly criticised by Jane Jacobs, one of the precursors of contemporary urbanism, who ironically describes them as: '(...) really very nice towns if you were docile and had no plans of your own and did not mind spending your life among others with no plan of their own.'²⁰

Quoting Valter Balducci's words:

These sporadic extensions between the city and the sea soon gave way to planned subdivisions, which, along the coastline at the edges of existing towns and villages, introduced a new type of urban fabric. Typically arranged in a linear fashion along the shoreline, this development was morphologically and typologically distinct from pre-existing urban centres, to which it appeared as an appendage.²¹

The structure of the Garden city is envisioned in Jesolo rather than in concentric circles in a linear scheme. A satellite hub for leisure, strategically positioned to complement the productive

²⁰ Jane Jacobs, 'Introduction', *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, [1961] (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p.17.

²¹ Valter Balducci, p.31.

centres located inland. Low density and an abundance of greenery could reduce congestion and unhealthiness. An idea which, despite its formal definition, most often results in the adoption of an urban form devoid of its social content, reduced to a mere organisational mode for the vacation spots of the emerging industrial bourgeoisie.²²

An idea of the city that also overlaps with the fascist antiurban approach to urban politics that discouraged the emigration of the masses from the countryside towards the city and in this case encouraged, even for a limited period, the temporary migration of the masses toward an artificial 'village' on the coast.²³



Figure 45 View of the first hotel complexes, Casa Bianca and Bella Riva, pioneers of tourist densification but, above all, of the distinctive feature of Jesolo, where there is no separation between the beach and the buildings. In the background, the agricultural fields of the Ca' Porcia estate. (c.1950)

²² Ibid.

²³ As Mussolini's own words make clear, the expansion of cities was actively opposed during the early phase of the Fascist regime: 'to facilitate by every means—and, if necessary, by coercive means—the exodus from urban centres; to hinder by every means—even coercive—the abandonment of the countryside; to oppose by every means the wave-like migration to the cities.' Benito Mussolini, 'Cifre e deduzioni. Sfollare le città', *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 22.11 (1928). In Lando Bortolotti, 'La proprietà edilizia e il fascismo', *Studi Storici*, 12.4 (1971), 718–778 (p.750).

Condominiums are not mentioned in the *Lido dei Lombardi* urban plan: they had not taken their place into the planning of holiday towns as they had not even entered official legislation yet.²⁴

The only collective facilities appear to be highly institutionalised, such as the Colonia, or for short stays, such as guesthouses and hotels. Property was still attached to the ground and indivisible, but condominiums were just slithering underneath the legislation surface.

Libera's 1933 project for the apartment blocks in Ostia, named *villini for Società Immobiliare Tirrena* offers insight into how tourism acted as a catalyst for new architectural forms. These buildings were, in fact, still mistakenly referred to as *villini*, revealing how tourist architecture often anticipated emerging social needs—in this case, the creeping demand for condominiums and the rise of *vacanza* culture along the Italian coastline.²⁵

Furthermore, two projects cited by Balducci foreshadowed the densification of the seaside and charted a path toward the modern beach town: Adalberto Libera's project for Castelfusano (1933–34) and Giuseppe Vaccaro's studies for the *Casa Collina* (1936–37).

A panoramic 'seascape' serves as the introduction to Libera's vision for Castelfusano. The observation point is set at the edge of a pier, gazing back towards the land. In front of us six tall buildings float above a shared basement behind which stands the *pineta*, hosting villas in the shadow of pine trees. The basement stretches along the entire length of the view, measuring the coast through the repetition of a constant structural scheme, interrupted by voids that seamlessly link the *pineta* to the beach. Along the shoreline, small black figures dot the sands, while above the basement, tiny white figures and vehicles allude to a pedestrian promenade and a street on top, gently reconnected to the ground at both ends.

The importance of this project is expressed by Balducci: 'This project also introduces a different reference for the seaside town: the six towers do not affirm continuity with the tradition of low-density villages but propose a scaling leap and insert a marked urban dimension into the imagination of vacation centres.'²⁶

We do not know if those blocks were meant to be apartment buildings, but within the Italian architectural panorama the project offered a foresight into the future of Jesolo's coastline (and

²⁴ As outlined in the first section of this study, within the chapter 'Atomisation,' the condominium was officially incorporated into Italian legislation only in 1934, with Royal Decree, 15 January 1934, No. 56, '*Regulation of Condominium Relations in Residential Building*'.

²⁵ Adalberto Libera's *villini* were commissioned by the Società Immobiliare Tirrena. Located along the seafront of Ostia, Libera presented three distinct typologies. Notably, in Typology C, there are clear references to naval architecture, expressed through a five-storey building with a narrow rectangular footprint, two apartments per floor, and projecting balconies. Francesco Garofalo and Luca Veresani, 'Catalogo delle opere. Villini per la società Tirrena ad Ostia (Roma), 1932-34' in *Adalberto Libera, Opera completa* (Milan: Electa, 1989), pp.143-145.

²⁶ Valter Balducci, p.42.

not only). Its conception coincides with the regulation of condominiums within the Italian legal system in 1934, marking a significant chronological alignment with a phenomenon that could not be overlooked anymore.

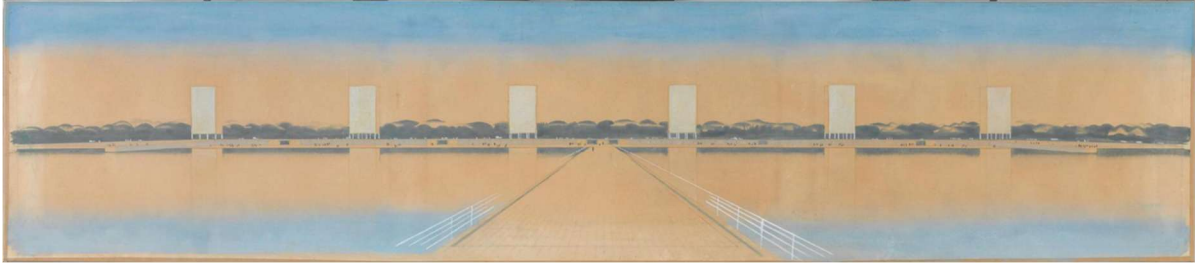


Figure 46 Adalberto Libera, 'Development of the Castelfusano Coastline, Rome, Italy', Centre Pompidou (1933-1934).

The second project consists of a study by the architect Giuseppe Vaccaro titled *La Casa Collina* (The Hill House). The proposal appeared in *Domus* magazine in 1937, introduced as a 'new concept of living that answers a vital issue.'²⁷ Various texts, images, drawings and even cartesian graphs support the conception of this new building typology, which consists of an apartment block where each unit enjoys an open terrace under the sky through the 'stepped' section of its floors. The surface of each floor gradually reduces from ground to top, creating a parallel between the image of the building and the shape of a hill.

Terraces allow for panoramic views and the interplay of nature with architecture. They are conceived as independent suspended gardens, and offer the same advantages as the much-desired *villini* in an apartment building.

Different urban configurations are described in the final section of the article, one of which displaying a sketch of several building blocks facing the sea; here, the *Casa Collina* is conceived as a solution for beach resorts, offering 'panoramic neighbourhoods for seaside towns'.²⁸

²⁷ Giuseppe Vaccaro, 'La casa collina', *Domus*, 113 (1937), pp.2-36.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

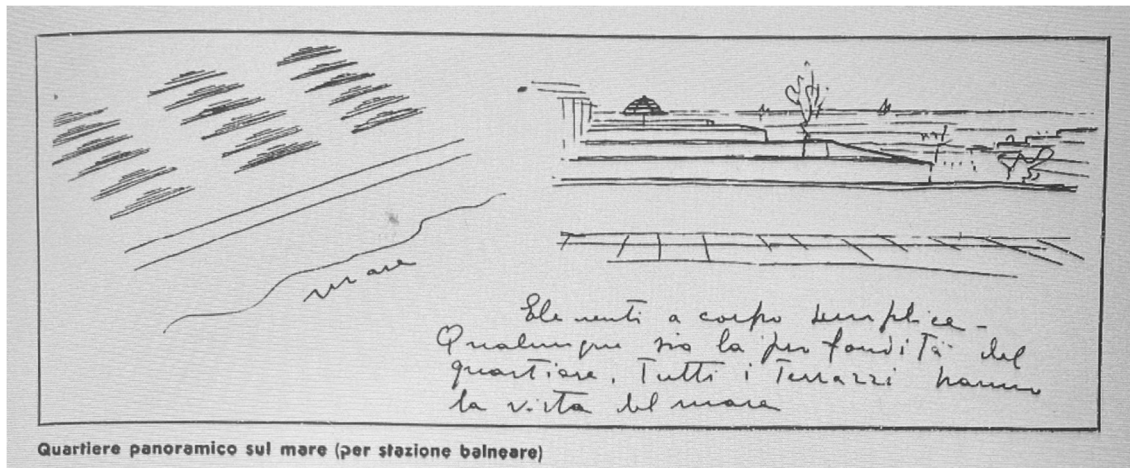


Figure 47 Sketches from Giuseppe Vaccaro's illustrative article on the *Casa Collina*. The architect's note in the margin of the drawings reads: 'Simple-body elements. Regardless of the depth of the block. All terraces face the sea.' 1937. Giuseppe Vaccaro, 'La casa collina', *Domus*, 113 (1937), pp. 2–36.

The urban qualities of this solution are highlighted also in comparison with Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* (1930), criticised by Pagano himself for the lack of aesthetic expression of the subject, its extreme functionality, and the statistical approach to urban planning of the Swiss master: a solution where housing becomes just mere numbers. Today, *La Casa Collina* has been widely replicated in various contexts, with some of the most notable examples being Francesco Di Salvo's *Le Vele* complex in Scampia (1962-75), the striking *Marina Baie des Anges* by André Minangoy (1970–72–80–92), and *La Grande Motte* by Jean Balladur (1965-1975) on the French Riviera.²⁹ The latter two developments consist of pyramid-shaped buildings facing the sea which bear a striking resemblance to the sketches drawn by Pagano over 30 years earlier. However, while *Marina Baie des Anges* and *La Grande Motte* are considered successful developments, *Le Vele* — whose intended purpose was never touristic — has a troubled history and has come to symbolize the failure of modern architecture. This underscores the critical role of contingencies in any design process, as well as the importance of tourism in sustaining the built forms of architectural modernity.

The city – or as we would later discover 'the suburb' – had arrived at the beach, marking a paradigm shift. Within these projects we can trace the transformation of tourism from an elite to a mass phenomenon. The following sub-chapter delves into the urban densification of Jesolo using its buildings as a mirror of its architectural evolution. Condominiums had entered the

²⁹ Virginie Picon-Lefèbvre, *La Fabrique Du Bonheur* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 2019), p.11.

city's real estate market, redefining apartment buildings, previously designated as *case d'affitto* (rental houses), as condominiums.

A shift that transformed property investment, making ownership within city blocks accessible even to the petit bourgeoisie, a privilege previously reserved for big investors and just for detached houses. This development not only addressed the rising demand for property but also seamlessly catered to the desire for leisure. The speculative ventures associated with vacation homes found their ideal vehicle, aligning perfectly with society's dual need for more housing and leisure options.

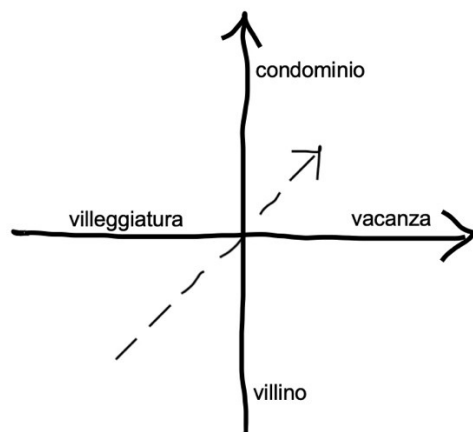


Figure 48 Cartesian graph illustrating the trajectory from aristocratic tourism — reserved for the elite and primarily health-oriented, known as *villeggiatura* and characterized by the architectural typology of the *villino* — to mass tourism, referred to as *vacanza*, where the condominium becomes the main built expression. Credits Pippo Ciorra (2023).

When, after the world war, Jesolo was asked again to present the *Piano Regolatore*, the municipality understood that a new approach was needed to its seaside urban planning, a new strategy that could embrace evolved unbridled private urbanisation, the capitals of the post-war reconstruction and the density of the masses. Quoting from the observations by the Municipality of Jesolo regarding the assessment of the validity of the pre-war master plan, we understand how the municipality was calling for more up-to-date, modern planning criteria:

[...] This plan no longer meets current needs, considering the situation that has arisen on the beach since '42 [...] and [...] it is therefore appropriate to proceed with the development of a new plan [...] that definitively outlines the areas of the beach, the hinterland, and the town centre with more modern criteria.³⁰

³⁰ These remarks are contained in the 1951 General Master Plan report by the Municipality of Jesolo. In Veronica Baldassa, p.53.

Jesolo had set its course, beginning a transformative process that would see the small seaside town evolve from a newly established *villeggiatura* destination into a vibrant *vacanza* resort. Within the context of this thesis, this transition marks the shift from single-property housing to condominium living.

2.4 The American beach: 1942-1977

From Venice to Trieste, (August 1959)

Now I am at my home, I think, the Adriatic arch from Venice to Trieste is the southern border of my early youth: everything is seen, everything is in my memories.

Instead, it is the most unexpected part of my journey: not only do I no longer recognize anything (and only eight, nine years have passed), but I am even in a foreign land. The official language is German; the beaches are the beaches of Germany and Austria. Here, it can be said that we are truly in Europe: and just a few years ago, this was one of the most provincial and archaic parts of the peninsula.

Jesolo did not exist: I remember that it was just beginning to be talked about in newspapers as a project. Now it's a huge beach competing with the Lido, organised like an American beach, a pure seaside town that in winter must be more deserted and abandoned than Timbuktu, a ghost town. Villas over villas, guesthouses over guesthouses: the petit bourgeoisie of Treviso and the German bourgeoisie literally cram in, in a deafening concert of clogs. Yet there is something mysteriously, hopelessly sweet in Jesolo. What is it? The greenery: but not of pines or olives or palms. Of poplars, of cornfields: and of lettuce, that Venetian salad that delicately carpets the well-groomed slopes, under the shade of hazelnut and elderberry hedges.¹

In 1959 Pasolini travelled for *Successo* magazine from Ventimiglia to Trieste traversing the entire Italian coast from north to south and back. The reportage framed the signs of a changing Italian society, where the effects of the 'economic boom' were beginning to be evident to everyone.

Among the various seaside venues that are documented on the way, Jesolo is the only one to be described as an 'American beach', a radical change for a seaside town that just a few years before did not yet exist. Agricultural, which was once the main livelihood of the population, was being scaled down in favour of the tertiary sector, primarily driven by tourism.² Even though Jesolo Lido's history had already begun at the end of the twenties, what Pasolini describes is the beginning of a new form of sea town, a place where a growing mass of local and foreign tourists could finally satisfy their need for leisure.

More precisely, Pasolini was likely seeking the end of the so-called 'aristocratic beach' — a town still characterised by two-storey *villini* and hotels, where the earliest signs of urban densification had begun to emerge. This moment marked the onset of Jesolo's own 'miracle', as Annunziata Berino observes: 'Jesolo is another miracle of the sixties: the 12 hotels that existed in 1949 had become 323 by 1962, and would rise to 468 by 1975.'³

¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *La lunga strada di sabbia* [1959] (Rome: Contrasto: 2015), p.161.

² Romani Chirivi and Giorgio Gentili, p.29.

³ Annunziata Berrino, *Storia del turismo in Italia* (Bologna: ilMulino, 2011), p.259.



Figure 49 Postcard depicting an aerial view of the beach (1961).

In Jesolo, the densification of the coastal area is indulged in the proposal for the *Piano Regolatore Generale* designed by engineer Augusto Morini. The masterplan studies began in 1951 and in 1954 it was approved by the local municipality ahead of its final approval in Rome.⁴ The plan was the result of a series of negotiations related to interventions on the erosion of the beach and the rapid urban expansion, suggesting a coastal area urban density of $5m^3/m^2$ to answer tourist demands. This value probably confirmed an emerging situation, where plots mainly occupied by two-floor villas were replaced by the construction of the first building blocks, including both hotels and the first condominiums. Despite its temporary adoption, the plan was not translated into law, since in 1957, three years after its completion, the proposal was rejected by the central government in Rome, exacerbating the uncertainty surrounding the urban development of Jesolo.⁵⁶

The need for a new plan became urgent when the existence of a *PRG* became mandatory according to new directives from Rome, further complicating the planning prospects of this growing town.⁷

⁴ Veronica Baldassa, p.53.

⁵ Ibid. p.118.

⁶ Reference is made to Law 3 November 1952, No. 1901, 'Safeguard measures pending approval of master plans.' Under this legislation, the mayor had the authority to withhold building permits for projects that conflicted with the draft version of the master plan still undergoing the approval process.

⁷ In 1956, Jesolo was included in the list of municipalities required to draft a General Master Plan. Decreto Ministeriale 1 March 1956, 'Approval of the second list of municipalities required to draft the General Master Plan for their respective territories'.

One condominium, named *Largo Talamini* or *Shopping Center*, epitomises the architectural ethos of the era within this period of unregulated urban aggression. From the building permit presented in 1961 we understand the different subjects involved in this project: the Talamini, a wealthy Venetian family, owners of the land; the construction company involved in the operation, named '*Shopping Center*', based in Treviso and led by Cesare Pasquinelli, a local engineer who also designed the building. The condominium was erected between 1961 and 1963 following the merging of a series of plots facing the sea, and composed of two symmetrical blocks, positioned perpendicular to the seafront, between Via Bafile and the beach.⁸

Each block stretches 130 metres in length and 12 metres in width, soaring seven storeys above ground level. The floor plan of each condominium measures 1300 m² and covers a plot of 7900 m² (including the alleys that connect the main street to the sea and two small plots used as private beaches in front of the two buildings). A swift calculation reveals an intervention density of 7m³/m², surpassing the 5m³/m² delineated in Morini's plan.

The building exemplifies typical features of condominiums from the era, where economic pressures and the urgent construction of the postwar period overshadowed any considerations of naval or seaside aesthetics that for example during the 30's were proposed through the '*paquebot style*' in numerous villas and colonie.

The ground floor is occupied by commercial activities facing the central alley, a detail which also gave the complex its '*Shopping Center*' name. Shops are interrupted by the entrances to the stairwell with an elevator that leads to the six residential floors above. The plan consists of a jagged juxtaposition of units, which allows for the better exposure of the sides facing the two external alleys. On these sides, independent balconies allow each apartment some fresh air under the sun, while on the side facing the 'commercial' alley, a continuous terrace covers the shop entrances and just few scattered balconies exit now and then on the upper floors.

The façade is composed of the typical exposed structural framework of concrete pillars and beams with brick infill walls that distinguishes numerous residential complexes of the 60's. In

⁸ The documentation concerning the *Condominio Talamini* originates from records submitted to the municipal offices and preserved in the archives of the private building department. In particular, reference is made to the building permits issued in 1961 and the occupancy licence for the project entitled 'New construction of a building for commercial and residential use to be erected on parcel no. 72, map sheet no. 7.' (Comune di Jesolo, 1961).

this case it is partially covered with plaster after refurbishment. An example of post-war architecture designed to accommodate the limited construction knowledge of workers, recalling the 'Romanic' correspondence between the façade and the interior structure.

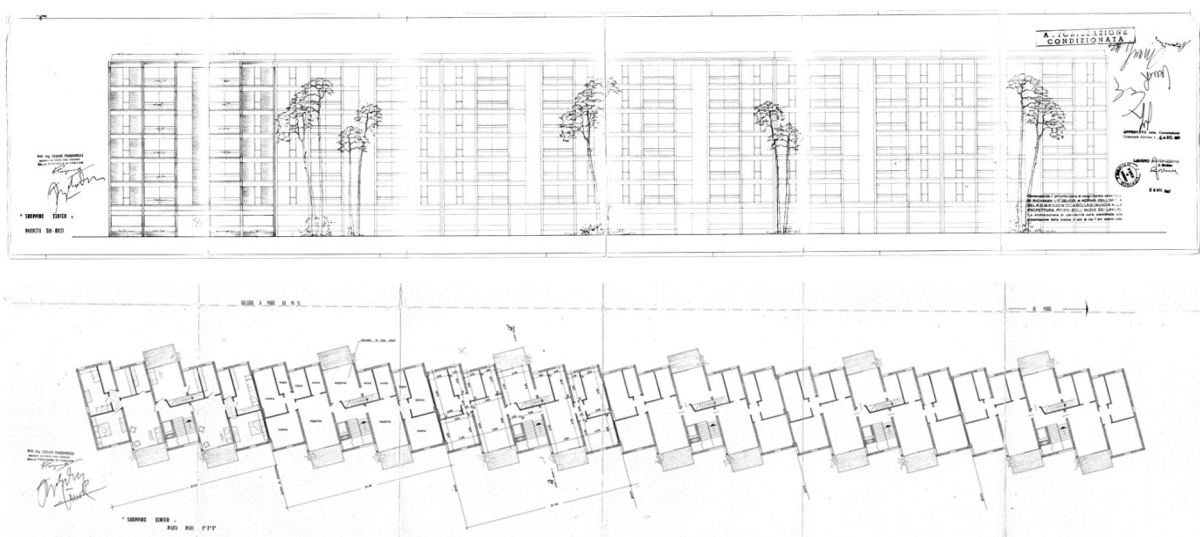


Figure 50 Ing. Cesare Pasquinelli, Shopping Center, Comune di Jesolo. Building permit 'Shopping Center', (1961).

The exceptionality of this building derives from its scale and its capacity to significantly redesign the seafront around the narrow streets that grant access to the sea. An exception considering that most of condominiums were just developed within small plots previously occupied by villas with gardens. An approach that would be replicated only in the new millennium, with projects by the sea capable of redefining entire portions of the seaside strip through the merging of different plots.⁹

Densification mostly occurred within the singularity of small plots, leading to a fragmented beachfront with no urban consistency, where the 'image of the city' overlapped with the image of speculation. A linear city with no references that stretches between the redundancy of the beach and the seriality of agricultural fields; where, due to the undersizing of inland public space, only architecture could embody the role of 'landmark.'

Villas of the 30's could not aspire to that role, due to their scale and rather fixed conventions, while condominiums could count on their volume and their speculative purpose which aimed at singular features and visibility.

⁹ In the same years, only another condominium in Jesolo, named Largo Tempini condominium, reproduced, on a smaller scale, the same urban configuration, in which two parallel building blocks left space for public access to the sea and for the frontage of several commercial activities.

The *Shopping center* exemplifies a broader phenomenon that affected the entire Italian peninsula, where rapid urbanisation posed significant challenges during the economic boom of the 1960s. To fully comprehend Jesolo's situation, it is crucial to consider the reform efforts initiated by the then-Minister of Public Work, Fiorentino Sullo.¹⁰ This reform had the potential to significantly impact the private sector, particularly landowners, construction companies, and financial institutions, which often speculated on the conversion of agricultural land to maximise profits. As noted, an unregulated landowner tends to develop land to extreme levels to achieve the highest possible land valuation, frequently driving urban expansion ahead of the provision of even the most basic infrastructure

The proposed legislation aimed to radically transform and standardise the concept of land rental (*rendita fondiaria*) across the nation. It would have empowered municipalities to expropriate and gain control over land once land use had been defined through masterplans (*Piani Regolatori*), and only after the completion of primary urban infrastructure would municipalities grant surface rights (*diritto di superficie*) to developers for residential projects through the public auction of plots.¹¹

The proposal led to a vigorous 1963 media campaign led by the landowning and real estate establishment, which successfully obstructed the passing of the law.¹² A subsequent attempt to pass the legislation involved new actors and included provisions for enhanced compensation for expropriation to landowners, while abolishing the *diritto di superficie* and exempting from expropriation areas with projects submitted before 12 December 1963. The new proposal only led to a surge in building permit applications across Italy by developers anxious to secure construction rights before the law took effect, since despite these revisions, the law ultimately collapsed along with the government.

This episode contextualises Jesolo social contingencies when in 1964 a new masterplan was entrusted to architects Romano Chirivi and Giorgio Gentili. The attempt to formulate a new national urban law had revealed not only the influence of a privileged class of landowners and developers associated with the construction sector but also the existence of a segment of society

¹⁰ In 1962, Fiorentino Sullo put forward what would later become Law no. 167 of 18 April 1962, 'Provisions to promote the acquisition of land for affordable and public housing', as part of a broader urban planning strategy aimed at addressing the growing demand for housing. The initial proposal is particularly relevant to this discussion as it included Sullo's attempt to reform the 1942 urban planning law by curbing the speculative power of the private sector, using expropriation as the main tool for territorial governance.

¹¹ Edoardo Salzano, 'Gli anni del dibattito sulla riforma urbanistica', in *Fondamenti di urbanistica* (Roma and Bari: Laterza editori, 1998).

¹² Fiorentino Sullo, *Lo scandalo urbanistico: storia di un progetto di legge* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1964).

at the core of Jesolo's development: composed of both big and small landowners, real and aspiring, that viewed Sullo's proposal as a threat to their 'speculative dream.'



28. Jesolo Lido, le recenti costruzioni e la saturazione delle aree.

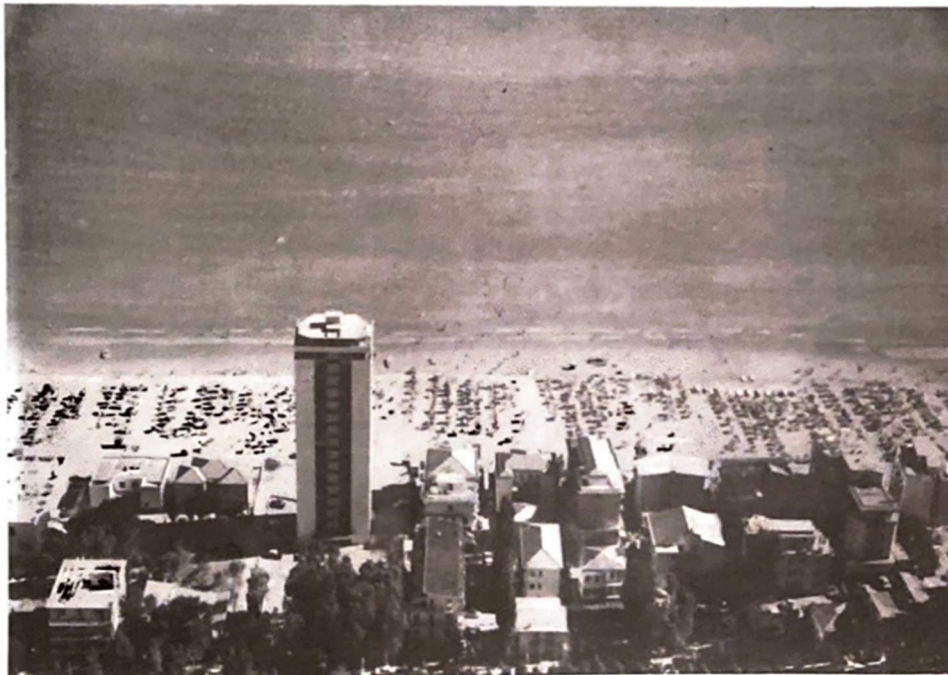
Figure 51 'Jesolo Lido, recent constructions and the saturation of the areas'. Largo Talamini or Shopping Center, image found inside the Chirivi and Gentili masterplan proposal (1964). p.59.

An aerial picture of the *Shopping Center* is used as an example of urban densification on the pages of the 1964 city masterplan by Chirivi and Gentili and captioned 'Jesolo Lido, recent constructions and the saturation of the areas.'¹³ The cover of the *PRG* booklet speaks for itself: an aerial view of the coastline makes the situation explicit; the front rows are no longer just composed of villas and hotels but filled with massive building blocks, the narrow streets between the plots that connect the main street to the beach are no longer visible, while in the background the urbanisation of the closest agricultural fields has just begun.¹⁴

¹³ Romano Chirivi and Giorgio Gentili, p.59.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.26.

The two architects were asked to find a solution to the insufficient road infrastructure, unable to deal with the growing tourist demand, and to regulate the existing built environment. Regarding the latter, the words of the mayor reflect his disillusionment: ‘The new zoning plan will certainly not save the urban planning of this seaside town, which has been subject to the continuous degeneration of its urban fabric. Rather, it will aim to give a possible urban significance to a difficult situation that has arisen due to uncontrolled building expansion.’¹⁵



29. Jesolo Lido, edilizia in fase di sostituzione alla tradizionale tipologia a villini.

Figure 52 ‘Jesolo Lido, replacement phase of the traditional building typology of the *villini*’. Image from the Chirivi and Gentili masterplan proposal (1964), p.59.

Determining the population of a seasonal city is the first issue the plan addresses. Numbers describe the change in the population distribution of Jesolo, showing the densification of the urban centres to the detriment of the countryside and scattered houses. The percentage describing the population living in the centres rose from 13% in 1936 to 47% in 1961. After this first general consideration the study then pays particular attention to the condition of Jesolo Lido. The coastal area is still described as the ‘seasonal city’, despite its resident population already surpassing that of the old town. The challenge of accurately quantifying Jesolo’s future density lies in the substantial variation in population due to seasonal influxes, particularly during the

¹⁵ Ibid. p.28.

summer months. On an average day in August, Jesolo Lido hosts around 65,000 summer visitors, a stark contrast to its year-round population of 4,802 residents. A condition that paints a picture where the summer population surpasses that of registered residents by more than ten times.¹⁶

In terms of occupancy, it is essential to briefly examine the condition of hotels, which played a pivotal role at the time. Hotels were predominantly family-owned businesses with an average size of 59 beds per structure.¹⁷ Encouragingly, there was a notable increase in demand for this kind of accommodation with statistics showing that in 1962 they surpassed apartments in terms of popularity, being preferred by 53% of visitors.¹⁸ Projections suggested that the occupancy level of hotels would have increased in the coming years to the detriment of apartments and other forms of vacation such as camping.¹⁹

The increase happened but it should be contextualised through a comparison with the occupancy of apartment and availability of beds. Although tourists, especially foreign ones, preferred hotels, the number of available beds in hotels never surpassed those of apartments. In 1961 hotels counted 16,406 beds (44%) and apartments 20,647 (56%).²⁰

Focusing on the Jesolo Lido apartment situation we discover that of the 4,343 existing units, 3,182 (73%) are not occupied and 1,161 (27%) are occupied, signifying that since the beginning of its history empty units due to seasonality are at the core of Jesolo's urban fabric.²¹

Going into more detail, we can observe another consequence of this aspect. Examining the available rooms within the units, we discover that of the 21,798 existing rooms, 14,453 are empty and just 8,092 of these are suitable for hosting and thus available for seasonal visitors. Considering the 20,000 daily presences in apartments during peak periods, rooms must have hosted between 2 and 3 hosts each, showing the high demand for rooms during the summer

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Numbers refer to the year 1961. Ibid. p.42.

¹⁸ Table, *'Evolution of overnight stays in accommodation facilities from 1956 to 1962'*. Figures refer to the year 1961. Ibid. p.44.

¹⁹ The current situation (2023) shows an almost equal distribution of overnight stays among Italian tourists between hotels and alternative accommodations such as holiday flats and campsites (1,086,481 in hotels and 1,073,942 in complementary structures). In contrast, a significant disparity emerges in the case of foreign tourists, with 2,413,687 overnight stays in hotels compared to only 925,430 in complementary structures. Source: ISTAT, Regione Veneto, *'Movimento turistico nel Veneto per comune, Anno 2023, Comune di Jesolo.'* (2024) <https://statistica.regione.veneto.it/banche_dati_economia_turismo_turismo1.jsp> [Accessed on 16 September 2024]

²⁰ Table, *"Comparative evolution of the capacity of accommodation facilities from 1956 to 1962"*. Figures refer to the year 1961. Romano Chirivi and Giorgio Gentili, p.43.

²¹ Table, *"Summary of demographic and building stock data"*. Based on data from the Municipal Registry Office, census of 15 October 1961. Ibid., p.56.

period. On the other hand, the 7,363 stably occupied rooms compared with the 4,802 fixed residents, points out an occupancy index of 0.65 that describes the availability of unused or extra space among residents and confirms the widespread habits among local families of renting rooms within their houses to tourists during the summer period.²² Tourism had become a cultural factor for the *Jesolani* and living off tourism was the new normal: 'I remember that when I was a kid it was normal for my family to host people to make a living. Earning money from tourists was normal, and what could be seen as speculation, to a local is seen as part of the territory's development.'²³ The domestic dimension of the home, when intersecting with tourism, took on a new meaning. The potential for income generated by renting out unused rooms during the summer months transformed the house into an investment, where each room became a potential source of revenue.

After this primary contextual information, the study then focuses on the built environment. Two plot typologies distinguish the original *Lido di Treviso* and the conterminous *Lido dei Lombardi*. Both areas present rectangular plots, defined by the beach at the front, by two minor perpendicular alleys at the side and a parallel commercial street at the back. Rather irregular plots with the shorter side facing the sea (on average 40x150m) characterise the former settlement, reminiscent of the *centuriazioni*, the former agricultural land subdivision. A heritage that within *Lido dei Lombardi*'s regular grid appears to be lost, due to the single ownership of the land that could impose its vision on the area. Here, a regular rectangular plot (130x80m) is positioned with the longer side facing the sea, in accordance with the original proposal of the 1929 *Piano Regolatore*.

²² Ibid. p.56.

²³ See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023.



Figure 53 'Detailed plan of the densified building situation along Jesolo's coast - in red circles the commercial alignments – in black hotels and hostels' image found in the Chirivi and Gentili masterplan proposal (1964), p.55.

The two areas also present different building typologies, framing different urban approaches. While scattered post-war villas on minimum plots still defined the first settlement, *Lido dei Lombardi* more intensively already manifests the 'typical building of the sixties', which is described as an isolated block mainly for hotels and condominiums, 600/500 m² with an average height of 22 metres, seven floors above the ground, and the 'efficiency' of the elevator.²⁴ Apparently, the development of Lido dei Lombardi was delayed by World War II, which postponed the construction of the planned *villini*. This delay created an opportunity to propose more profitable investments that allowed for higher density—such as condominiums or hotels. The primary objective of the survey was to assess the maximum capacity of the town in anticipation of a potential extreme densification. This involved considering the densification of the

²⁴ Chirivi and Gentili, p.58

available plots and the replacement of the villas constructed between 1945 and 1953, with density of $2\text{m}^3/\text{m}^2$, with buildings that adhered to the building regulations in force at the time that permitted a density of $5\text{m}^3/\text{m}^2$. Hotels and condominiums more than doubled the volume of villas and consequently could accommodate more than twice the existing population. A scenario that could be avoided through a controlled densification managed by zoning the city. This zoning adheres with Jesolo's 'urban environment', where sometimes, walking through the city, someone could even ignore the existence of the nearby sea.²⁵ Densification is thus stimulated through different solutions: five nodal areas that function as 'malls', in correspondence with the main public spaces; towers between 40 and 60 metres that satisfy the town 'parochialist' aspirations in three different areas; and more importantly, the plan foresees the diffusion of hotels and condominium along the one hundred metre-deep strip closest to the sea. A plan which, even if through 'controlled' zoning, considerably incentivised urban density. The capacity of the beach would have been compensated by inland public spaces comprising parks and collective facilities.

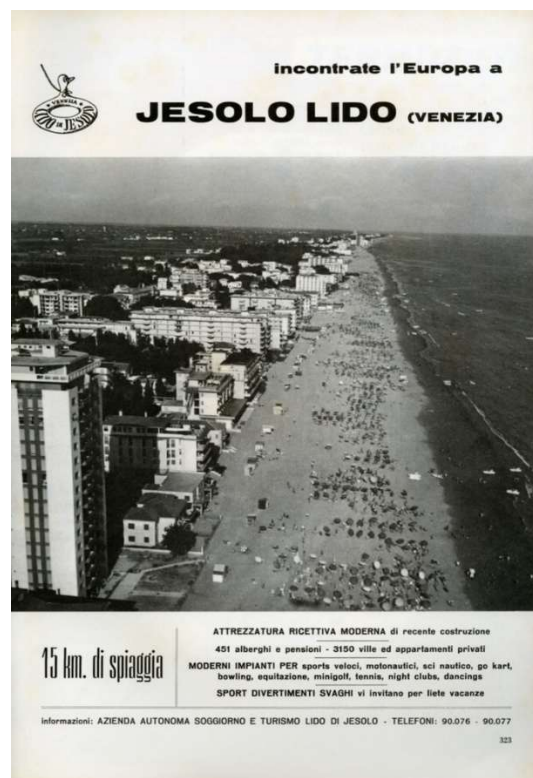


Figure 54 Tourism advertisement featuring a black-and-white photograph of the 15 km beach at Jesolo Lido (VE). Advertising insertion, *Fiera di Milano. Rassegna dell'Ente Autonomo Fiera*, XX (1968), p.368.

²⁵ Ibid. p.90.



Figure 55 Postcard depicting the densification of the Jesolo coastline during the 1970s. Visible are the high-rise constructions of hotels and apartment buildings along the seafront, with plots further inland awaiting development.

Jesolo had accepted and was committed to the idea of being a 'urban' destination for seaside holidays. A place situated in a nodal position within the region, with local entrepreneurs eager for development and experience in tourist management. A space for 'metropolitan sensations', fostering a unique blend of urban allure where customers could satisfy their needs for leisure and social activities. The city's unbridled urbanisation had become its distinctive trait, the absence of physical barriers between beachfront buildings and the coast a source of pride. Given its established dominance in the market and distinctive appeal compared to more conventional 'low density' destinations, nowhere else in the region could compete with Jesolo. Jesolo has solidified its position by offering a unique environment that sets it apart.²⁶

²⁶ Ibid. p.78



Figure 56 Postcard of Jesolo Lido showing the 1966 flood that completely washed away the beach. In the background, the recently constructed Pineta Tower is visible (1966).

Chirivi and Gentili had embraced the forces of the growing tourist industry and despite the approval of the municipality this *Piano Regolatore Generale* was also rejected by the Minister in Rome for the following reasons: excessive settlement capacity of the Lido; unacceptable urbanisation of the pine forest; inadequate protection of the coastal and lagoon landscapes; lack of green areas.²⁷ The rejection of the Urban Plan for the aforementioned reasons exacerbated the issue, as the resulting absence of regulations, combined with the exponential increase in annual tourist arrivals that the city was experiencing, focused the attention and efforts of the construction industry solely on its ability to increase profitability, without any environmental protection or concern for the cohesion of the downtown community.²⁸

²⁷ Adopted by municipal resolution no. 28 on 4 June 1965, the new Urban Plan was later re-evaluated by the Ministry of Public Works in Rome, which deemed it unsuitable through the provision of 23 July 1969 and returned it to the Municipality of Jesolo on 3 March 1970. Veronica Baldassa, p. 54; Lupo and Badiani, p. 110.

²⁸ Veronica Baldassa, p.54.

2.5 The sea is not enough: 1977-1997

The territorial policies of the 1960s played a crucial role in shaping the structure of Lido di Jesolo. The 1977 urban plan sought to address the new regulatory and economic landscape that Italy entered after the post-war economic boom, while considering the spontaneously developed layout it inherited. As stated by Daniela Vitale, its primary objective was to streamline the existing structure, organising various functions into zones parallel to the coastline. These zones were separated by the main internal transport infrastructure: the first zone encompassed the sea, the beachfront, and sea-facing lots; the second included public service areas; and the last contained the old residential centre of the hinterland. However, this scheme had already been compromised by over three decades of large-scale interventions.¹

The implementation logic of the 1977 *PRG* was based on the use of the '*piani particolareggiati*', an urban tool that defined the details of each transformation to which a significant part of the decisions was entrusted. However, some of these detailed plans were not followed through, either due to the inertia of certain administrations or, even more so, due to the difficulty in their formulation.²

The adoption of a masterplan for Jesolo became impossible to postpone after 1967 *Legge ponte*, a national law that obliged municipalities with an *indice di fabbricabilità fondiaria* (building density index) above 1.5 m³/m² to adopt a *PRG*.³ Density had become the principal gauge to evaluate the evolution of the city, leading to its subdivision into zones with different characteristics and purposes.

Moreover, the 1973 oil crisis marked the end of the sustained economic growth that had drastically transformed Italian lifestyles in the post-war years, with mass tourism being one of the most significant outcomes. The end of this period was marked by some signals. Economic

¹ Vitale, p.1.

² *Ibid.*, p.2

³ Ten years after the Legge Ponte, Presidential Decree 24 July 1977, No. 616, 'Implementation of the delegation referred to in Article 1 of Law 22 July 1975, No. 382, definitively transferred urban planning powers from the State to the Regions, which had been formally established in 1970. This marked a significant turning point, as it had historically been the central government that postponed or requested amendments to various urban planning proposals in Jesolo. From this point forward, the Veneto Region became the primary interlocutor for political and planning decisions, and in the following years emerged as a key promoter of Jesolo's urban development. Only with Regional Law 27 June 1985, No. 61, 'Provisions for the planning and use of the territory', did the Veneto Region establish its own regulatory framework.

downturns and real estate cycles are often foreshadowed by indicators such as peaks in consumption which, in a highly speculative environment like Jesolo in the late 1960s, can manifest through the development of ambitious projects.

An example of this dynamic is the erection of the *Empire State Building* in New York, whose construction began just one month before the Wall Street Crash of 24 October 1929. The building remained three-quarter empty for a decade after its opening in 1931 and did not turn an annual profit until 1950.⁴ In Jesolo, the *Residence Pineta* — a 60-metre-tall residential tower located in the Pineta area of Jesolo Lido — stands as a symbolic precursor to a shift in development priorities. Construction did not stop after its completion, but to witness the construction of new towers in Jesolo we would have to wait until the dawn of the new millennium. The *Residence Pineta* is a condominium that marked the resolution of the period of uncertainty that accompanied the controversial rejection of the 1964 *Piano Regolatore*. Despite the urbanisation of the Pineta being one of the contentious points in the masterplan, the building succeeded in breaking ground and was completed between 1965 and 1967, becoming the highest building in town.

On a national level, the 1973 crisis marks the contraction point of the first big Italian real estate cycle (1969–1977), heralding a period of high inflation rates that traversed the national economy until 1980.⁵ The end of the ‘*economic boom*’ did not stop the construction sector, as investing in real estate had become the first form of prevention against currency devaluation in a country where the political system had always incentivised private property over rent.⁶ Owning a holiday home had thus become a valuable solution both for inflation and leisure.

Real estate cycles are composed of four phases: recovery, expansion, hyper-supply and recession. A recurrent pattern in Jesolo’s urban history shows that the need for a *Piano Regolatore*

⁴ Carol Willis, *Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), p.90.

⁵ In brief, as outlined in Mario Breglia’s presentation on the history of the Italian real estate market, the sector experienced five major cycles between 1950 and 2020, each marked by a phase of expansion followed by a period of contraction. The five cycles are: 1969–1977, 1978–1986, 1987–1999, 2000–2015, and 2015 onwards. The period prior to 1969 falls within the Italian economic boom, with the first notable slowdown in real estate activity occurring in 1964–1965. Mario Breglia, ‘Un secolo di mercato immobiliare’, unpublished presentation delivered at the conference ‘La società italiana e le grandi crisi economiche: 1929–2916’ (Sapienza Università di Roma, 26–26 Novembre 2016).

⁶ It was only with the 1978 rent regulation law, known as *Equo Canone*, that a serious attempt was made to regulate rents, countering the previously dominant regime in favour of property owners. Law 27 July 1978, No. 392, ‘Regulation of urban property leases.’

Generale generally emerges in the first half of the real estate cycle but its completion occurs only at its end with the variable of its approval.⁷

The masterplan operates as a strategic instrument for revitalizing the construction sector. It must be designed to anticipate forthcoming capital inflows and positioned to absorb them effectively.

In doing so, it both precedes and aligns with the evolving interests of the real estate market.

The 1977 masterplan perfectly positions itself at the end of the first cycle ready to take advantage of the second one (1978-1986), the end of which was marked by a rising interest in national treasury bonds and stocks as form of personal investment that took form around 1985, the year of the *'nausea del mattone'* ('real estate nausea').⁸

The two decades between 1961-1970 and 1971-1980 witnessed a boom in the construction of residential buildings, confirming the trend of owning a second home as form of investment.

| The five major cycles of the real estate market in Italy | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------|------|
| trend | I | II | III | IV | V |
| expansion | 1969-1974 +86% | 1978-1982 +86% | 1987-1992 +83% | 2000-2007 +81% | 2015 |
| recession | 1975-1977 -8% | 1983-1986 -20% | 1993-1999 -56% | 2008-2015 - 78% | - |

Table 1 'The five major cycles of the real estate market in Italy'. Source: Mario Breglia, 'Un secolo di mercato immobiliare', unpublished presentation delivered at the conference 'La società italiana e le grandi crisi economiche: 1929-2916' (Sapienza Università di Roma, 26-26 Novembre 2016).

| Residential buildings constructed in Jesolo by year | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| be-fore1919 | 1919-1945 | 1946-1960 | 1961-1979 | 1971-1980 | 1981-1990 | 1991-2000 | 2001-2005 | 2005-2011 |
| 13 | 102 | 501 | 1649 | 1515 | 569 | 426 | 345 | 612 |

Table 2 'Residential Buildings Constructed by Year', compiled by the Statistics Office of the Veneto Region based on ISTAT 2011 data.

⁷ Since the beginning of Jesolo's development, masterplanning initiatives have consistently aligned with real estate cycles and major economic events. The timeline begins with the first proposals for Lido di Treviso in 1927 and Lido dei Lombardi in 1929, which coincided with the onset of the 1929 economic crisis. This was followed by the 1964–1965 trade downturn, during which Chirivi and Gentili presented their masterplan (1964). In 1977, the approval of the *Piano Regolatore Generale* corresponded with the end of Italy's first major real estate cycle (1969–1977). Lastly, as discussed in the following chapter, the 1997 proposal by Kenzo Tange—later revised by Danilo Gerotto and enacted into law in 2003—marked the conclusion of the third real estate cycle (1987–1999).

⁸ Giuseppe Turani, 'E ora la borsa batte il mattone. La casa ha perso il 30% in tre anni', *Repubblica*, 41 (1985).

When the first *condono edilizio* – a sort of amnesty on buildings infractions – took place in 1985, there were 8000 requests for the regularisation of 6000 buildings.⁹ This episode highlighted the amount of irregular buildings produced in a period of construction fervour and the absence of an urban regulation, which only officially came into force on 4 August 1977 when Jesolo’s *Piano Regolatore Generale* became effective. After 45 years a set of defined rules shared by the central government regulated Jesolo’s urban expansion.

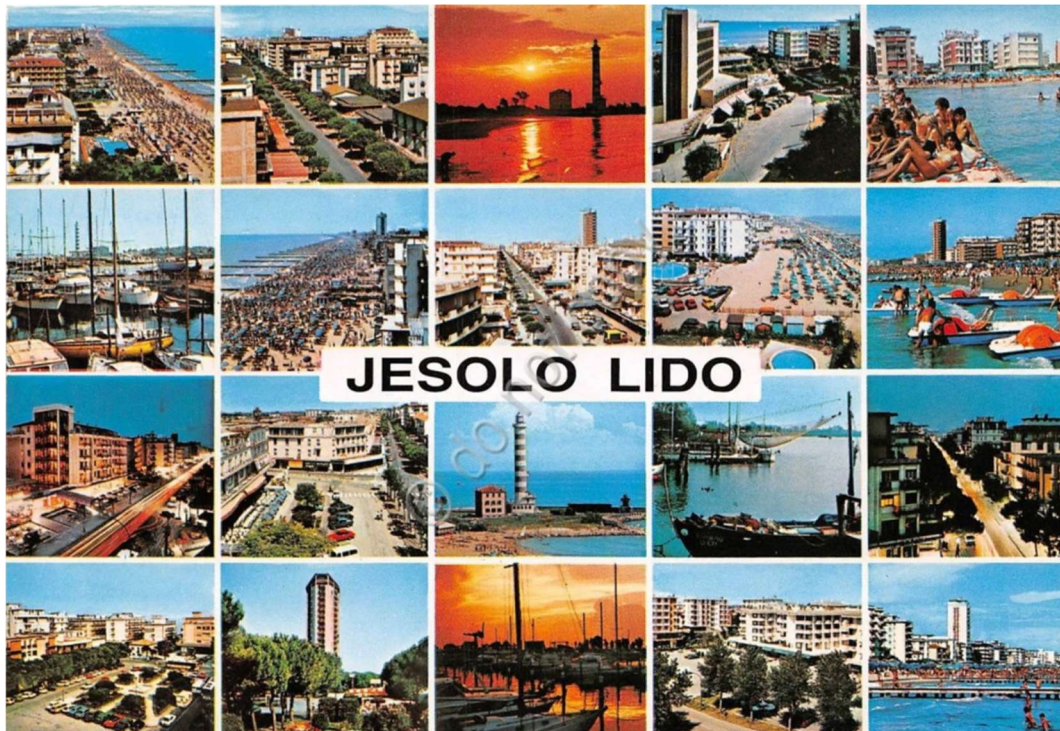


Figure 57 Postcard from Jesolo in the 70's (c.1970).

The masterplan was assigned in 1970 to the architect Giovanni Barbin, who understood the necessity of a new approach questioning the previous proposals from their roots.

A new analysis of the urban context categorised the city into zones based on their density, pinpointing the central region of the Lido between Piazza Brescia and Piazza Trieste as having the highest density index at 3.7 m³/m². Numbers that six years after the previous plan shed new light on Chirivi and Gentili’s ambitious forecast of 5m³/m².

⁹ The *condono edilizio* is a form of amnesty for building infringements, allowing citizens to regularise unauthorised construction works while also generating exceptional revenue for the state. Since the foundation of the Italian Republic, there have been three such measures: in 1985 (Craxi I), 1994 (Berlusconi I), and 2003 (Berlusconi II). References to the *condono* are also made by Danilo Gerotto, a key figure in Jesolo’s urban development after 1994. See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023.

As stated in Veronica Baldassa's thesis on Jesolo, on a broader level Barbin highlights how the linear settlement along the coast had reached such a level of expansion and evolution that its growth could no longer easily be halted. Indeed, throughout the 1960s, the entire central coastline was affected by extensive construction, spreading out in a continuous line along the seafront, as seen, for example, in the area adjacent to the lighthouse at the mouth of the River Sile, resulting in a significant decrease in building quality.

The linear settlement was divided into two main areas: one extensively urbanised, stretching from the mouth of the River Sile to Villaggio Marzotto, and a second one coinciding with the Pineta with an average density of $0.4 \text{ m}^3/\text{m}^2$.¹⁰ The first area, precisely due to its saturation, saw behind it a series of land divisions, approved or not by various municipal administrations, already executed or partially started, which violated the respect for areas reserved for squares, streets, green zones, and public spaces, leading to an even greater concentration of construction. On the other hand, the second area, thanks to its numerous green spaces and 'front row voids', did not seem affected by the same issues, but was still characterised by vast agricultural areas in the hinterland, providing the possibility of formulating growth and development alternatives while maintaining a balance between the environment and built-up areas.¹¹

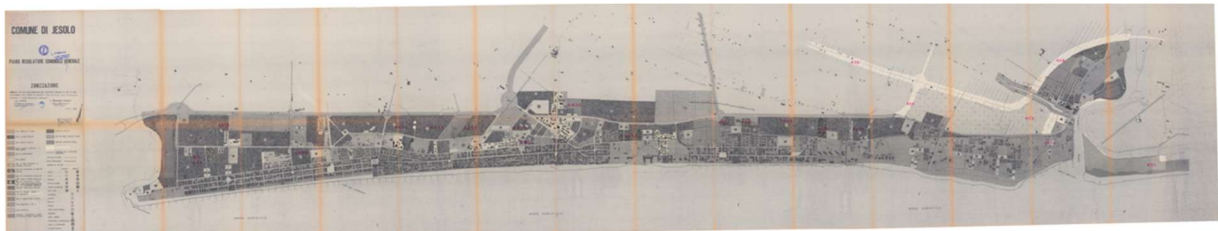


Figure 58 1977 Master plan, Coastal Areas. *Piano Regolatore Comunale Generale*, Zoning. Annex B/2 to Municipal Council Resolution No. 106 dated 25 November 1976, entitled: 'Counter-arguments to the observations submitted on the general plan', scale 1:5.000 (1976).

The masterplan sized Jesolo Lido's occupation capacity on the available public space for each inhabitant, in this case mostly related to the consistency of its beach, the extension of which at the time was estimated at $740,724\text{m}^2$. The beach was conceived as the collective space of the city, indivisible from its urban structure, an area that supplied the public surface requested by the regulation leaving inland plots to private initiative.

¹⁰ Comune di Jesolo, 'Norme Tecniche di Attuazione', *Piano Regolatore Generale Comunale* (1977). Adopted by the Municipal Council through Resolutions No. 62 of 13 January 1972 and No. 100 of 15 June 1972. Approved by the Regional Council of Veneto on 4 August 1977, Resolution No. 3425.

¹¹ Baldassa. p.59

To address this limitation, the urban—rather than natural—character of the beach created a growing need for parks and public squares. By setting Jesolo’s urban capacity at 83,300 visitors and allocating 15 m² of communal and green space per person, the beach alone was no longer sufficient. This shortfall necessitated the planning of parks, squares, and, most importantly, collective facilities in the inland area. The creation of these spaces served not only functional needs but also laid the groundwork for renewed real estate speculation, forming the basis of the new urban plan and reshaping Jesolo's development strategy.

The plan explicitly prohibited any new construction along the coastline that would increase the tourist load. Instead, it focused on redeveloping the existing urban fabric through the demolition and recomposition of volumes—without permitting any increase in the number of tourist beds.¹²



Figure 59 1977 Masterplan, Internal Areas. *Piano Regolatore Comunale Generale*, Zoning. Annex B/1 to Municipal Council Resolution No. 106 dated 25 November 1976, entitled: 'Counter-arguments to the observations submitted on the general plan', scale 1:10.000 (1976).

The masterplan calmed the city’s building fever, but the limited capacity of the beach together with the demand for newness led to a period of conversion and replacement of the existing buildings, together with the realisation of fresh attractions and amenities to offset the limited space on the sand. The city required inland attractions capable of drawing in new visitors and offering diverse experiences during the summer months. *Caribe Bay*, formerly known as *Aqualandia*, established in 1989, epitomises this necessity. This water park, situated on former

¹² Lupo and Badiani, p.112.

agricultural land, today replicates the ambiance of the Caribbean with its pristine white sands and pirate island aesthetics. Its role as an architectural catalyst is proved by its anticipation of a renewed passion for verticality, as symbolised by an unbuilt 'CN Tower'-like panoramic building. Despite this episode, its urban significance is of greater interest. Unlike isolated amusement parks such as Disneyland, this park, along with other initiatives like golf clubs and public parks, is integrated into the city's common areas. These spaces are vital for supporting the city's residential capacity, rather than merely serving as standalone entertainment zones.

This development establishes an intricate, reciprocal relationship between leisure and residency, increasing the available city's population capacity by 4,100 inhabitants through its area of 61,500 square metres.¹³

A process that aims to launch a new speculative cycle, where the construction of condominiums is the final product of urban policies. In a place where the potential for constructing new condominiums hinges on the availability of communal spaces for each resident – as the beach area had become insufficient – further building initiatives rely on the development of additional inland communal facilities.

The new masterplan regulations ushered in years of transformation rather than construction. Jesolo's urban expansion slowed, despite the fact that in 1983 it was officially recognised as a city at the national level—achieving, at least numerically, its urban ambitions beyond those of a mere summer resort.¹⁴ Since laws were more restrictive towards new developments, a new phenomenon became more common: the conversion of hotels into condominiums, often under the English term of *Residence*, which in Italian indicates a residential complex for tourist accommodation with shared facilities. Inside the Residence, customers also had the possibility of owning their apartment, leading in actual fact to condominiums with a higher degree of amenities, mostly located in tourist venues. The most emblematic conversion of the time involved the Grand Hotel Bagni & Miramare, a well-known hotel on the beach built during the 30s: the first building representing Jesolo Lido on postcards.

The hotel succumbed to the pressures of private ownership and parcellation. In the late seventies, the building underwent comprehensive renovation, forsaking the romantic allure of the

¹³ The area is classified as: F3 'Leisure facilities-Swimming pool- Aqualand'.

¹⁴ Jesolo was officially recognised as a city by Presidential Decree, 31 March 1983, No. 2099.

1930s in favour of a pragmatic approach aimed at ensuring market success and reducing maintenance costs.¹⁵



Figure 60 Grand Hotel Bagni & Miramare before (c.1950) and after (today) its transformation into a residence.

The redesigned exterior dramatically transformed the lush entrance garden into a minimalist arrangement of hedges and palms overlooking the beach. Similarly, the building underwent refurbishment, but instead of enhancing its charm, the changes rendered it mundane and uninspired. The once distinctive horizontal railings reminiscent of transatlantic elegance were replaced with independent balconies adorned with ornamental wrought iron parapets. Luxury seemed to have shifted primarily to the shared swimming pool, positioned towards the beach to elevate the status of the property.¹⁶

¹⁵ Giovanni Cagnassi, 'Piazza Marconi, il cuore di Jesolo', *Jesolo Journal* (2021), < <https://www.jesolojournal.com/piazza-marconi-il-cuore-di-jesolo/> > [accessed 7 August 2023].

¹⁶ The comparison is made possible through the numerous postcards depicting the Hotel Bagni & Miramare and the various images of the residence available on booking websites today.

2.6 All year round holidays: 1997-2003

After all, contemporary architecture — at least here in our area, meaning in Italy and in the Veneto in particular — produces only and exclusively suburbs. This is something that, in the very relationship between architecture and history, must be attributed more to history than to architecture, if it is true that by the word *territory*, today more than ever, we mean: the area under the jurisdiction of the state, regional, provincial, or municipal administrative body. In its modern sense, it is the space in which a population carries out its activities, and which must be organised in the most appropriate way to meet the needs of the community while also being protected from degradation and pollution.¹

The town reached its saturation point at the end of the eighties when the visitor quotas established by the *PRG* of 1977 became an obstacle to Jesolo's growing tourist demand.² After years of stagnation that had begun at the end of the eighties, the tourist capacity needed to be increased. For the first time not just quantity but also quality was addressed: the city's urban expansion required not mere numbers but also needed to make the city attractive again. The tourist market had changed, welcoming new national and international competition.³ Jesolo's built environment was beginning to show its obsolescence, in particular its hotels, where the lack of investment resulted in outdated structures lacking in facilities.

Three events set the right contingencies for the beginning of an alternative urban approach. A natural phenomenon, known as 'mucilage', which affected the sea of the north Adriatic coasts, transforming the act of swimming into an unpleasant experience; a political upheaval, determined by the first direct municipal elections; and Italy upcoming membership of the European monetary system, which gave a new boost to the construction sector.

During the summers of 1988, 1989 and 1991, the Adriatic, particularly in its northern part, was affected by an invasion of mucilage, a viscous organic substance that floats on the water, keeping tourists out of the sea.⁴ To prevent customers from going elsewhere, hosts had to reinvent their facilities, offering a suitable alternative to visitors that could not enjoy the sea anymore. As the sea temporarily lost its attractive value, a new awareness of the built environment began

¹ Vitaliano Trevisan, *Tristissimi giardini* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010), p.13.

² The 1977 *Piano Regolatore Generale (PRG)* analysed the accommodation capacity of the beachfront area, ultimately setting a maximum limit of 124,520 visitors.

³ Spain's delayed development was closely linked to the long-standing Francoist regime, which only came to an end in 1975. After this, Spain began to move at a new pace within Europe, with Benidorm becoming both a symbol of real estate speculation and of success—significantly increasing its density through an ambitious expansion of building volumes and the construction of iconic structures. As in the case of Jesolo, this transformation was rooted in political will, particularly that of the popular mayor Pedro Zaragoza Orts (1922–2008). Edwin Heathcote, 'Skyscrapers-on-Sea: Benidorm, an Oasis of Modernist Design', *Financial Times*, 25 June (2021). And *Costa Iberica: Upbeat to the leisure city*, ed. by MVRDV (Barcelona: Actar, 2000).

⁴ Danilo Degobbi, Alenka Malej, and Serena Fonda-Umani, 'The mucilage phenomenon on in the northern Adriatic Sea. A critical review of the present scientific hypotheses', *Annali Dell'Istituto Superiore Di Sanità*, 35.3, (1999), 373-381 (p.373).

to rise: swimming pools, amusement parks and other terrestrial facilities answered the needs of tourists in the short term, further demonstration of the lessons learned in previous years; the sea was not enough.

The second event that pushed the city towards a new masterplan was the 1993 municipal election, when the political leadership of the municipality shifted to a new force in the first direct Italian municipal elections, a system which gave more stability to the mayor in charge.⁵ The new council understood that the situation required a radical change, the city needed new investors, new ideas, and thus a new masterplan. Together with external consultants from Bocconi University in Milan, one of the most renowned economics and business universities in Italy, the city decided to hold an international competition.⁶ On 12 April 1996 the municipality assigned the masterplan to the world-famous architect and urbanist Kenzo Tange ahead of 49 other applications, including the proposal of Vittorio Gregotti, which did not satisfy the municipality's expectations to the same degree.⁷

The final factor pertains to macroeconomics and real estate cycles. The impending membership of the Eurozone economic system, coupled with the subsequent prospect of favourable interest rates under the new economic framework, laid the foundation for increased investments in the construction sector.⁸ The city had to ready itself to capitalise on the favourable conditions and attract developers by reshaping its image. Clients were knocking at the door, driven by a demand pushed by demographic aspects which included – immigration aside – the influence of the 'baby boomers', a generation that in Italy recorded the highest birth rate during the sixties and that during the nineties and the beginning of the new millennium acquired the economic power to access the housing market.⁹

The aim of our work on the Master Plan is to develop a physical framework capable of achieving, in an orderly manner, the objectives identified within the broader intent of unifying and organising the city of Jesolo—while preserving its cultural richness, diversity, and exceptional natural beauty. To this end, we have established the following goals:

.Establish an appropriate vision to guide future growth

⁵ Orazio Lanza and Daniela Timpanaro, 'Che cosa è cambiato con l'elezione diretta del sindaco? Alcune risposte dall'esperienza di Catania', *Quaderni di Sociologia*, 14 (1997), <<http://journals.openedition.org/qds/1511>> [accessed 25 March 2024].

⁶ See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023.

⁷ The master plan was assigned to Kenzo Tange on 12 April 1996.

⁸ The Maastricht Treaty, which also outlined the path toward monetary union and thus the establishment of the euro, was signed on 7 February 1992.

⁹ Daniele Girardi, 'The construction sector in Italy, crisis and change', *Cresme Ricerche*, (2012).

- .Improve the city's physical structure
- .Balance and diversify the city's tourism industry
- .Increase the number of permanent residents
- .Enhance the use of natural attractions
- .Create the conditions for the development of sectors related to tourism (such as crafts and industry)¹⁰

This quote from Kenzo Tange's masterplan summarises the intention of the administration and the Japanese architect. Looking at the Masterplan booklet presented on 2 October 1997, edited both in Italian and English, in the first section Jesolo is dissected, outlining the existing situation and problems: demographics, tourism, built environment, natural environment, vehicle traffic, hydrological issues, landscape and public opinion. The second section examines the masterplan's objectives and targets, fostering a more organic relationship between the inland and coastal areas to envision Jesolo as a cohesive city through the development of green areas and an increase in the residential population. All these targets are preceded by a graph highlighting Jesolo's international tourist appeal on the first page of the chapter. In the graph, titled 'Tourism Frequency', Jesolo and other popular tourist destinations are placed into bubbles on a Cartesian plane. The vertical axis indicates the length of tourist stays, ranging from 'sightseeing' to 'long stay', while the horizontal axis represents the seasonality of visits, ranging from 'all year round' to 'seasonal'. Jesolo is positioned in the upper right quadrant, indicating that tourists typically visit with seasonal frequency and for relatively long stays. A red arrow indicates the project's aim, which is to find a new position for Jesolo, shifting from seasonal to year-round tourism while slightly decreasing the length of stays. The new 'neighbouring' cities become Cannes, Nice, and Monaco, rather than Rimini, Cortina, and Karuizawa, which are venues known for seasonal and temporary tourism.

¹⁰ Kenzo Tange Associates, 'Obiettivi', p.16.

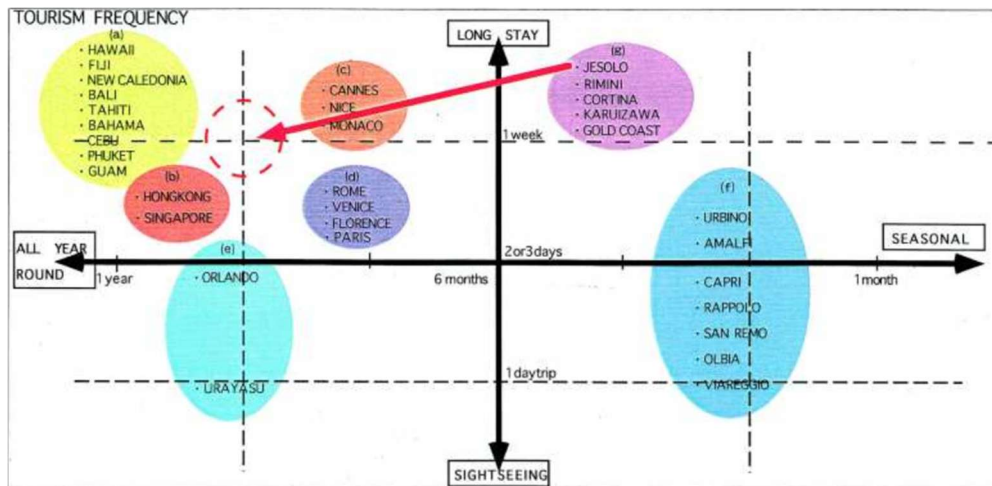


Figure 61 Tourism Frequency scheme on Kenzo Tange's masterplan. Kenzo Tange Associates, 'La visione del futuro di Jesolo' (1996), p.19.

Despite the evaluation of various alternatives to achieve this target, such as Jesolo as a technological hub, satellite city or city for retired people, the study accepts that the most feasible one appeared to be acting on the already existing and influential tourist sector.¹¹ The oscillations between the 22,000 residents and the 140,000 visitors during the summertime needed to be reduced. An improved quality of the urban context together with an increase in the quantity of available built square metres could lead to an increase in the residential population and thus of 'loyal customers', visitors that could live in the city throughout the year. Jesolo's marketing approach underwent a transformation, aimed at attracting customers interested in 'entry level luxury' such as inland entrepreneurs, retired people or middle-class families seeking to establish roots by the Adriatic Sea, while diminishing the influx of younger or temporary visitors that mainly use cheap accommodation and have low purchasing power. The city required new inland attractions, together with more green spaces, new parking lots and infrastructures to answer the needs of the future resident population, transforming Jesolo into an all-year round city.

¹¹ The study takes into account the possibility of Jesolo as a satellite city, an industrial town with 'high technological content', and as city for retired people. Kenzo Tange Associates, p.19.

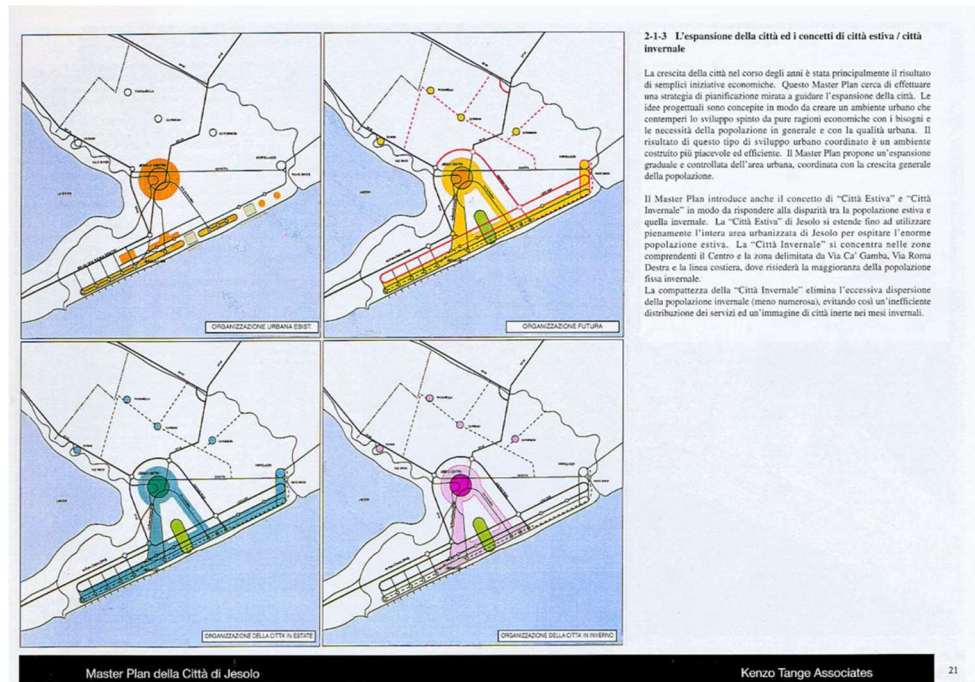


Figure 62 Extract from the Master Plan pages illustrating the urban strategies related to the four seasons of the year and the definition of a summer city and a winter city. Kenzo Tange Associates 'The expansion of the city and the concept of the summer city / winter city' (1996), p.21.

Within this strategic framework, while on one hand hotels had a diminished role in the accommodation of residents, a trend that had already begun in previous years, condominiums emerged as the quintessential solution and a coveted asset.¹² Within this strategy, apartment buildings represent a lucrative investment opportunity for both developers and prospective residents alike. The former benefit from a comprehensive masterplan that optimises new constructions by new lotting and consolidating fragmented beachfront plots inherited from the villa era; the latter finds in this investment the fulfilment of a lifetime desire, a form of self-recognition, a product defining success among the entrepreneurial class from Veneto.

After part two explaining the ideas of the masterplan and part three devoted to the *Piani Rionali* (Neighbourhood Plans), the proposal booklet continues with part four, where areas of particular importance for the success of the plan are examined in detail.¹³ In two areas, condominiums play a crucial role: the residential and the tourist area. The residential area of Jesolo is crafted around a triangle with one vertex situated within the historic town and the other two on the lido.

¹² Summer visitors could count on a hotel capacity of 45,527 beds, leaving an estimated 84,000 visitors to residential units. The statistics on surfaces are even more striking considering that hotels covered a floor area of 616,558 m², while residential units covered 1,213,919.133 m². Kenzo Tange Associates, p.8.

¹³ Kenzo Tange Associates, 'Piani Rionali', p.34.

A strong and defined shape aims to unify Jesolo along the two main streets connecting the inland to the sea. This low-density area of 200 hectares for 7000 inhabitants (35 inhabitant/ha), is meant to play an essential role in year-round Jesolo, giving a fixed form to the city, organised around a big void where the agricultural fields are preserved, and a big park replaces the existent hospital facing the sea, serving as link to the coast. Two-floor single family houses coexist with condominiums with an average height of three floors.

The twelve kilometre tourist strip facing the sea is treated differently. Specifically, the emphasis is placed on a four-kilometre stretch where the 'low-density' triangle intersects with the 'high-density' strip. An intersection which creates a zone where the distinction between tourists and residents becomes blurred, seamlessly integrating into the year-round city.

This also coincides with the part of the coastline where the haphazard arrangement of villas, condominiums and hotels best expresses the indiscriminate urbanisation that occurred prior to the 1977 *Piano Regolatore*, an area of savage parcellation which influenced not only building quality but also its road system, leading sometimes to intricate passages, sometimes impeding direct access to the beach.

A section of the seafront, between Piazza Mazzini and the hospital (future park overlooking the sea), is taken as an example to illustrate the masterplan strategy for this area, the one of utmost importance for Jesolo's attractiveness as a tourist destination.

Here the irrational arrangement of tiny blocks resembling the existent unattractive villas, condos and hotels is replaced by a more schematic and rational plan that strategically positions wider building blocks around a more efficient road infrastructure. At the same time the plan quantitatively illustrates the available square metres after the intervention, shifting from 67,580 to 134,600, doubling the existing volume. Hotels, oriented towards the sea, span between 24 and 8 floors and are artfully rotated by 45 degrees to 'maximize the views of the sea', while also incorporating open spaces and green areas between structures. Behind these hotels, condominiums of 5 and 6 floors host commercial spaces on the ground floor and rise to offer a diverse array of living options, tailored to meet the needs and desires of their owners.¹⁴

¹⁴ Kenzo Tange Associates, p.64.

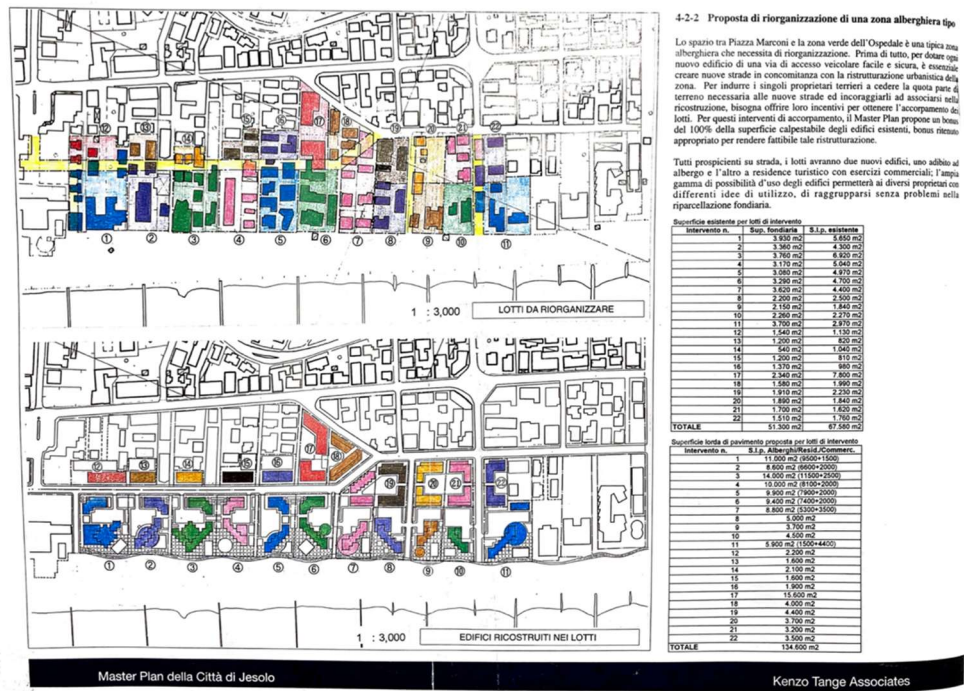


Figure 63 Extract from the Master Plan pages comparing the before and after of the reconfiguration of existing building volumes. On the right, a table illustrates the new volumes added as incentives for private stakeholders. Kenzo Tange Associates 'Proposal for the reorganisation of a typical hotel district' (1996), p.63.

Density-wise, this is the apex of Kenzo Tange's ideas for Jesolo, an example that most closely equates the masterplan to a simple speculative tool for the tourist industry. Despite the pages dedicated to territorial preservation, landscape preservation, and green areas, one could easily assert that these aspects are included merely to increase the tourist capacity and justify the highest possible construction volumes. Although this might be true, speculation should not be condemned outright but addressed in relation to its contingencies. In a period when the eco-climatic challenge was beginning to have a wider impact, considering that the Kyoto Protocols were published just the year before, Shigeru Iwakiri, associate architect of Studio Kenzo Tange Associates (KTA) in Tokyo, plainly express his opinion about Jesolo in the project guidelines with which the Japanese studio won the Masterplan of Jesolo in March 1996, writing that: 'the primary ideology of the development of Jesolo Lido was more that of a quarry cultivator than of a city founder'.¹⁵ An extractive attitude which unquestionably exists and that should be pragmatically channelled instead of condemned as the 1977 masterplan did.

¹⁵ This episode is mentioned by Lupo and Badiani, during the 'Procedura negoziata per l'affidamento dell'incarico di redazione del progetto preliminare del nuovo PRG del Comune di Jesolo'(1996). A likely misunderstanding of Jesolo's original name, *Cavazuccherina*, contributed to misleading associations with quarries. As previously explained, *cava* in Venetian dialect means *canal*, not *quarry*. Lupo and Badiani, p.109.

Speculation again appears as a cultural rather than an economic aspect. The doubling of built volumes in the coastal area might seem outrageous if considered only in numerical terms. However, when viewed through the lens of Tange's proposal from an architectural and spatial perspective, the plan appears more reasonable. Given the existing circumstances, the masterplan offers a pragmatic solution to the fragmentation caused by indiscriminate urbanisation. Economically, more built volume translates to greater profits, providing the funds needed to purchase and consolidate the small, divided plots. Larger plots enable the more thoughtful design of the spaces between buildings, enhancing the overall quality of this part of the city. Despite these new spaces still being private, the new street system is visually and physically linked to the beach through wider passages, even connecting Piazza Manzoni directly to the sea. An approach that enhances public space through compaction, using private interest as a driver.

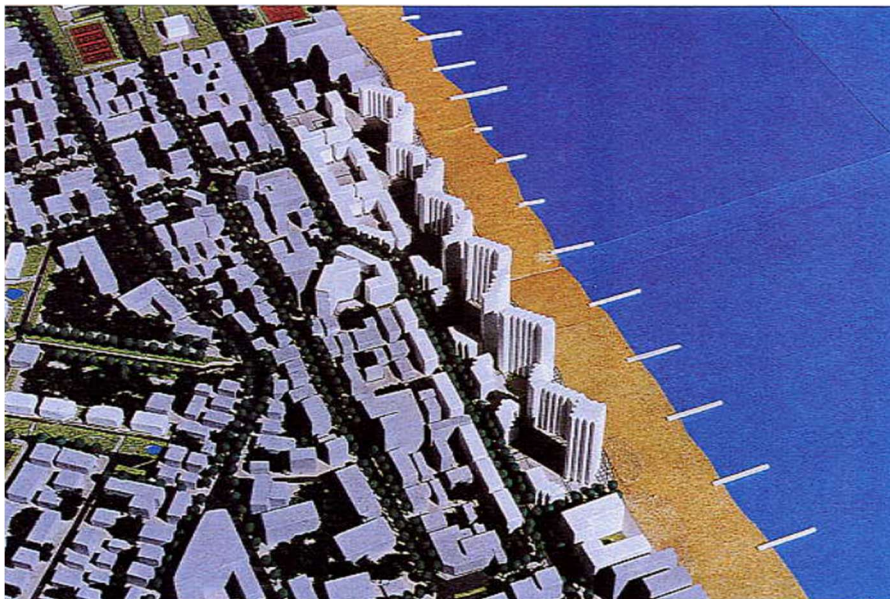


Figure 64 Model of the reorganisation of a hotel area. Kenzo Tange Associates 'Hotel area aspect' (1996), p.65.

Tange's work should not be considered a mere speculative tool. More precisely, the strategy adopted evokes the '*Defrag*' approach proposed by writer Vitaliano Trevisan when describing his homeland, the outskirts of Vicenza, as an example of today's urbanism. Here the lack of density and spatial quality makes it difficult to classify this suburb as part of the city, even though most of its inhabitants do not reside in the historic town anymore.

For once, let's invest a bit of our time and look at it, this hard disk, taking it for what it concretely is, that is, a plastic disk that spins on its axis at high speed, a physical, concrete surface, on which the operating system, that is, artificial intelligence, which by the way is in turn a kind of writing that already occupies a significant part of the surface it works on, writes its working memory, without raising any issue regarding the relationship between the surface it is about to occupy, and the position of the surfaces previously occupied: as soon as it finds enough space to deposit the block of memory it needs to save, it occupies it and that is enough for it. The method guarantees speed, but not order.¹⁶

The use of the IT term *Defrag* – the compaction and freeing up of space – originates from the comparison of the city to a computer hard drive that aims to improve system performance by maximising disk space.¹⁷ If the indiscriminate urbanisation had guaranteed execution speed but not order, now the system (the city) had reached illogical and convoluted paths to access files (buildings, monuments, public spaces), *Defrag* suggests a sort of compaction of the built environment, which in Jesolo finds its expression through the de-parcellation of the city, using private property and investment as mediums, an attempt to shape Jesolo's seafront through density, mediating between the public and the private interests, a way to replace what in fact was merely a linear suburb with spaces that thanks to their density could finally be called 'city'.

¹⁶ Vitaliano Trevisan, The term 'defrag' stands for 'defragmentation': to make a computer organize its files and free space so that it can operate more quickly. Vitaliano Trevisan, 'No-Defrag, ovvero il territorio come disco fisso', *Tristissimi giardini* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2012). p.18.

¹⁷ Parallels between the city and the computer hard drives exist also in Rem Koolhaas' *Delirious New York*, in William J. Mitchell's *City of bits* and in Mike Davis's idea of the city as techno-landscape. Defragmentation is also mentioned by Richard Florida, American urban theorist and expert in urban marketing, whose theories expressed in the book *The rise of the creative class* are criticised in Reiner De Graf's book *Architect Verb*: 'Richard Florida's advice is invariably the same: the road to a brighter future begins with the accomodation of a particular lifestyle.' p158

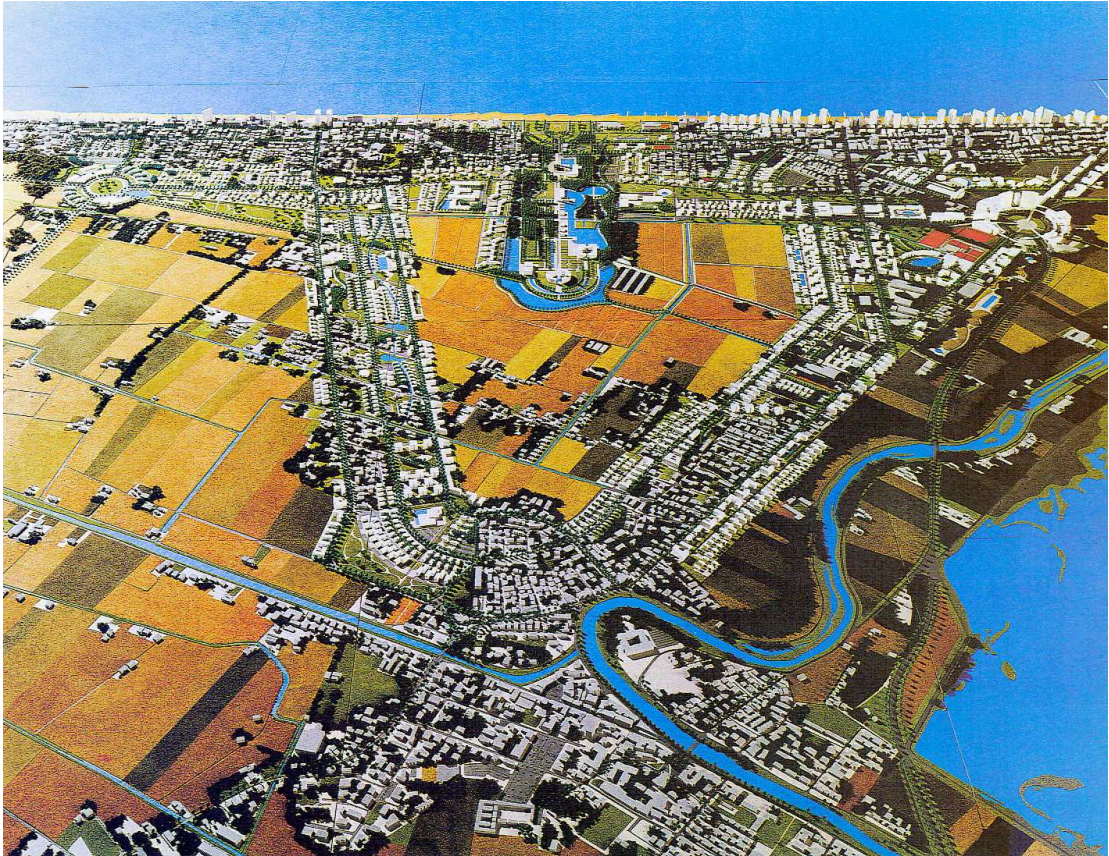


Figure 65 Model of Kenzo Tange's masterplan. Kenzo Tange Associates (1996), p.17.

2.7 Jesolo Lido City Beach: 2003-2012

Sometimes it is important to find what the city is – instead of what it was, or what it should be.

That is what drove me to Atlanta – an intuition that the real city at the end of the 20th century could be found there ...

Atlanta has CNN and Coca-Cola.

Atlanta has a black mayor, and it will have the Olympics.

Atlanta has culture, or at least it has a Richard Meier museum (like Ulm, Barcelona, Frankfurt, The Hague, etc.).

Atlanta has an airport; actually it has 40 airports. One of them is the biggest airport in the world. Not that everybody wants to be there; it's a hub, a spoke, an airport for connections. It could be anywhere.

Atlanta has history, or rather it had history; now it has history machines that replay the battles of the Civil War every hour on the hour. Its real history has been erased, removed, or artificially resuscitated.

Atlanta has other elements that provide intensity without physical density: one building looks innocent from the outside – like a regular supermarket – but is actually the largest, most sophisticated food hall in the world. Each day it receives three cargo planes of fresh products from Holland, four from Paris, two from Southeast Asia. It proves that there are hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of gourmets in Atlanta.

Atlanta does not have the classical symptoms of city; it is not dense; it is a sparse, thin carpet of habitation, a kind of suprematist composition of little fields. Its strongest contextual givens are vegetal and infrastructural: forest and roads. Atlanta is not a city; it is a landscape.

Atlanta's basic form – but it is not a form – its basic formlessness is generated by the highway system, a stretched X surrounded by an O: branches running across the city connecting to a single perimeter highway. The X brings people in and out; the O – like a turntable – takes them anywhere. They are thinking about projecting a super-O somewhere in the beyond.

Atlanta has nature, both original and improved – a sparkling, perfect nature where no leaf is ever out of place. Its artificiality sometimes makes it hard to tell whether you are outside or inside; somehow, you're always in nature.

Atlanta does not have planning, exactly, but another process called zoning. Atlanta's zoning law is very interesting; its first line tells you what to do if you want to propose an exception to the regulations. The regulations are so weak that the exception is the norm. Elsewhere, zoning has a bad name – for putting things in their place simplistically: work, sleep, shop, play. Atlanta has a kind of reverse zoning, zoning as instrument of indetermination, making anything possible anywhere.¹

The role of the condominium within Jesolo's urban history highlights the relevance of architecture as both a mirror and a predictor of socio-economic dynamics. The condominium, as the epitome of these dynamics, becomes the focal point around which the identity of the town and its surrounding territory revolves. Jesolo's diachronic urban architectural palimpsest allowed for the reconstruction of a urban history of modernisation che partendo da that spans from early revivalism, modernism and deconstructivism, and that, while globally delayed, anticipated regional trends.

¹ Rem Koolhaas, 'Atlanta', in *Shaping The City*, eds. Rodolphe El-Khoury and Edwards Robbins (London: Routledge, 2013) doi:10.4324/9781315662152-3

What if the real city at the start of the 21st century isn't a global metropolis, but a seasonal beach town? Jesolo doesn't have headquarters. There are no banks or tech campuses, no grand cultural institutions with century-long histories such as its neighbour, Venice. What it does have are ice cream parlours and real estate agencies—lots of them. It has endless rows of beach umbrellas, lined up with algorithmic precision, waiting not for residents, but for waves of temporary inhabitants. Jesolo doesn't so much *house* people as it *hosts* them.

Jesolo has had several urban plans. But it also originally had a casual disregard for them. The plan was there in theory, in drawings, in the promises of balanced growth. On the ground, however, the logic of speculation tended to write its own rules. And if Jesolo has history, it is a fragmented, seasonal one.

If Jesolo has a formal structure today, it comes from the property market. Urban form follows return on investment. The condominium is the basic unit of expansion through which spatial and architectural quality is expressed. And the 'masterplan' becomes a kind of placeholder—used to unlock bonuses, rather than direct development.

What Jesolo tried to adopt was something more fluid than planning, more tactical: a system based on incentives. Zoning exists, yes, but it bended easily. A tourist bed cap might appear here; a demolition bonus there. A hotel becomes a residence; a residence becomes a condhotel. Every function is provisional and seasonal. Public space, when it emerges, tends to be the by-product of negotiation—not the result of a civic ideal.

There is spectacle, and density is only seasonal, Jesolo doesn't conform to classical ideas of the city. It's not structured by squares *ma da strade per il passeggio e pieni*. It functions more like a mechanism—flexible, seasonal, reactive. Most of its streets lead to commerce; most of its plots are designed to be reprogrammed. The most stable feature of the city, the Lido, is itself rebuilt each year. Permanence is not part of the logic here.

Jesolo has become a kind of urban prototype—not for what cities once were, but for a different kind of urbanism entirely. One that sustains itself by forgetting, constantly, what came before.

The leaflet of *Jesolo 2012 The city beach* does not include any images of families on the beach, tanned people sunbathing, kids screaming down a waterslide, or stolen shots from a night out with friends. Instead, the brochure advertises buildings, projecting the reader inside the latest built tourist accommodations and future developments in town. The particularity of this brochure is that each project is associated with its designer. The most important authors are featured

in small pictures next to their names in the upper right corner of a comprehensive map of future interventions in Jesolo. These images depict Richard Meier, Carlos Ferrater, Gonçalo Byrne, Zaha Hadid, and Aurelio Galfetti — architects whose portfolios, in most cases, already include involvement in projects related to leisure architecture.



Figure 66 Brochure and video still from *Jesolo. The City Beach 2012* advertising campaign.

In regular real estate advertising, where the agency and freedom of choice needs to be flattered through photorealistic images of buildings and interiors, the architect's authorship plays a secondary role. Rendered images allow clients to avoid the stressful burden of imagination and the purchase is the prerequisite to a new life; or more precisely a new 'lifestyle.'² Here, the strength of the advertisement does not derive from the fact that the brochure is selling something tangible, in some cases already existing and ready to be occupied. The strength of the advertisement

² See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023.

come from the promise to be part of the Jesolo of the future, in a building designed by a prominent architect – here called a ‘planner’ – which implies that what is being sold is not merely a building but a product of design to be proud of.³

When someone mentions the ‘Bilbao Effect’ they mean a phenomenon whereby cultural investment plus showy architecture is supposed to equal economic uplift for cities down on their luck. It is the origin of ‘iconic’ architecture, the prolific progenitor of countless odd-shaped buildings the world over.⁴ They refer more precisely to the effect of Frank Gehry’s famous Guggenheim museum, which opening in 1997 almost overlaps with the beginning of Jesolo’s relationship with world famous architects. This expression persists even in the case of non-cultural buildings, with important coeval and previous examples, such as the case of Calatrava’s *Turning Torso* in Malmö, Sweden, where after the wreck of the shipyard industry, the 190 metre-high residential tower lifted the image of the city.⁵

The outcomes of this approach have been examined by Reiner De Graaf’s book *Architect, verb*, where, referencing a collection of glamorous contemporary projects, it is questioned and, in some cases, debunked. In the case of the Guggenheim museum, we can say that ‘yes’, it is true that architecture, especially Gehry’s building, was able to radically contribute to the economic and cultural uplift of the city. It is proved by facts and numbers, among which it is worth mentioning that the investment in the museum was recouped within the first year of its opening, and not only Bilbao but the entire Basque region continued to benefit from this operation.⁶ However, it is also true that the same strategy had not been successful in all cases which, following in Bilbao’s footsteps, use architecture to boost the city’s image. De Graaf argues that, after numerous other examples, this strategy ironically met its end in Spain once again, with Peter Eisenman’s disastrous project for the Museum of Galicia. An ambitious development,

³ Some texts, both in Italian and English, highlight the key features of the project, marking Jesolo as the ideal place, ‘to live all year round, to spend your holidays, to enjoy your free time, to do business, to investigate cultural aspects, to start a business.’

⁴ Rowan Moore, ‘The Bilbao Effect: How Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Started a Global Craze’, *The Observer*, 1 October 2017, section Art and design <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/oct/01/bilbao-effect-frank-gehry-guggenheim-global-craze>> [accessed 13 September 2024]. Another seminal article on the same topic is: Witold Rybczynski, ‘The Bilbao Effect’, *The Atlantic*, 1 September 2002 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2002/09/the-bilbao-effect/302582/>> [accessed 13 September 2024].

⁵ *Turning Torso*, designed by Santiago Calatrava, is the tallest tower in Scandinavia, completed in 2005 at a cost of \$220 million. Initially a sculpture, it was transformed into a high-rise project led by the HSB housing cooperative to revitalize Malmö post-shipbuilding era. Despite a \$70 million deficit, the project succeeded by renting out luxury apartments quickly. The building features a unique twisted design with high-end amenities added during construction to increase the financial feasibility of the project.

⁶ Reinier de Graaf, *Architect, Verb: The New Language of Building* (London, New York: Verso, 2023) p.12

whose design dramatically reproduced the sinuosity of a hill, that remained partially unbuilt due to unsustainable cost increases.

Jesolo 2012 The city beach was considered a fundamental step in the realisation of Kenzo Tange's master plan, with architects serving as a primary conduit to communicate the quality of the city. The name, used as the brand of the operation, summarises the intention of transforming Jesolo into an international seaside 'city' and not simply a 'town' or 'venue'; a place where one could live all year round, with 2012 as the provisional deadline for its realisation. The projects illustrated in the brochure and dedicated website comprise buildings with different uses, with condominiums the protagonists. These projects involve both international and prominent local architects with Kenzo Tange's appearing as a demiurge of the Jesolo of the future. The rendering of the sinuous shopping mall designed by Zaha Hadid opens the way to other colleagues comprising Gonçalo Byrne and Joao Nunes from Portugal, Jean Nouvel from France, Carlos Ferrater from Spain and Richard Meier from the US. In the same pages we can also find prominent local architects, whose origins can be traced to the Veneto region, and Italian offices specialised in architecture for tourism.⁷

The following three chapters serve as a foundation for the concluding chapter of this section, providing case studies essential for defining the *Culture of Suspension* that characterises Jesolo's architecture. The following chapter examines the densification of the coastline through the replacement of Hotel Tahiti, reconstructing the architectural significance of this transformation. The analysis is based on the research conducted by Veronica Baldassa, complemented by an in-depth study of the international stakeholders involved. The second chapter documents the developmental process behind the conception and realisation of Richard Meier's *The Beach Houses* — a symbolic building of the entire urban transformation. Particular attention is focused on the impact of local building regulations on architectural decisions, even when involving world-renowned architects.

⁷ The 'local' architects mentioned include: Ortica and Zanforlin (Jesolo), Maurizio Ghezzi (Venice), Favaretto & partners (Padua), Bruno Dolcetta (Venice), Knowcoo (Mestre) Giovanna Mar (Jesolo) and Toni Follina (Treviso), Gianpaolo Mar (Jesolo), Proteco engineering (San Donà), Emiliano Granzotto (San Donà). Additionally, it is interesting to note the presence of Italian architects specialized in tourist structures such as: Alberto Montesi and Alessandro Costanza of BlueArch (Rome, New York, Miami) who have apparently also worked on Elon Musk's house in the Dolomites and have had several projects with Carnival Cruise, Jean Claude Lesuisse (Arzachena), specialised in traditional and organic look-alike tourist complexes, and Vudafieri Saverino Partners (Milan, Shanghai), specialised in retail and corporate architecture.

Finally, the third chapter presents a categorised analysis of key architectural elements in Jesolo's built environment, offering a summary of its predominant features. These elements are illustrated through the city's most iconic buildings, which symbolise Jesolo's urban renewal and influence the design of condominiums, particularly in shaping the concept of vacation spaces.

All the case studies examined in the following chapters represent *skilful buildings by skilful architects* — structures that, through their distinctive features, contribute to a deeper understanding of Jesolo's urban environment. These chapters, in particular, benefit significantly from first-hand insights gathered through interviews with key figures involved in the projects.

2.8 An attractive confusion: Zona B3

The translation of Kenzo Tange’s plan into law was directed by the architect Danilo Gerotto, one of the most influential figures in Jesolo’s urban history. The proposal was adopted by the City Council as a guiding tool for drafting the general amendment to the existing masterplan (PRG) of 1977 and was finally approved in 2003.⁸

Regarding the densification of the coastal area, the most compelling article of the NTA⁹ is Article 11, which concerns the ‘*Zona di riorganizzazione alberghiera ‘B3’*.’ This is the area designated by Kenzo Tange for densification, that originally spanned 3 km between Piazza Mazzini and the new park, with a depth of 300 m, aiming to become the new centre for Jesolo Lido. The PRG later extended this area by 1 km, enabling, as will be later described, the intervention designed by Richard Meier in a plot formerly occupied by the *Colonia Monte Berico*.

Within this area Tange’s idea takes shape through two tables, one for tourist and one for non-tourist accommodations. Here, to encourage interventions, the possibility of increasing existing volumes is highlighted, based on the following parameters for tourist facilities: 20% more if a new access to the sea is created; 10% if a green area and tourist facilities are created; 20% for maintaining the coverage ratio below the 40% limit and for setting the building back from the shoreline; 20% for the creation of underground parking; and finally, 30% as an additional volume increase exclusively for hotel use, an exclusive benefit for the private sector without any compensation. In total, a 100% bonus of the existing volume for tourist facilities (hotels) and 50% for non-tourist facilities.¹⁰

| Volume increase for non-tourist and tourist accommodation facilities (B3 zone): | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Intervention description</i> | <i>Volume increase tourist</i> | <i>Volume increase non tourist</i> |
| Creation of an access to the sea | 20% | 20% |
| Creation of (min. 20% of the total area) a green area and facilities for tourists | 10% | 10% |
| Maintaining the coverage ratio below the 40% limit and setting the building back from the shoreline | 20% | 10% |
| Creation of underground parking | 20% | 10% |
| Additional volume increase exclusively for hotel use | 30%. | - |
| Total | 100% | 50% |

Table 3. Art. 11 NTA, Volume increase for tourist and non-tourist accommodation facilities.

⁸ The General Amendment for the *Piano Regolatore Generale* (PRG 2003) was adopted by the municipality of Jesolo with DCC 5 July 1999, No. 118, and approved by the Veneto Region on 18 April 2003.

⁹ Comune di Jesolo, ‘Norme tecniche di attuazione’, *Piano Regolatore Generale* (2003). *Approvato con modifiche d’ufficio dalla Giunta Regione Veneto con delibera n. 1979 del 19.07.2002, pubblicata sul B.U.R. Veneto n. 79 in data 13.08.2002 pubblicata sul B.U.R. Veneto n. 47 in data 13 maggio 2003*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

As described by Danilo Gerotto himself, the masterplan in this area supplies ‘the tools for re-development, by implementing the demolition and reconstruction of the existing volume, developing it vertically and creating green areas, parking spaces, wide access to the sea; elements that result in a volumetric increase, which acts as an incentive for redevelopment. The city becomes ‘taller’ and carves out the necessary areas for quality urban spaces.’¹¹

An approach that Gerotto affirms be developed out of the fragmentation produced by the city’s microstructures, complexity, variations, distinctive features, different sensations, in short by ‘a sort of attractive confusion’.¹² This ‘confusion’ Gerotto talks about merges together Denise Scott Brown’s diversity, Venturi’s complexity, and Koolhaas’s culture of congestion, encapsulating a fundamental aspect of Jesolo’s identity: tourism, which makes it necessary to confront the city with intellectual honesty, acknowledging it ‘as a product itself.’¹³ Simultaneously, tourism highlights a significant weakness in this strategy: the lack of diversity. According to Scott Brown’s writings, diversity should always complement density to ensure a liveable city. An aspect which here still lacks consistency despite the masterplan’s intentions to reduce seasonality and promote parallel sectors, such as local craftsmanship and industry, alongside tourism.¹⁴ The masterplan for Jesolo follows the liberal principles of fragmentation and recomposition of land based on profit. A strategy which, despite the organisational effort, values ‘confusion’ as an attractive element, leading to a system that could be defined as ‘antifragile’, where disorder is transformed into an asset.¹⁵ A system which is able to adapt to the market’s needs and benefit from its apparent weakness.

In a place that seasonally confronts the constant erosion of the beach – its most lucrative attraction – the response is to constantly raise the stakes: building on the coast and increasing the economic interest in the area.

This is the case of the Tahiti Hotel, whose approval process lasted more than ten years and accurately summarises the initial steps and issues that legislation imposes on development. The

¹¹ Danilo Gerotto and Maurizio Varagnolo, *La città del tempo libero: Jesolo fra presente e futuro* (Opus, 2002), p.39.

¹² Ibid., p.34.

¹³ See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023.

¹⁴ Camera di Commercio di Venezia, ‘Sedi d’impresa e unita’ locali attive nel 2009 nel comune di Jesolo’ (2009). The report indicates the following percentage for the first three economic sectors: 30% commerce, 21% Tourism, 13% Services, 11% Building sector.

¹⁵ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Antifragile prosperare nel disordine* [2012] (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2013).

area is located in the heart of Jesolo Lido, stretching between the beach and the parallel inland street, and was already occupied by a hotel facing the sea and a residential condominium inland. Its development process is described in the last chapters of Baldassa’s research.



Figure 67 The Tahiti Hotel before demolition (c.1990).

The project was initially assigned to Kenzo Tange’s assistant Shigeru Iwakiri, with the cooperation of two local consultants, the engineer Marino Zorzato and architect Marco De Poli.

The intention was to take full advantage of the masterplan volume bonuses through two buildings: one residential tower facing the street and one hotel facing the sea. The existing volumes comprise 12,803.39m³ of tourist facilities (hotel) and 6,651.85m³ of residential, the project expected a maximum volume of 16,644.41m³ for tourist facilities and 18,940.15 m³ for residential, 35,584.56m³ in total.

| | Tourist (Hotel) +100% max | Non-tourist + 50% max |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Existing volume above ground | A) 12,803.390 | B) 6,651.850 |
| Volume increase | 3,841.017 (30% of A) | 3,325.925 (50% of B) |
| Remaining increments for tourist accommodation structures that can be considered non-tourist accommodation volume | | 8,962.373 (70% of A) |
| Total | 16,644.41 (+30% of A) | 18,940.15 (+185% of B) |
| | 35,584.56 (+55% existing volume) | |

Table 4. Hotel Tahiti volume increase¹⁶

¹⁶ Data interpreted by the author, from ‘Relazione tecnico-illustrativa (Allegato a) del piano di riqualificazione area “Hotel Tahiti” del 03.02.2009.’ Found in Veronica Baldassa, p.171.

Some numbers help us to better understand the operation. Apparently, the project could profit from all the available bonuses, exploiting both the 100% bonus related to tourist facilities and the 50% bonus related to non-tourist ones. What is of interest to us is that part of the bonus which could have led to the construction of a bigger hotel was transformed into residential volume, leading to a condominium whose actual volume increase is 185% instead of the already mentioned 50%. This is possible because the regulation's only prescription was to maintain the existing volume for tourist facilities when the masterplan was adopted. Consequently, the remaining bonuses, which are not strictly related to hotels, were attributed to non-residential construction. The preservation of hotels on the beachfront only served developers as a bargaining chip for bigger condominiums, which guarantee short terms profits and simpler management plans.¹⁷

From Baldassa's examination of the building permit we can also reconstruct the proposed building distribution. 'The plot was composed of a residential building, with a height of 52.20 metres for 16 storeys, including a ground floor designated for commercial activities and a top floor for service rooms. Similarly, the hotel, 29.60 metres high, allocated the ground floor for the reception, bar, and associated restaurant, while the eighth and top floor was for technical rooms and a panoramic terrace. Underneath the buildings, a two-level underground car park was to be constructed with access from Via Dante Alighieri, providing a total of 170 parking spaces for both structures, plus an additional 20 surface-level parking spaces.'¹⁸

The project also included the creation of a pedestrian island on Via Dante Alighieri, as well as the construction of a new 5-metre-wide access to the sea and the arrangement of the paving in such a way as to create a continuous and uninterrupted path connected to the main road. This intervention, to be carried out exclusively by the developing company, would then be granted and under the jurisdiction of the Municipal Administration.'¹⁹

¹⁷ As mentioned by Danilo Gerotto: 'New hotels are also scarce and those that were built are the result of dealings in which developers are also given the possibility of building condominiums in exchange.' See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023.

¹⁸ Veronica Baldassa, p.172.

¹⁹ Ibid.

PROJECT

TOP



1 2 3 4

Hotel Jesolo

イエゾロ市の都市計画委員でもある岩切が丹下設計時代から着手するプロジェクトのひとつ。歴史あるビーチ・リゾートの美しい景観に配慮し、二棟に分けられた建物の周囲には緑地を賛況に採り入れて街並みとの調和を図った。“歴史の中のモダン”を体現する建築としてイエゾロの新しいランドマークを目指す。

所在地：Jesolo 市 (Venezia 北 25km)
 用途：コンドミニアムホテル棟と共同住宅棟
 規模：ホテル棟・地上 8 階
 (延床面積 5,347 m²)、住宅棟
 地上 14 階 (延床面積 5,304 m²)
 竣工時期：2012 年竣工予定

Figure 68 Iwakiri's proposal for the Tahiti Hotel (2012).

This initial proposal was approved in 2009,²⁰ the first apartments began to be sold in 2018 and the condominium was completed in 2024. During these years the project sought various changes and the building permit was initially blocked due to the lack of approval of the *Soprintendenza*, a national office with local inspectors that is responsible for overseeing the protection and preservation of landscape and cultural heritage.²¹ The project resulted too impactful and a resizing was requested. The reaction of the constructor led to an alternative proposal which to maintain the financial suitability of the project involved the setting back of the hotel and the positioning of the condominium on the beachfront. ‘The beachfront building was to be designated for residential use, with an overall height nearly identical to the previous one at 28.00 metres, divided into 9 above-ground floors plus 2 underground levels, with the first above-ground floor designated for commercial use and the top floor reserved for facilities. The hotel section was to be located in the structure facing Via Dante, with a height of 34.10 metres (significantly lower than the previous 52.20 metres), divided into 11 above-ground floors plus two underground levels. As in the first project, the ground floor was to be allocated for the lobby, restaurant, and bar, while the top floor would accommodate the service rooms.’²²

²⁰ The project was approved by Municipal Council Resolution, 13 July 2009, No. 80.

²¹ The *Soprintendenza* is the government office responsible for the protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage. Its jurisdiction extends to all interventions within 300 meters of the coastline, the area where most of the Jesolo 2012 The City Beach projects were built.

²² Veronica Baldassa, p.173.

On 20 July 2012, the *Soprintendenza* rejected the project for the second time, condemning it, again, for its excessive volume, height and proximity to the beach.²³

The Tahiti condominium was completed only in the spring of 2024, resulting in a complex that differs from Iwakiri's original intentions.



Figure 69 Rendering of final Tahiti project (2020).

The project's trajectory was not straightforward, encountering variations and numerous compromises along the way. The resulting access to the sea respected the initial aims, providing a more generous and well-paved path for Jesolo's visitors, a meaningful improvement compared to the narrow neighbouring streets surrounded by two-storey villas and small condominiums with discontinuous iron fences and green edges, more appropriate for a suburban context than an international beachfront. However, despite this general upgrade, the final design seems more like the work of a local architect than that of Tange's assistant.

²³ Ibid. p.174.



Figure 70 Tahiti after completion (2023).

The translation of Kenzo Tange's masterplan vision into reality was less linear than anticipated, highlighting the complexities of the legislative framework that architecture must answer. The PRG aimed to clarify to investors the possibilities for developing new projects in Jesolo, serving as the main tool for this purpose. However, its influence on construction was weakened by external forces. The masterplan faced three main legislative obstacles or variables that undermined its coherent adoption, diverting part of the private initiative towards modest and insignificant urban proposals. This bureaucratic tangle was something even the municipality could not overlook.

The first one was the existence of urban tools such as the PUA (*Piano Urbanistico Attuativo*), a tool for the implementation of the masterplan, through projects on circumscribed areas before accessing the final building permit from the municipality. This instrument is used to evaluate the proposal on an urban scale when necessary due to the project's dimension or location. If the PUA can be considered an essential tool for translating the general masterplan into projects and evaluating them, at the same time it allows investors to avoid some existing conditions within the zoning system of the general plan, or, in some cases, to completely avoid the general plan, identifying 'degraded' areas which require interventions. The former is the case for example of building height limits that could be exceeded according to articles in national law, as in the case

of the initial proposal for Richard Meier's project,²⁴ the latter refers to large scale projects that had been approved despite their plots not being part of expansion areas, as in the case of the Merville tower by Gonçalo Byrne within the green area of the *pineta* that Tange intended to preserve.²⁵

The tools which translate the generic plan into reality thus become an opportunity for further negotiation of the project volume. Specific tools which make both ambitious projects possible and at the same time give investors and the municipality the possibility of avoiding the general masterplan, overlapping private with local interests. A tool which makes it possible to negotiate new conditions despite the existing set of rules.

The second aspect, already mentioned while summarising Hotel Tahiti's troubled history, is the intervention of the *Soprintendenza*, a national office with local inspectors that is responsible for overseeing the protection and preservation of cultural heritage, ensuring that any development, renovation, or construction work complies with regulations aimed to protect Italy's territorial and historical legacy. The national *Legge Galasso* environmental preservation law entered into effect in 1985, describing the jurisdiction of the *Soprintendenza*, which includes various historical and natural contexts. Included among these areas are coastal zones within 300 metres of the shore, with the exception of areas already classified as homogeneous territorial zones 'A' and 'B' in the regulatory plans already in force in 1985, areas which consisted of historic urban centres and already built-up urban areas facing the sea.²⁶ Considering Jesolo's history, these were the expectations of the masterplan, expectations that were soon disappointed. The PRG incorrectly expected the coastal area inside the B3 zone – the zone chosen for rehabilitation through density – to be excluded from its jurisdiction and thus open to intensive development. Following this recognition, the role of the *Soprintendenza* became pivotal for any project within the 300-metre coastal strip. This marked a turning point for developers who had anticipated capitalizing on the construction incentives offered by the masterplan. The *Soprintendenza* required not only compliance with regulatory standards and permitted volumes,

²⁴ The national law in question is Ministerial Decree No. 1444/1968. During the counter-arguments phase, the Municipality of Jesolo succeeded in bypassing one of the key issues—the strict height limitation—by adding to the prescription of the Regional Technical Commission the exception clause provided by DM 1444/1968: 'with the exception of buildings that are the subject of an implementing urban planning instrument', which was accepted. Lupo and Badiani, p.122.

²⁵ In this case the implementing urban tool is named PIRUEA (*Programma integrato di riqualificazione urbanistica edilizia e ambientale*).

²⁶ The '*Legge Galasso*,' officially known as Law, 8 August 1985, No. 431, 'Conversion into law, with amendments, of Decree-Law No. 312 of 27 June 1985, containing urgent provisions for the protection of areas of particular environmental interest. Supplements Article 82 of Presidential Decree No. 616 of 24 July 1977'.

but also a thorough assessment of the visual and environmental impact on the Jesolo coastline.

This variable was sharpened by the ‘discretionary’ role that the heritage office holds, meaning that it applies concepts that are not exact, but debatable, with the consequence that any assessment, with regard to the specific situation, even if considered manifestly illogical by the constructors or architects, can deem a project as illegitimate. An uncanny path on which the experience and reputation of the architect can play a crucial role.

The final aspect that led to the plan's partial realisation was the regional law known as the '*Piano Casa*' (House Plan), which came into force in 2009.²⁷ An issue that was preceded by other ‘interfering’ laws that similarly hindered Tange’s masterplan ideas, particularly the original aggregative intentions promoted by the plan.²⁸

The primary aim of the *Piano Casa* was to revitalise the construction industry during the economic downturn of 2008 and to address housing shortages. It sought to simplify and expedite procedures for building renovations, expansions, and new constructions.

This national law saw different regional applications, with Veneto being one of the most flexible regions. Flexibility which led to incoherent development driven by private initiatives. In the case of Jesolo, for example, among various incentives, the plan allowed a construction bonus of 20% of the existing volume, making the bonuses for aggregation theorised by Tange less competitive as plot owners were incentivised to add volumes within their single plots instead of accepting aggregation incentives venturing into larger and more risky economic operations.

²⁷ Regional Law No. 14 of 8 July 2009, known as the *Piano Casa*. Regional intervention in support of the construction sector and to promote the use of sustainable building practices, along with amendments to Regional Law No. 16 of 12 July 2007 concerning architectural barriers.

²⁸ As stated by Lupo and Badiani, prior to the *Piano Casa*, the Municipality of Jesolo was also required to address the PALAV: *Variante di adeguamento del PRG al Piano di area della Laguna e area veneziana (Palav)*, approved by Regional Resolution (DGR) No. 70 of 9 November 1995, as well as the *Variante per strutture turistiche*—a targeted amendment concerning hotel structures that led to administrative confusion. The Municipality aimed to allow hotels, including those located in the B3 zone, to expand by more than 30%.

The *Variant for Tourist Structures* and the general PRG amendment—drafted on the basis of the Master Plan—were jointly reviewed by the Regional Technical Commission (CTR) in May 2001. The Commission readily identified the clear contradiction between the aims of the two urban planning tools: allowing 53 hotels (out of 123 located within the hotel reorganisation area) to expand by 20%–30% effectively undermined the very hotel reorganisation strategy envisaged by the PRG.

Initially, the *Variant for Tourist Structures* was rightly declared “inadmissible”. However, during the rebuttal phase, the Regional Technical Commission accepted the Municipality of Jesolo’s revised proposal, permitting a maximum expansion of 20%—just enough to satisfy local hoteliers, who evidently favour volumetric increases but are reluctant to engage in risky construction projects.

While neither the Regional Technical Commission nor the Commission for the Protection of Venice objected to the establishment of the “bonus”, both sought to render it less practical: the former imposed a restriction that building heights must align with surrounding structures, while the latter required that any volumetric increase must not result in an increase in accommodation capacity (i.e., number of beds). Lupo and Badiani, p.121

A final blow to the Japanese architect's idea of a seaside town which put Jesolo's ambition for an open and international seafront into perspective.

These urban laws and regulations play a crucial role in establishing the initial set of rules for the project. As described by Hugh Ferriss talking about Manhattan zoning law in 1916, 'Zoning laws are designed to control the size and scale of buildings, which in turn limits the number of occupants. This reduction in occupancy lessens the demand for access and egress, thereby alleviating traffic on adjacent streets.' On the contrary, in Jesolo the laws served as a medium to construct that 'attractive confusion' Danilo Gerotto refers to, increasing density through a controlled vision that could at the same time guarantee quality to the urban fabric of the beach front.

In the words of Ferriss: 'The limitation in mass had also of course the effect of permitting more light and air into the streets as well as into the buildings themselves (...) The Zoning Law was not at all inspired by concern for its possible effect on architecture'.²⁹ This aspect is clarified in Hugh Ferriss's skyscraper renderings which were meant to show how to get the most out of building volume through a theoretical envelope and produce the maximum financial return on any given block. In Jesolo, planners are tasked with achieving the same level of efficiency, and are moreover requested to navigate an additional layer of complexity when defining buildings' volumetry: market demands, location contingencies and local building regulations.

The following chapter explores the architect's role in shaping the building's volumetry, tracing the process by which local regulations and developer requirements inform the initial definition of the project's financial feasibility. This phase directly impacts both the costs and expected returns of the development, establishing the first concrete and essential constraint on the design process—one that, in many ways, becomes a project in itself.

²⁹ Hugh Ferriss, *The metropolis of tomorrow* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1929), p.72..

2.9 Real estate rules for condominium design: volume

In *Form follows finance* Carol Willis draws a parallel between two of the major cities in the United States: New York and Chicago. The study pragmatically retraces the developments of skyscrapers through an accurate overview of their evolution at the beginning of the 20th century and examines the economic and cultural background connected with this roaring urban phenomenon. ‘Skyscrapers are the ultimate architecture of capitalism’,¹ Willis says, as they reflect the demand for location through the city, which becomes a three-dimensional chart of land value through its buildings.² Willis’s book reconstructs the urban history of New York’s development by stripping away the irrational or supra-rational elements celebrated by Rem Koolhaas. Instead, it offers a detailed analysis of the multiple factors that shape buildings—highlighting how municipal codes, site-specific conditions, and real estate economics often exert as much influence, if not more, than architects and engineers.

Building on Carol Willis’s argument and methodology, if the skyscraper remains the ‘ultimate architecture of capitalism,’ it is equally true that under current global conditions, it has become nearly impossible to identify architecture that does not in some way reflect the capitalist economy. This dynamic is particularly evident in Jesolo, where developments such as *The Beach Houses* are shaped primarily by market forces. Given the town’s scale and projected growth, such projects stand out at the national level.

In Jesolo, the *condominio* functions as the fundamental unit through which urban expansion occurs, forming the basis of the city’s urban planning strategies. While Jesolo holds a prominent position within Italy’s national tourism market, the placement of individual buildings within the city—especially their proximity to the coastline—underscores, as Willis notes, the three essential rules of real estate: ‘location, location, and location.’ This principle is taken into account from the earliest stages of development, where the analysis of comparable supply in the surrounding area helps to determine the project’s initial budget.³

On a national scale, Jesolo’s real estate dynamics are particularly noteworthy, especially considering the town’s size and consistent growth trajectory. By analysing data spanning from 2011 to 2023, with a focus on the annual value of registered transactions within the residential sector,

¹ Carol Willis, *Form follows finance: Skyscrapers and skylines in New York and Chicago*, (Princeton Architectural Press, 1995) p.181.

² *Ibid.* p.155.

³ See Appendix: Francesco Martin (Marina Immobiliare), interview by the author, 29 February 2024.

Jesolo's advantageous position becomes increasingly evident.⁴ Although the volume of residential transactions in Jesolo is not directly comparable to larger markets such as Milan or Rome, evaluating the growth rate offers an alternative and insightful perspective on its real estate performance. Jesolo's growth patterns reflect the characteristics of a tourism-driven economy, characterised by significant seasonal and cyclical fluctuations. Compared to Milan, Jesolo's growth trends exhibit greater volatility. While Milan's growth is relatively stable, Jesolo's peak growth rates are higher, indicating that when conditions are favourable, the city can experience rapid expansion, with notable peaks observed in 2016 and 2021. Despite this volatility, Jesolo's market demonstrates a degree of resilience, as evidenced by the average growth rate during this period (+4.65%), which surpasses that of Milan (+3.21%). The ability to recover after downturns and maintain stability even during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic – which has had a varying impact on tourist destinations – has made Jesolo a location where investors are willing to commit, despite the heightened risks associated with its seasonality and volatility. Following this initial insight, Jesolo appears to be a place worth doing business at.

Following this initial insight, urban codes, and especially municipal codes, are the essential gauge of any investment, followed by several other factors including the specifics of a site, the conception of a profitable programme, the design input from professionals (architect, engineer or *geometra*), technology, taste, nature and place.⁵

While technological advancements were pivotal in the development of skyscrapers — enabling their existence through elevators and influencing building depth and window dimensions via artificial lighting — in Jesolo, the design principles for condominiums are primarily governed by three main factors: commercial, in defining unit size and layout; regulatory, in determining the volumetric parameters of the condominium; and contextual, where the foremost consideration is always the view of the sea.

Local building regulations and the exceptions within this code constitute an important metric for analysing the processes of design and approval of a building. Examining these constraints can provide a deeper understanding of the architectural skill of the designer involved. In this case, the fact that the project is associated with American Pritzker Prize laureate Richard Meier

⁴ OMI (Osservatorio Immobiliare Italiano). 'Average growth based on the values of yearly NTA (Numero di Transazioni Normalizzate)'. <<https://telematici.agenziaentrate.gov.it/DatiOMI/VC/vcMain.do>> [accessed on 10 September 2024]

⁵ Carol Willis, p.143.

presents an opportunity to assess the methodological contribution of a leading architectural figure. This analysis challenges the belief that real estate speculation alone dictates the form and design outcomes of these condominiums.

Once the maximum volume is fixed through urban laws, constructors would search local building regulations for those architectural elements which do not contribute to the calculation of total building volume. These architectural elements constitute implicit bonuses which help constructors to maximise their profit walking the tightrope of legality. Exceptions that can be perfectly handled by local professionals, who draft plans considering all possible 'bugs' in the system.

So, although the project of *The Beach Houses*—the first condominium by a Pritzker Prize-winning architect in Jesolo—is often accompanied by lofty quotes attributed to the architect—intended to persuade potential clients—such as:

I am creating a new concept of space, where you can spend your holidays and leisure time, using human dimensions as the unit of measurement.⁶

The design of this building is the result of a more pragmatic and mediated process than it might appear on the surface.

The following lines describe this process, which led to a set of defined solutions that both respond to market demands and help formalize them within Jesolo's built environment.

These regulatory parameters may derive from local building codes or, as in this case, from the approval documents submitted to the municipality by Studio Antonello—the local architectural firm that oversaw every phase of *The Beach Houses*, Richard Meier's first beachfront condominium in Jesolo.

The regulatory interpretation provided by local architects thus becomes a crucial foundation for any project, even when it involves internationally renowned figures. This document outlines all relevant elements and serves as a key reference for understanding the design decisions shaped by regulatory constraints.

⁶ Jesolo Lido Design District's, *Jesolo Lido Design District: Scopri un'area esclusiva da vivere* (2024) <<https://jidd.it/it/about-us.html>> [accessed 3 July 2024].

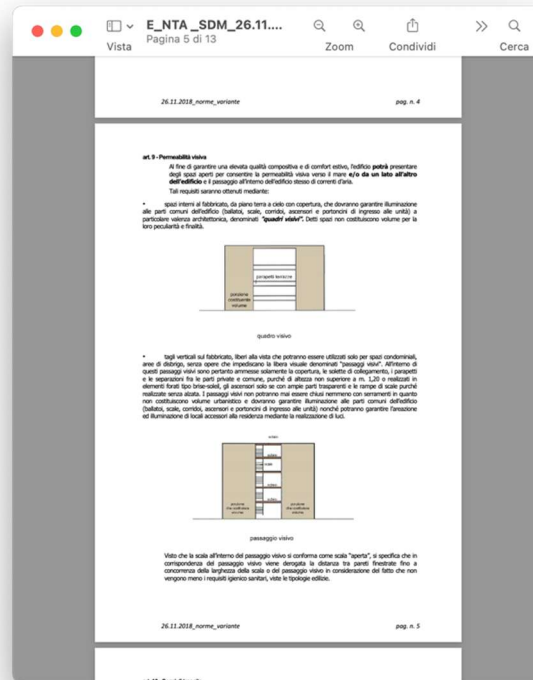


Figure 71 Excerpts from the description of the *Norme Tecniche Attuative* presented by the local architect Antonello Associati.

The first concept clarified in the document is the definition of the volume of the building, which is given by the volume of the emerging solid; to this abstract shape precise elements can be added without contributing to its approved size: beginning with the volume of the elevators – including the shafts in which they will be installed – the volume of the space housing the access ramp to the basement up to the limit it occupies on the ground floor of the building, as well as the space designated for the waste depot, considered as a technical space.⁷ Technical shafts or volumes or technical walkways provided exclusively for accessing the technological parts do not count towards the volume (square metres that will later often be transformed into real rooms).⁸

Also not included in the building’s volume are internal spaces from the ground floor to the sky with transparent roofing to provide lighting to common areas of the building (walkways, stairs, corridors, elevators, and entrance doors to the units) of ‘particular architectural significance’.

⁷ Studio Antonello, Piano Urbanistico Attuativo ‘Stella del Mar’ terza variante elaborati grafici, NTA, ‘Titolo II. Definizioni’, Art.6 (2018).

⁸ NTA, ‘Titolo II. Definizioni’, Art.7.

even if they contain pathways or intermediate walkways that serve to connect the various units, which must have a maximum width of 1.20 metres.⁹

These 'Transit spaces' or 'Transparent passages' often come together with so called areas of 'visual permeability' which are 'open spaces to allow visual permeability towards the sea and/or from one side of the building to the other and the passage of air currents within the building'.¹⁰ These spaces are similar to the 'Visual frames' or 'Vertical cuts', which are areas in the building, free to view, that can also only be used for common areas, utility areas, without elements that obstruct the free view. Within these 'Visual passages', only specific elements are permitted: roofs, connection slabs, railings, separations between private and common areas (provided they are no higher than 1.20 metres or made with perforated elements like brise-soleil), elevators with large transparent sections, and stair ramps without risers. Since these passages do not constitute volume, they must remain open to the view and cannot be closed off, even with shutters.

Internal heights also benefit from some exceptions. Regarding condominiums – overlooking some specific rules for hotel spaces – if the ceiling is not entirely horizontal but includes inclined sections (even small portions), the standard for non-horizontal ceilings (average height) applies. If the ceiling features multiple slopes and horizontal sections at different levels, the standard for ceilings with multiple slopes (virtual height) should be referenced. Exemptions that allow for more flexibility, lowering when possible the required height to 2.40 metres instead of 2.70 metres. Regarding the exterior of the building, the construction of outdoor pools is permitted. These pools can extend inside the building without constituting volume if the enclosed parts, 'preferably with side-folding shutters' (or similar as long as they are openable), are within a portico or open spaces even covered by volume.

Particular attention is paid to the articles related to loggias, balconies, and terraces. Beside the already mentioned 'transparent passages', loggias are permitted and do not contribute to the volume of the building. They are defined as 'a part of a building created within its volume' and their depth can measure 3.00 metres with a suspended projection of one metre. Cantilevered balconies can extend beyond 3.00 metres in depth without adding to the volume of the structure. Moreover, they are not required to maintain the standard distance of 5 metres from the permitted construction boundaries, having to respect just 3 metres.

⁹ NTA, 'Titolo II. Definizioni', Art.9.

¹⁰ NTA, 'Titolo II. Definizioni', Art.10.

But the real ace in the hole of this section about balconies derives from the definition of verandas with a ‘bioclimatic’ function. These elements contribute to the solar gain of the building and thus also are excluded from its volume. In addition, the areas pertaining these verandas are not comparable to cantilevered terraces or loggias and therefore do not contribute to their depth.¹¹ A sort of additional ‘transparent’ room, which normally owners occupy as any other room of the apartment. All these external projections are calculated from the envelope line of the buildings, defined as the line that includes and aligns all fixed or structural protrusions such as partitions, chimneys, niches, walls and pillars. A line which the author of the document cares about defining with a schematic drawing.

The draft version of the document also included two other major elements: rooftop structures named ‘*altane*’ and a structurally detached building envelope named ‘structural façade’. The ‘*altane*’ are rooftop terraces (typical of Venetian architecture) which are allowed to add a maximum total area equal to 40% of the footprint area of the roof, and must be accessible only by lightweight stairs which are excluded from any calculation. Practically, they are terraces that, although they can never be enclosed, can be covered with sliding curtains, photovoltaic panels, solar panels, or other collection systems without contributing to the determination of the maximum building height.¹²

‘Structural façades’ are undoubtedly the most curious element of the entire document. They are envelopes of the building which are exclusively used as a walkway or sun-sheltered terrace. The structural façade must be structurally independent from the main building, supported by pillars connected to the ground, and linked to the main building only for bracing.¹³ No closures are allowed except for those that divide the different units (somehow recalling the Lacaton & Vassal Bordeaux project). But more importantly, they may have a maximum depth of 4.00 metres and may be built outside the construction limit mentioned in the balcony section. A considerable gain of square metres.

Setting aside certain aspects related to underground parking, these are the principal features that characterise Jesolo’s condominium architecture. These elements lie outside the permitted building volume and therefore represent net profit for developers. Moreover, the majority of these

¹¹ NTA, ‘Titolo III. Caratteristiche e parametri costruttivi’, Art.15.

¹² NTA, ‘Titolo III. Caratteristiche e parametri costruttivi’, Art.11 (first draft).

¹³ NTA, ‘Titolo III. Caratteristiche e parametri costruttivi’, Art.12 (first draft).

features are well-suited to the seaside context in which the buildings are situated, offering residents open, transparent spaces that face the sea—or at the very least, open outwards.

This document also outlines the urban planning works provided by the building in exchange for the additional volume granted—that is, the infrastructural and architectural interventions that enhance the existing public space. The most significant of these—alongside various underground services—is undoubtedly the access to the sea, designated as a 517.90 m² area of public right of way.¹⁴

With this set of rules at hand, it becomes easier to understand most of the design choices visible in Jesolo's apartment buildings, beginning with Richard Meier's The Beach Houses, the first condominium built in Jesolo by the world-famous American architect.

The urban approval for The Beach Houses, much like the Tahiti Hotel, was complex and tortuous. The initial phases of this crucial project in Jesolo's urban history are detailed in both Lupo and Badiani's article and Baldassa's thesis, while most of the graphic and descriptive material produced for its approval can be found on the dedicated website or within the municipality archive. This project presents various topics for discussion but for now we will be focused primarily – rather than on Richard Meier's involvement – on its urban and architectural features, to understand how local building regulations influenced its design.



Figure 72 Richard Meier first project for Jesolo. An 83 metres residential tower facing the Adriatic Sea (2003).

To summarise the process which led to the definition of the available volume, the first steps date back to the year 2000, when even before the final approval of the PRG in 2003, a first

¹⁴ NTA, 'Titolo III. Caratteristiche e parametri costruttivi', Art.19.

proposal for the rehabilitation of the Colonia Monte Berico foresaw the realisation of an 83-metre tall tower opposite the sea.¹⁵

Despite the advancement of the project, the idea was soon abandoned due to its impact on the surrounding existing and upcoming buildings highlighted by the *Soprintendenza*, pushing the developer to decline this initial volume through different solutions. The entire project involved three main figures: Richard Meier as the architect (Studio Antonello & Associati as the local office), Danilo Gerotto representing the administration, and Peter Reichegger, the head developer of the Hobag group from Bozen in the north of Italy.



Figure 73 Postcard showing Colonia Monte Berico on the right and the green 'degraded' area behind (c.1990).

The plot where this development is set consists of an abandoned area presenting scattered buildings immersed in an unmanaged green area; not exactly the unbridled and dense urbanization that surrounded the Tahiti Hotel, but 'degraded' enough to require intervention and thus divert from Tange's idea to include it in Jesolo Lido central park. Spanning 45,000 sq.m, the area was divided in two: one inland, covering 35,000 sq.m with a 'regular' developing plan, and one of 10,000 sq.m facing the sea, which was included by the PRG in the 'B3' seafront zone for densification.

¹⁵ This proposal was presented in 2001, even before the approval of the 2003 PRG. Proving the necessity for developers to anticipate the regulatory system. Comune di Jesolo, 'Piano di recupero ex Colonia Monte Berico', 20 July 2001.

The first built project located inland encountered no particular difficulties, leading to the realisation of *The Pool Houses*. A complex of two-floor contemporary townhouses organised around a 48 metre-long and 6 metre-wide swimming pool.

The second project, more ambitious, reminiscent of the initial tower, involved the area facing the sea that would benefit from the PRG building bonuses.

Considering the existing volume of 29,281,49 m³, the densification bonus of 100% allowed for a total volume of 58,562.98 m³, later extended to 62,524 m³.

In 2004, Jesolo Immobiliare srl, part of the Hobag group, presented a project consisting of three blocks: two hotels, each 41 metres tall, and a residential tower facing the sea, this time 70 metres tall. The project did not want to give up on its landmark but, as in the case of the Tahiti Hotel, the *Soprintendenza* came into play.¹⁶ The area was not exempted from its jurisdiction, forcing both the developer and the administration to reshape their proposal.



Figure 74 On the left *The Pool Houses*, on the right the proposal for *The Beach Houses* comprising the residential tower and two hotel towers (c.2003).

The result of this negotiation led to a solution comprising of two buildings instead of three with a considerable height reduction. None of the already approved 62,524 m³ was wasted but the project had renounced its verticality. One building now consisted of a hotel 27 metres tall (with

¹⁶ Comune di Jesolo, DCC, 30 giugno 2008, No. 68.

a reduction from 13 to 7 floors), while the condominium was 34 metres tall (with a reduction from 23 to 8 floors).¹⁷

This is the initial volume of Richard Meier's condominium *The Beach Houses*. Now that the highest volume possible had been extracted from the urban law, the next process was to obtain the maximum number of square metres through the regulatory exceptions in the building regulations.



Figure 75 The Beach Houses. View from the beach (2013).

Looking at *The Beach Houses* from the street, or even better from the beach, the building seems to be made of two materials: steel and glass. If colour was a material, 'white' should also be mentioned but this aspect requires an in-depth analysis that can be tackled later. The long-coveted volume appears as unitary but aerial, disembodied, deprived of its mass. A preliminary estimate of this apparent volume can be calculated by multiplying its 70x20 metre footprint by its 34 metre height, resulting in 47,600 cubic metres, which is approximately 77% more than

¹⁷ According to Lupo and Badiani: '*Jesolo Immobiliare S.r.l.* submitted an application for the approval of a new Monte Berico Redevelopment Plan on 2 April 2007 (Protocol No. 19248), which was adopted by Municipal Executive Resolution No. 179 on 24 April 2007 and subsequently approved by the City Council with Council Resolution No. 68 on 30 June 2008. See also Zanutto (2007): following a meeting with the Venice Heritage Authority (*Soprintendenza*), Calzavara announced that the buildings in Meier's 2005 project—originally planned at 13 and 23 storeys—had been reduced to 8 and 6 storeys, with an increase in floor area and the relinquishment of 6,000 cubic metres of hotel volume. However, no trace of this reduction can be found in the final approved Redevelopment Plan.' Lupo and Badiani, p.131. trans. by the author.

the approved volume. The length of the building exploits the entire plot, spanning from the margins of the plot facing the street to the mandatory limit of 30 metres from the beach imposed by the municipality.

Just observing its façade we already begin to recognise some of the elements which do not contribute to the building volume. Horizontal sunshades run all around the building elevation, sometimes becoming vertical partitions, sometimes parapets, or decorative elements. They give consistency to a façade which, looking more carefully, is composed of numerous deep cantilevered balconies, which in fact are the real façade of the building, in between the sunshade layer and the full height glass walls where thicker white frames enable you to recognise the parts that can be opened.

Looking at the plan of the building, what initially appeared as a single, unified volume from the outside is composed of five blocks interspersed with four transparent service volumes, each measuring 2.7x9.2 metres. Each of these service volumes houses a metal staircase, a spacious landing leading to the apartment entrances, and a glass elevator. Two glass walls enclose this shared space making it possible to see through, allowing this space to be classified as a ‘Transient space’ or ‘Visual passage’ that does not contribute to the building volume.



Figure 76 The Beach Houses. The areas contributing to the total building volume are highlighted with black hatching and correspond to the five residential blocks described in the text. The image also shows the property boundaries, the minimum required setback from the beach (dashed line), and the approved limits of the construction area, offering a clearer understanding of the applied regulations. Plan reconstruction and contextualisation by the author (2024).

The building is composed of two types of living units from the first to the eighth floor. The standard unit is a 6x15 metre double bedroom apartment, east-west oriented (parallel to the sea), with the entrance and the two toilets interposed between the living and the sleeping area. The apartments have a gross floor area of 85 sq.m and a net floor area of 75 sq.m, plus a 10-square-meter private balcony. The layout demonstrates careful attention to the positioning of service spaces and built-in storage, aligning with the most in-demand apartment size in Jesolo.¹⁸ One single unit constitutes the first block facing inland, while the following three blocks towards the sea present the pairing of two units, each divided by a shared continuous wall with the entrances located on different 'Transient spaces.' The paired plans of the two units follow the literary rhetorical figure of the chiasmus, exchanging the orientation of the living area from east to the west. A variation that enhances the privacy of each unit by preventing the 2.5 metre deep and 4.5 metre wide balconies – extensions of the interior living rooms – from being directly adjacent to each other.

A different living unit composes the fifth and last block facing the sea. This block comprises two mirror-image units, each measuring 14x7.5 metres. These north-south oriented apartments (perpendicular to the sea) feature three bedrooms and three bathrooms. The seafront living room and corresponding 2.5 metre deep cantilevered balcony are positioned at the end of a 9.5 metre-long corridor that provides access to all the rooms. This final projection of the building extends beyond the insurmountable 'area of respect' that prohibits construction within 30 metres of the beach; a space where only the sand separates the observer from the sea.

¹⁸ By analysing sales volumes in relation to apartment sizes over the years, we can identify which types of apartments are most in demand. In Jesolo, the most sought-after apartments range from 50-85 m², followed by those between 85-115 m², under 50 m², 115-145 m², and lastly, those above 145 m². Jesolo's market trends differ from inland cities like Treviso, where apartments between 85-115 m² are more popular, and apartments under 50 m² almost irrelevant. Interestingly, Jesolo's trends align closely with Milan, which shows a similar ranking. A hint of the overlapping condition between seaside and metropolitan contexts where for different reasons each user is pushed to spend less time as possible at home. However, since 2019, in Milan apartments under 50 m² have slightly surpassed those between 85-115 m² in sales volume. This narrowing of the gap between these two categories is also becoming evident in Jesolo. Source: Data analysis by the author based on data from Osservatorio del Mercato Immobiliare, Volumi delle Compravendite (OMI) between 2011-2023. Dataset available <<https://telematici.agenziaentrate.gov.it/DatiOMI/VC/vcMain.do>> [accessed 10 September 2024]

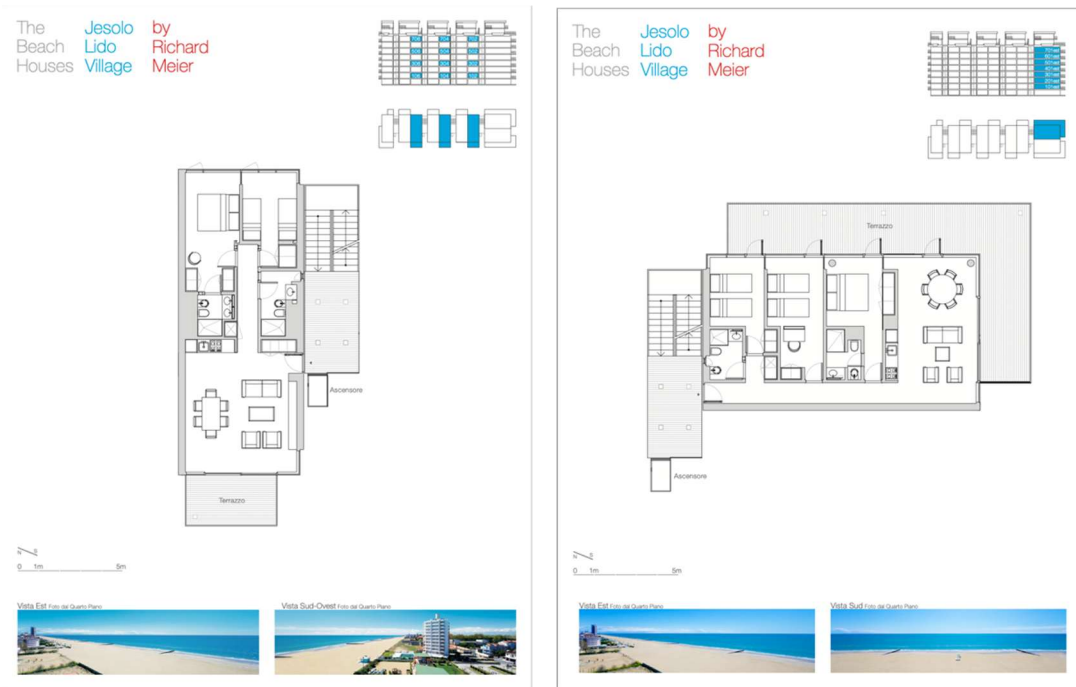


Figure 77 On the left the standard unit, on the right the frontal one. Hobag group, *The Beach Houses brochure* (2013).

The last two floors, the eight and the ninth floor, are occupied by the penthouses, one for each block. The term penthouse derives from the Old French word *apentis*, which stood for ‘attached building’ and whose modern spelling is formed by the French *pente* and English *house*.¹⁹ The diffusion of this concept parallels the history of condominiums, emerging in the early 19th century and experiencing significant growth after the end of World War I.²⁰ Penthouses today are expensive apartments at the top of a building (usually a tall one), mostly luxurious and with panoramic views. This definition also fits well with *The Beach Houses*, where these exclusive apartments comprise two floors with a private staircase, double height spaces, bedrooms with private bathrooms, one suite bedroom with walk-in closet and above all a huge terrace with a private swimming pool. The proportions of the terrace in relation to the interior spaces are striking, especially when examining the largest penthouse located atop the sea-front block, where the terrace exceeds the internal area by 50%. A space which again does not contribute to the building volume despite the external staircase and the 40 sq.m covered area.

Instead of simple additions to the volume, today penthouses might appear as the true reason that justifies the overlapping of all the other units underneath. Apartments that guarantee big

¹⁹ ‘Penthouse’, Oxford Dictionary [Online], <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/penthouse_n?tab=fact-sheet#31125511> [accessed 26 June 2024].

²⁰ Books Ngram Viewer inquiry for the word ‘penthouse’. <https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=penthouse&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=en-2019&smoothing=2> [accessed 26 June 2024].

profits to constructors who secondly need to fill the in-between floors that divide penthouses from the ground floor where the entrance and shared amenities are located.²¹



Figure 78 The Beach Houses Penthouse facing the sea. Hobag group, *The Beach Houses brochure* (2013).

The ground floor of the building has mixed use. The three central blocks present the same living units as those on the first through to the seventh floors. However, instead of having cantilevered balconies, the living rooms extend into small private gardens.

The first block, which faces inland, houses the reception area, while the last block, facing the sea, contains the spa and internal swimming pool, an area that is enclosed by a system of folding windows and does not contribute to the building volume due to its transparency and ‘technical’ function.

Amenities play an essential role in condominiums, especially luxury ones. They essentially provide shared commodities to residents, and can be considered as an indicator of the level of luxury of the condominium itself: from swimming pools – which become essential the further away from the sea the condominium is – to other leisure commodities such as gyms or spas. These features serve both to attract potential buyers and to pre-select a clientele capable of not

²¹ See Appendix: Simone Gobbo, interview by the author, 25 September 2023.

only purchasing an apartment but also sustaining the ongoing costs associated with the annual maintenance of these high-end amenities.

In this case, Meier’s intervention brought Jesolo’s condominium amenities to a new standard. *The Beach Houses* adds various amenities to its privileged position opposite the sea: one shared garden with nine maritime pine trees, a spa with changing rooms, a sauna, showers, one internal hydromassage, three external swimming pools, one of which heated, one with an area of 190 sq.m and a linear one with a length of 70 metres. Outside there are more showers, a sun deck and a lounge area with wooden deck flooring, and finally, outside the property, facing the sea there is an equipped public beach.



Figure 79 *The Beach Houses* amenities plan (2013).

Meier Partner’s project successfully combines ‘zero volume’ features through a series of meticulously controlled spaces and details, where wall integrated closets and services results in a clean and rational plan. Here, the exploitation of voids enhances the holiday experience for a relaxed and tourist-like lifestyle, promoting the hybridisation of external spaces, considered as the real ‘living area’ during the summertime, sometimes even providing external cooking areas.²² All service areas such as bathrooms and kitchens are extremely parsimonious in size, even

²² See Appendix: Francesco Martin (Marina Immobiliare), interview by the author, 29 February 2024. External cooking areas are provided in all penthouses.

in penthouses where luxury reaches its highest level.²³ Kitchens are composed of four 60x60cm modules in standard units and 5 modules in penthouse apartments. In the former case, they are always part of the living room, while in the latter, they are part of an open dining room. Bathrooms in standard units measure 3 sq.m and 4.7 sq.m, while the largest bathroom in the penthouses measures 4.8 sq.m.²⁴ This sizing suggests a limited use of these areas, as their function is aligned with a lifestyle in which minimal time is spent at home, in a seaside venue that encourages an outdoor-oriented daily routine.

Privacy and leisure are the two principal aspects that influence Jesolo's architecture. Privacy ensures that there is no promiscuity between different units, for example by designing balconies that do not face each other and providing direct access to the units from the underground car park. Leisure, on the other hand, is addressed through a wider range of features that encompass both extrinsic and intrinsic aspects.

Extrinsic aspects include proximity to the sea, panoramic views, and good orientation. Intrinsic aspects encompass both shared and private amenities, as well as elements that constitute the façade of the building, such as balconies, verandas, terraces, transparent spaces, and shading elements. Penthouses occupy a special place, serving as exceptional units in any block. These leisure features, involving technical, transparent, and open-air spaces, are crucial for the economic return and marketing success of any development. They overlap with elements that do not contribute to the building volume, making them indispensable to constructors.

Maximising the potential of any context is a fundamental aspect of speculative initiatives, and the example described above is not the first to adopt these measures. Richard Meier's project has served as a trailblazer for an authorial conception of this process in Jesolo, where the contribution of a world-famous architect and the use of architecture as an essential asset played a crucial role in the development of the building, from its approval to its sale. This approach is part of a broader strategy in Jesolo, known as *Jesolo 2012 The City Beach*, which has led to the

²³ Kitchens are composed of four 60x60cm modules in standard units and 5 modules in penthouse apartments. In the former case they are always part of the living room, while in the latter they are part of an open dining room. Bathrooms in standard units measure 3 sq.m and 4.7 sq.m, while in penthouses the biggest bathroom measures 4.8 sq.m.

²⁴ Looking at local building regulations we learn that at least one bathroom must have a minimum surface area of 4 square metres and be equipped with a window facing the exterior—in this case, overlooking the visual passage. All other bathrooms are only required to have at least one side measuring more than 1.20 metres in width. Comune di Jesolo, 'Minimum Space Requirements'. *Regolamento edilizio*, Art. 26 (2009).

repetition of this process through other examples. In Meier's case, it extended the same operation to an entire neighbourhood, serving as a reference for many other local architects.

In conclusion, a comparison with a subsequent project of a similar scale allows for an assessment of Richard Meier's ability to act as a mediator, as demonstrated in the case of *The Beach Houses* and the *Jesolo Lido Design District* as a whole. The comparison is with the proposed *Wave Sea View* project, a seafront condominium complex consisting of five independent buildings on a lot of similar dimensions to Meier's.



Figure 80 Rendered image of the *Wave Sea View* (2024). The perspective is taken from the beach looking inland, highlighting the five independent building blocks facing the sea.

Resulting from the same process of demolition and reconstruction with an increase in volume, the complex rigidly adheres to the concept suggested by its name, *Sea View*, by proposing a dispersed layout of two-unit structures separated by a transparent stairwell. However, without allowing any visual permeability between the street and the sea, the project ultimately fails to mediate between the city and the landscape, clumsily attempting to resolve—through a mere divergence in the orientation of the second-row units—a problem created by the designer himself.

While Meier consolidates all units into a single block to maximise the visual connection between land and sea, improve sea accessibility, reduce its footprint and pragmatically design his building as part of a cohesive whole, the *Wave Sea View* demonstrates how absolute adherence to market demands, without meaningful architectural mediation, results in *monstrosities*.

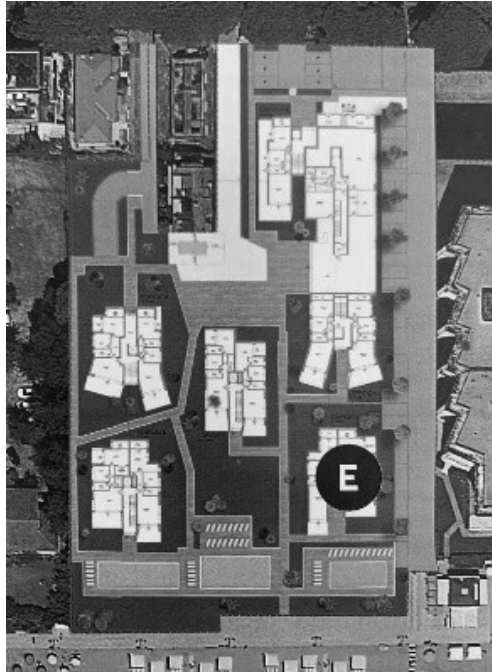


Figure 81 The layout of The *Wave Sea View* condominium complex. At the bottom, the beach. The independent buildings are clearly visible, along with the main shared amenities such as pools and the solarium (2024).

Real estate in Jesolo is driven by financial calculation, regulatory navigation, and the commodification of leisure. Jesolo's building code becomes a toolkit, enabling developers to maximise surface and profit by pushing the legal boundaries of what counts as 'volume.' Real estate, in this context, becomes a technique of extraction—of space, value, and visibility.

What *The Beach Houses* demonstrates—beyond its aesthetic signature or association with Richard Meier—is the degree to which within this tightly constrained framework, architecture still plays a critical role—not simply as an image, but as a mediator of urban experience. Meier's project succeeds not just by adding visual refinement, but by organising mass, openness, and programme into a coherent whole that interacts meaningfully with the coastline. His ability to coordinate the regulatory framework, market demands, and architectural identity sets a precedent in Jesolo's speculative environment.

In contrast, projects like the *Wave Sea View* complex reveal the risks of removing architectural authorship from this equation. Without a guiding design intelligence, speculative development risks collapsing into incoherence—repeating typologies without spatial clarity, severing connections between buildings and their urban or natural contexts, and reducing the city to a field of isolated objects. Jesolo's urban diversity is therefore not simply a by-product of different styles or typologies, but a result of how architecture intervenes—whether to compose, translate, or resist the pressures of pure market logic.

If Meier's *Beach Houses* elevated the standards of condominium architecture in Jesolo, it did so by embedding architectural expertise within the economic and regulatory machinery of the city. His project reveals the potential of design to drive both differentiation and urban quality in a context otherwise governed by repetition and short-term logic. Jesolo is not the site of a singular architectural narrative, but a contested ground where every façade, balcony, and floor plan becomes a negotiation between finance, policy, and the possibility of architecture. The following chapter explores this logic by focusing on the essential elements of Jesolo's architecture.

2.10 Real estate rules for condominium design: features

Jesolo may not be the first place one thinks of when discussing architectural experimentation, global design culture, or the politics of urban form. Yet that is precisely what makes it so revealing. This beach town-turned-tourist machine has, over the past two decades, become an unlikely testing ground for the ambitions of high-profile architects, the demands of real estate development, and the uneasy mediation of public institutions. In Jesolo, architecture does not merely provide shelter—it performs. It negotiates. It sells.

This overview explores how architecture in Jesolo operates within a highly specific condition: where the promise of expertise collides with the need for visibility, and where the built environment is less a product of coherent planning than a result of overlapping agendas. From the landmark aspirations behind Richard Meier's *Beach Houses* to the conflicted mimicry of Gonçalo Byrne's *Torre Merville* and the expressive defiance of ElasticoFarm's *Podium*, Jesolo reveals a city where architecture is constantly repositioned—caught between image and regulation, between aesthetic branding and environmental constraint.

Here, the condominium becomes the city's core urban brick, not simply as a building, but as a socio-economic and architectural phenomenon. Condominiums are at once anonymous and highly curated, standardised and bespoke. They are speculative artefacts, framed by zoning tools, manipulated through heritage negotiations, and sometimes justified by ecological gestures, often superficial in nature. Yet within this field of constraints, architects are not absent—they're repurposed. Their role shifts from authors to mediators, from form-makers to image-providers, sometimes even to symbolic guarantors of quality.

What emerges in Jesolo is not a clear architectural narrative, but rather a layered, sometimes contradictory field of strategies. Jesolo presents us with an architecture of productive miscommunication—a landscape where each project negotiates a delicate balance between aspiration and concession, identity and neutrality, presence and absence. These are towers that attempt not to appear as towers, structures whose ecological intentions are overwhelmed by glossy façades, buildings that aim to disappear into the landscape while simultaneously rising higher than anything else in view. 'Whiteness,' in the case of Meier, becomes both signature and camouflage. 'Blackness,' more recently, emerges as a counter-trend, another layer of symbolic distinction in a city obsessed with visibility.

Yet within this surface-level homogeneity lies an unexpected driver of urban diversity, contrasting interiors homogenization. Architecture, in Jesolo, produces contrast—not through overt urban planning or deliberate socio-spatial mix, but through formal, typological, and representational variation. Each project introduces a different atmosphere, logic, and spatial experience: the austere minimalism of Meier contrasts with the scenographic abstract naturalism of Byrne, which in turn diverges from the expressive tectonics of ElasticoFarm. These contradictions break the monotony of the grid, interrupt the regular rhythm of the seafront, and inject a form of fragmented identity into the urban fabric.

This diversity is not always harmonious, nor is it the product of a pluralist planning vision. Rather, it is a by-product of overlapping private interests, institutional constraints, and the branding power of design. But it nonetheless generates a peculiar kind of richness: a city where, despite the dominance of the condominium as typology, architecture introduces different spatial strategies for living, seeing, and being seen.

This text does not seek to celebrate or criticise Jesolo's architecture in conventional terms. Rather, it traces how architecture here becomes a lens through which we can read broader tensions: between expertise and market logic, between regulation and creativity, between architecture as discipline and architecture as commodity.

Jesolo is not an exception. It is a prototype for a form of urbanism increasingly common: shaped by tourism, fuelled by speculation, mediated through aesthetic codes, and built on the unstable foundations of image and desire. Its architecture is not the background—it is the story itself.

Expertise

In 1981, an international competition for the design of a new opera house in Paris was ordered by the newly elected President François Mitterrand. The opera house was meant to be part of his large monument-building programme known as the '*Grands Travaux*', through which Pei's pyramid at the Louvre was also built. In 1983, after receiving more than 700 proposals, with the architects' names kept hidden, Mitterrand and his aides mistakenly assumed the design was by the distinguished American architect Richard Meier. It was not.¹

¹ Joshua Barone, 'Why the Ugliest Opera House in Europe Was Worth Building', *The Independent* (2019), <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/paris-opera-house-bastille-grands-projets-palais-garnier-ott-architecture-a8779356.html>> [accessed 16 July 2024].

The competition was won by little-known architect Carlos Ott, a Uruguayan living in Canada, whose design recalled Richard Meier's pure lines and abstract materiality.

The completed project resulted in one of the most controversial buildings of the period. Considered 'ugly', 'cold' and 'anonymous', it failed to be accepted by the public. The building is still functioning but since day one has presented a number of unresolvable issues, such as the positioning of the main entrance on top of a rarely used grand staircase, the narrow lobby, and the lack of intimacy and charm of the interior spaces.

The case of Ott shows how the success of certain figures does not necessarily depend on full control over their discipline. It also illustrates how, even though an architect's image often becomes their primary mark of recognition, it can distract from a judgment of the project's intrinsic value. On the other hand, as shown in the case of *The Beach Houses*, Meier—despite his dogmatic image—continues to represent both a guarantee of design control for a high-profile clientele and a mediator of architectural quality and the surrounding spaces.

Placed within Ott's career as an architect, this episode takes on even greater significance. Ott later shifted into a more 'touristic' architect, focusing mainly on commercial and residential buildings, especially in Dubai—where he signed the iconic seven-star *Burj Al Arab*—and in Latin American capitals, adapting his language and intentions according to the different contexts.

The involvement of Richard Meier sought to attract new attention on Jesolo's real estate market, serving as a stimulus for the city after Kenzo Tange's masterplan. The key figures behind his involvement are Danilo Gerotto, head of the Urban Department; Renato Martin, mayor in charge; and the developer Peter Reichegger, head of the Hobag group from Bozen. Gerotto and Martin represent the political will driving the project, while Reichegger embodies its entrepreneurial aspect.

Despite the initial involvement of the Milanese office Vudafieri Saverino, the development was considered an opportunity for the participation of a world-renowned architect such as Richard Meier.² The selection of the American Pritzker Prize winner among other 'star-architects' was not just due to his fame but also his expertise. Richard Meier is not only the architect of some of the best-known cultural buildings of the XXI century, but looking at his portfolio the number of residential buildings constructed by the sea also stands out, more than 25 from 1964 to 2006, starting with his first built project, a tiny house on the dunes of Southampton in 1967, to the

² See Appendix: Peter Reichegger, interview by the author, 26 September 2023.

massive redevelopment of Miami Surf Club completed in 2019.³ Richard Meier, simply as a highly qualified and experienced professional, would already be a reasonable choice.



Figure 82 Richard Meier's first project. *Lambert Beach House*, Fire Island, NY (1962).

Among the other figures involved, a connection can also be seen between their work and the field of leisure or, more explicitly, tourism. This reveals a kind of curatorial approach by the administration and developers involved, aiming to offer guaranteed-success products developed by professionals with experience in similar contexts.

From Carlos Ferrater's work on the Benidorm seafront, to Gonzalo Byrne's extensive experience at various scales culminating in the iconic Lisbon lighthouse tower; from Aurelio Galfetti's iconic house in Paros, to Zaha Hadid's first iconic project—the Peak Leisure Club in Hong Kong; from the whiteness of Aires Mateus' neo-Mediterranean architecture, to Meier's neo-modernist language, widely applied in his many water-related projects, especially those in

³ Looking at Richard Meier's monographies edited by Rizzoli from 1964 to 2009, it is notable to see how many projects were developed by the sea, beginning with his first project in 1962, when still working at Breuer's office. A list of residential buildings by the sea includes: Lambert Beach House (Fire Island) 1962, Hoffmann House (East Hampton) 1967, Saltzman House (South Hampton) 1969, Maidman House (Sands Point) 1976, Douglas House (Harbor Springs) 1973, House in Palm Beach (Palm Beach) 1978, Ackerberg House (Malibu) 1986, Santa Monica Beach Hotel (Santa Monica) 1987, Shwartz Residence (Laguna Beach), Beach Houses (Malibu) 2001, Neugebauer House (Naples, Florida) 1998, Santa Ynez House (Santa Ynez) 1999, Beach House (Southern California) 2001, Santa Barbara House (Santa Barbara) 2001, House at Sagaponac (Southampton) 2001, Jesolo Lido Hotel and Residential Complex (Jesolo) 2004, Flying Point Residence (Southampton), Bodrum Houses (Yalikavak), Pacific Coast Residence (California), Gardone Residence (Gardone), Fire Island House (Long Island), Seamrq Hotel (Gangneung), Montagnola Residence (Montagnola), The Surf Club (Miami), Ward Village Gateway Towers (Honolulu), Miramar Hotel competition (Santa Monica). Richard Meier and others, *Richard Meier, Architect: 1964-1984* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984) *1985-1991* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991) *1992/1999* (New York: Rizzoli, 1999) *2000-2004* (New York: Rizzoli, 2004) *2004-2009* (New York: Rizzoli, 2009).

Miami — these examples reflect that same strategic alignment between architectural identity and high-profile leisure development.⁴



Figure 83 One of Richard Meier's most recent projects. *The Surf Club*, Miami (2016). Richard Meier & Partner's website.

After their expertise, the leverage of the figure of an architect can be measured in his or her image and reputation. This quality becomes essential in the negotiation process that any developer must address with different stakeholders, including: the municipality, the heritage office, investors, real estate agencies, consultants, and end clients.

The need for 'architecture' can be justified and judged by the impact that it has on these actors, but is this asset always worth it? It 'depends', as Jeremy Till would say, on aspects that span from the architectural aspirations of the developer to the need for profit behind any speculative process. It is in this 'delta' that the possibility of architecture dwells.

⁴ Richard Meier & Partners, *The Surf Club* (2016) < <https://meierpartners.com/project/the-surf-club> > [accessed 24 Novemebr 2024].

Landmark

Richard Meier's involvement initially focused on the creation of a new landmark for the city and a low-rise residential complex. However, the proposed 83-metre tower was later scaled down and reconfigured into the complex that today includes *The Beach Houses*. This section examines the contradictory role of landmarks in Jesolo, where—despite their symbolic function—they often become the subject of a *productive miscommunication*.

As previously noted, with the full support—and indeed complicity—of the municipality, which was the initiative's strongest advocate, the primary obstacle emerged from the *Soprintendenza*, whose jurisdiction within 300 meters of the coastline encompassed most of the high-rise proposals in the designated densification zone. Initially underestimated, this obstacle became unavoidable by 2004, effectively halting or delaying the municipality's and developers' vision for a radical transformation of the city.

When the *Soprintendenza* blocked projects on various grounds—such as excessive building height, insufficient setbacks, or incompatibility with the surrounding context—developers and local officials not only criticised what they saw as a lack of responsiveness to critical investment opportunities, but also condemned the perceived indifference toward the aesthetic and visionary ambitions of internationally recognized architects. This recurring conflict cast the *Soprintendenza* as a conservative force resisting internationalisation, a stance encapsulated by then-mayor Renato Martin's blunt summary: 'short is good and tall is bad.'⁵

Within condominium production, towers have been the most controversial building typology. They guarantee the highest profit from a limited plot of land, but they are also a risky investment since their construction requires more capital, their allocation requires more time and, particularly in Jesolo, they must overcome the scepticism of the *Soprintendenza*.

The idea of towers in Jesolo is incorrectly attributed to Kenzo Tange despite originating with the Swiss architect Aurelio Galfetti, who proposed the construction of a series of tall buildings to reduce the impact on land consumption but also to 'allow visitors to perceive and measure the territorial extension of Jesolo from a distance.'⁶ A vision which sought its definition in 2002 through his proposal for the redevelopment of Jesolo's *pineta* entitled *Progetto Europa*.⁷

⁵ Comune di Jesolo, DCC, 30 June 2008, No. 68. Found in Lupo and Badiani, p.131.

⁶ See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023.

⁷ [s.n.], 'Progetto Europa Jesolo', *Archi: rivista svizzera di architettura, ingegneria e urbanistica*, 3 (2006), <<https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-133468>> [accessed 2 September 2023].

This project consists of a series of tall, translucent volumes suspended above ground, preserving the surrounding forest while accommodating the approved building volume.

Moreover, towers in Jesolo—and more broadly along the Adriatic coast—are not a new phenomenon.⁸ However, contemporary landmarks are now required to justify their height by offering ecological benefits, minimising their environmental footprint and reducing their impact on the surrounding landscape.

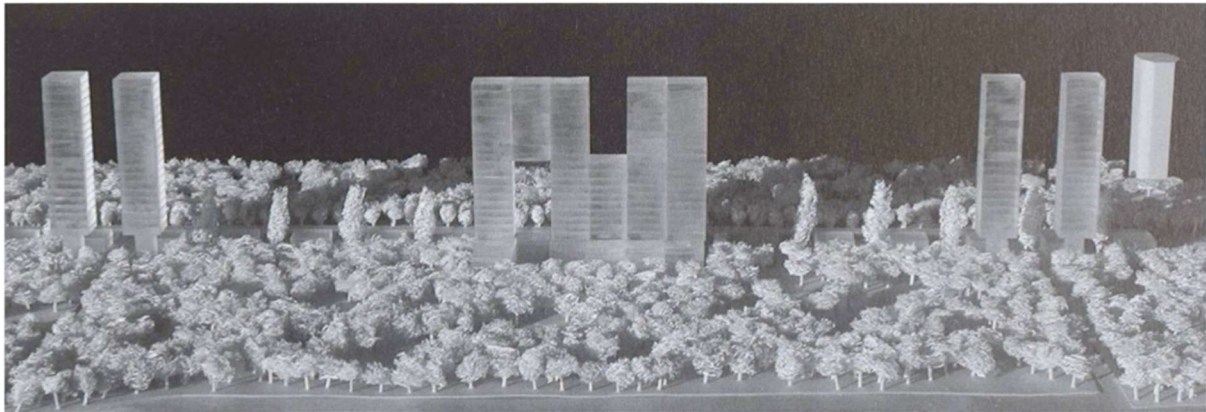


Figure 84 Aurelio Galfetti, *Progetto Europa*, Jesolo Pineta (2002).

The *Torre Merville* (2011), the only realised tower of *Progetto Europa*, encountered the strenuous opposition of the *Soprintendenza* leading in 2005 to the interruption of the project and to a direct confrontation with the municipality which had supported the rehabilitation of this stretch of the *pineta* since the 1999 PRG. An area where the 1977 PRG expected the progressive demolition of the existing buildings and Tange's masterplan imagined a low-density development, later transformed by the municipality into a low-rise tourist village.

Despite these initial restrictions, the area became the centre of a new intensive development drive led by construction company Cogetrev Spa from the nearby town of Treviso. This company not only inherited the previously approved 25,000 cubic metres but also transformed the existing site limits, originally intended to preserve the forest, into an opportunity to construct a tower instead. The project was brought to completion through the introduction of a new urban tool called *PIRUEA*, which allowed private investors to construct in exchange for rehabilitating

⁸ Jesolo's main towers at that time were: the Residence Pineta, 60 m (1964); the Residence Palace, 48 m (1980).

degraded areas.⁹ Additionally, bureaucratic disputes regarding the opinion of the *So-
printendenza* played a role in advancing the project, which was completed only in 2011.

As part of Jesolo's star architects programme, Gonçalo Byrne (architect) and João Nunes (land-
scape architect) were tasked with planning a complex that included a tower and a few low-rise
buildings. Their brief required them to respect the existing pine trees while also reducing the
visual impact of the development's volume, all without sacrificing the approved cubic metres.
A duo which could not only guarantee the undebatable quality of the operation but also its
respect for nature, a concept reinforced by the project's second name: *Casa nel Parco* (House
in the park).



Figure 85 Gonçalo Byrne and Joao Nunes, *Torre Merville*, Jesolo Pineta (2011). On the left the area dedicated to the public park, on the right the area with the tower and the residential buildings.

The area of the *Torre Merville* is composed of two plots: one plot facing the sea measuring 24,000 m² where there is a 24-floor residential tower with a commercial basement and three residential blocks of 4 floors each, and one inland occupied by a 22,000 m² public park designed by the landscape architect Joao Nunes.

This park is the first ecological output of the development, bargaining chip of the entire complex which helps to shed a different light on the status of landscape design as wholesome offshoot of architecture, in contact with nature and harmless. The truth is that, similarly to public parks, that are often just means for new developments, landscape design today is an essential speculative tool that both justifies the built cubic metres and at the same time increases the

⁹ The term PIRUEA, which stands for '*Programma Integrato di Riqualificazione Urbanistica e Ambientale*' ('Integrated Programme for Urban and Environmental Redevelopment'), is found in Article 16, paragraph 5 of Law No. 1150/1942 and in Article 5 of Veneto Regional Law No. 23/1999. This law was later repealed by Veneto Regional Law No. 11/2004, which, as is well known, replaced the PIRUEA with the '*Piano Urbanistico Attuativo*' (P.U.A.), or Implementing Urban Development Plan.

value of developments as additional amenities. To this end, the external public park, consisting of suspended wooden paths that 'respect' the existing pine trees and undergrowth, along with the private garden featuring a perfectly manicured lawn surrounding the residences and the shared swimming pool, appear to be less honest than the architecture they surround.

Back to buildings, the most interesting aspect of this project is the contradictory challenge of building a 'mimetic' landmark – a contradiction in terms. Byrne's ecology does not use greenery to legitimise itself but visually manifests through two different 'mimetic' building envelopes: a series of continuous vertical shaders made of wood from Canadian cedars for the lower residential blocks, and glass plates coloured in different shades of green and blue for the façade of the tower and the commercial basement. This solution aims to merge the tower with the surrounding landscape, an effect enhanced by the reflection of the glass surfaces at different times of day, addressing the primary challenge posed by this building: that of minimising its visual impact. Byrne's answer is architectural, 'honest in its lie,' almost 'beaux-art' in its pictoriality, and strengthened by an indisputable attention to detail and alignments that distinguish the building from the average condominium. An architecture of miscommunication over space; instead of 'I am a monument', the highest residential building in Veneto prefers ambiguously to say 'Look at me, I'm not here.'



Figure 86 The two different forms of mimetics. The wooden clad residential building and the 'celestial' tower on the right. Image from Gonçalo Byrne's website (2011).

This sort of 'shy duck', as Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour would put it, similarly manifests also in the case of the *G-House* (2013), developed by the local entrepreneur Gianni Gobbo,

originally designed by the talented Venetian architect Valter Tronchin and completed by the Swiss architect Aurelio Galfetti with Luciano Schiavon.

The building was meant as a new landmark for the area of Piazza Marina on the western side of the Lido, outside the density area but addressed by a *PIRUEA* as in the case of the *Torre Merville*. A piece of architecture designed to redevelop a marginal area, through private initiative.

This condominium by the sea counts thirteen above ground floors reaching an height of 47.30 metres, each floor occupied by a single unit. And when in 2009 the construction site was blocked due to controversies with the municipality and the *Soprintendenza*, the building was already half completed.¹⁰

The original elevation designed by Tronchin consisted of a white articulated volume with one side open towards the sea featuring large balconies, enclosed in three-dimensional projecting volumes. The inland side was closed off, with scattered windows and small isolated balconies. However, the building must have appeared too complex and out of sync with its surroundings, obliging the developer to seek aesthetic alternatives.



Figure 87 Valerio Tronchin's G-House. Back and front elevation towards the sea (c.2009).

Due to Tronchin's untimely death, the developer needed a new architect whose prestige and expertise could solve the heritage office's perplexities in the shortest time, negotiating a new

¹⁰ Veronica Baldassa, p.155.

building envelope with the *Soprintendenza*.¹¹ The choice fell on the renowned Swiss architect Aurelio Galfetti, who had already worked in Jesolo on the above mentioned *Progetto Europa*. While the building's plan remained almost unchanged, the façade underwent a significant transformation, characterised by simplified forms and the extensive use of glass and wood, as documented in the local newspaper.¹² The tower now appears more abstract and lacks three-dimensionality, with an inland façade where all openings are hidden behind a perforated metal sheet, while the seafront facade highlights the design's mimicry intentions, with bluish continuous parapets that blend the building in with the sea and sky.



Figure 88 LVL Architettura (Aurelio Galfetti and Luciano Schiavon) G-House (2013).

Both *Torre Merville* and *G-House* exemplify the contradictory relationship of Jesolo's architecture with its external contingencies. A place where the market demand for uniqueness and the imposed dialogue with the authorities produces a sort of neutered architecture.

Both Byrne's and Galfetti's mimetic design express a form of authorship that is detached from Hobbes's definition in *Leviathan*, where real authors are persons who, first and foremost, accept responsibility for a text and, secondly, 'own' that text, retaining the right to determine its meaning. In this case the building's meaning appears as an imposition rather than a proposition.

¹¹ See Appendix: Luciano Schiavon (LVL), interview by the author, 29 February 2024.

¹² [n.d.], 'Torre di piazza Marina, pace fatta', *La Nuova Venezia*, (22 June 2011), < <https://nuovavenezia.gelocal.it/venezia/cronaca/2011/06/22/news/torre-di-piazza-marina-pace-fatta-1.1450352> > [accessed 25 July 2024].

Despite the absence of historicity, Jesolo's architecture landmark aspirations constantly need to compromise with the surrounding landscape.

The current condition of stratified construction, imposed by contemporary building systems, highlights the role of architecture as symbolic representation. At times, however, the previously described relationship — in which the envelope legitimises the operation's sustainability and sensitivity to its surroundings — can be reversed. In such cases, internal structural solutions aligned with sustainability criteria may be adopted, only to be later softened or concealed by an exterior image tailored to market preferences.

In the case of The XLam Tower (2019), designed by Demogo, the disconnect between the building's external appearance and its 'ecological core' contributes to this ambiguity. The tower takes its name from the technological construction system at its base, which consists of a structural framework of cross-laminated timber (CLT) panels—a construction system that inherently requires a final cladding layer.

Externally, however, the building does not present itself as a timber structure, nor does it adopt a mimetic approach, as seen in previous examples. Instead, one façade is characterised by a series of small openings on a white plaster surface, while the main elevation is divided by two slender vertical bands of balconies, articulated through coloured ceramic sunshades.

The architects cite Gio Ponti's decorative language as a source of inspiration, adopting a design strategy that seeks to animate a project otherwise constrained by its structural system. The tower was originally envisioned as the tallest residential wooden tower in Europe, yet it remains un-built.

Nonetheless, the project illustrates how architecture seems to legitimise its own existence through the prior fulfilment of ecological expectations provided by its timber structure—a kind of reciprocal compensation, where references to Mediterranean traditions, à la Gio Ponti, and the tourist context serve to accelerate and reinforce the project's narrative.



Figure 89 Note the two blocks separated by the usual transparent core, a response to building regulations, as well as the difference in scale of the attic and the privacy ensured by the clear separation of the units. Demogo's Xlam tower (2019).

In conclusion, another more subtle form of mimicry appears to be that of Richard Meier who appears to completely detach his work from its surroundings through the obsessive repetition of his stylistic code. His authorship instantly stands out for his adoption of the colour white as his signature. But observing more carefully and looking at the surrounding built environment, what might appear at first glance to be a distinctive signature, in Jesolo and more generally in most seaside venues could be considered another form of mimicry, which instead of mimicking the surrounding territory reaches invisibility through conventions. Thanks to his mastery of the modern alphabet, Meier's architecture epitomises the architecture of the seaside so well that today his buildings appear to be the ultimate version of the average condominium in Jesolo. Moreover, what aesthetic observations could the heritage office offer to an architect with such a globally recognised body of work and well-defined stylistic framework? Language, that allows developers to make Richard Meier's choices aesthetically unquestionable in front of the heritage authority (just the height of the intervention was rejected). Even when the heritage office questioned the chromatic redundancy within the *Jesolo Lido Design District*, asking the Pritzker Prize winner to add some 'variety' to his design, they were unsuccessful in modifying his architecture. An episode that shows how the discretion of the *Soprintendenza* can be bent by the leverage of an architect.¹³

¹³Richard Meier's complex was criticised for being too white and having too much glass. [n.d.], "*Jesolo, edifici con troppo vetro e troppo bianco*" *La Soprintendenza bacchetta lo stile dell'archistar Meier*, *La Nuova Venezia* (12 October, 2023) < https://nuovavenezia.gelocal.it/regione/2023/10/12/news/jesolo_soprintendenza_stile_meier_archistar-13778564/ > [accessed 12 Septemebr 2024]

Whiteness

‘White makes the differences between openings and closures, between solidity and transparency, between linear elements and planar elements, between envelope and structure more evident. White brings architectural elements to life.’¹⁴

‘Sitting on La Playa del Tejon at La Costa Careyes on eve of the last day of the year 1990, looking out at the steel blue sea, the only white I find is the foaming surf gently touching sand streaked with volcanic black. (...) White become the signal of the sea touching land, of horizontal disappearing into vertical. White is the ephemeral emblem of perpetual movement.’¹⁵

(...) ‘Daddy, what is your favourite colour?’ Every time we play this game, my response is the same: ‘White.’/ ‘But Daddy,’ Joseph says, ‘you can’t choose white. White is not a colour; white is not in the rainbow; you have to choose a colour that is, like red or green or blue or yellow.’ And I explain each time that I think white is the most wonderful colour of all, because within it one can find every colour of the rainbow.¹⁶

Richard Meier’s emphasis on the colour white is a fundamental aspect of Jesolo’s architecture, that extends beyond the aesthetic quality and colour of a building. The American architect continues the legacy of the neoclassical rationality of Carl Fredrick Schinkel and the ‘Mediterranean exotism’ that modern architecture has adopted going back to its best-known exponents, the Bauhaus movement and Le Corbusier. The colour white is Meier’s signature. He explains his devotion for this colour on many levels: it helps emphasise the geometry and purity of his architectural designs, it enhances natural light and colours, it serves as a versatile and neutral background, it represents clarity, purity and perfection.

Jeremy Till questions the concept of modernist ‘purity’ in his book *Architecture depends*. Purity is characterised by cleanness, the removal of waste, and, whiteness.¹⁷ The consequence of this belief is that modernist architectural beauty links with pure forms, the elimination of decoration, and white walls. An idea which was further reinforced by the correspondence of visual order to social order, leading architects such as Le Corbusier to the conclusion that creating architecture was synonymous with imposing order – a form of radical surgery to heal the city.

Today ‘the myth of purity’ has been partially exacerbated by facts, but architecture is still the main tool for creating exclusiveness within the city and white the colour that most of all can

¹⁴ Richard Meier and others, *Richard Meier, architect: 1985/1991*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), p.8.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Richard Meier and others, *Richard Meier, architect: 1964/1984*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), p.8.

¹⁷ Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends*, (Cambridge, Mass., London: MIT Press, 2013).

satisfy real estate needs for neutrality, value, and the sense of spaciousness required in both interior and exterior spaces.¹⁸

In the *Jesolo Lido Design District* project, ‘whiteness’ is not just a colour and reveals itself in different ways, also emphasised by the meticulous attention to detail of the building rules that regulate condominiums. For example, in common areas such as the swimming pool, every resident is supplied with branded (and compulsory) white towels matching the building's colour. In the same spaces, the presence of beach umbrellas beside the pools is discouraged to avoid conflict with the building's image.¹⁹ Moreover, one episode perfectly describes ‘whiteness’ in its different facets: the ‘White Party’ occasionally organised for condominium residents.²⁰



Figure 90 The White Party held around *The Pool Houses*' swimming pool to celebrate winning the 'Dedalo Minosse Prize' in 2012.

This event generally consists of a private themed party where all guests are dressed in white, an international trend with various manifestations that here represents an exclusive opportunity

¹⁸ White pigments, such as titanium dioxide and calcium carbonate, are generally less costly to produce than many other pigments. They are abundant and thus have lower costs. Moreover, since they reflect more light and are resistant to fading, they require less pigment for achieving high coverage, making them economical. Despite being 'pure' white is essentially also 'cheap.'

¹⁹ See Appendix: Peter Reichegger, interview by the author, 26 September 2023.

²⁰ Two 'White Parties' are documented on *The Beach Houses*' website: The 'White Party' to celebrate winning the *Dedalo Minosse Prize* – international prize for the best client – that is also part of the video advertising Jesolo Lido 2012 City Beach, and the 'White Party' organised in front of the construction site of *The Beach Houses*, attended by Richard Meier in person.

to interact with the condominium residents. The 'White Party' is held around the swimming pool, as amenities serve as a key element of distinction, fostering social exchange while simultaneously enforcing exclusion from the outside world.

This episode is reminiscent of the 'Hotel Astor Ballet' described in Koolhaas' *Delirious New York*. On that occasion the most influential architects of Manhattan dressed up like their own buildings, symbolically reproducing them through eccentric costumes and headgears. 'The Skyline of New York' – this is the name of the costume competition – symbolised Manhattan's competitive urban environment through a beauty contest while the 'White Party' represented the exclusivity that Jesolo's condominiums seek to achieve.

The success of a themed party depends on the mutual agreement of a defined set of rules, that in this specific case derive from the architecture itself. The architecture is the backdrop of a staged event with residents dressed in the same colour as their building. The event reached its apex when the residents and guests were joined by Richard Meier in person, who also dressed in white and added to the perfection with his distinctive white hair. A sort of complicity and self-irony, mixed with a sense of identity and self-esteem deriving from their membership of this group, makes the 'White Party' the mirror of Jesolo's architectural hunger for exclusivity, boosting its residents' public identity.

The party can therefore be considered a highly symbolic moment in which architecture most powerfully expresses its representative role. At the same time, it also reflects a moment of strong exclusivity and selection. It is no coincidence that a fallen champagne bottle during a party on the top floor serves as the narrative incipit of J.G. Ballard's infamous novel *High-Rise*, whose title was translated as *Il condominio* in its Italian version.²¹ Ballard plunges the individual out of the virtual world (the building) into a real world of dystopian events.²²

'Whiteness' is therefore a highly-controlled non-inclusive and self-sufficient dimension where architecture serves both as an instrument of social recognition and a marketing and personal branding tool.

²¹ James Graham Ballard, *High-Rise* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975).

²² John Gray and Will Self, 2 December 2011, 'JG Ballard', Watershed, online video recording, < <https://www.watershed.co.uk/audio-video/john-gray-and-will-self-jg-ballard> > [accessed 17 December 2024].



Figure 91 Peter Reichegger and Richard Meier dressed in white visiting the construction site of the *Beach Houses*.

This dynamic similarly manifests also in the common practice of giving condominiums names. All condominiums must have names since they are legal entities that require formal identification but in contexts such as Jesolo, this naming takes on a symbolic significance. The most common ones refer to exotic venues, names of cities, names of flowers, names of Greek or Roman divinities or more simply female names, often inherited after the conversion of former hotels into condominiums. The best-known ones are part of the city's toponymy and have become reference points within the city.

The *Jesolo Lido Design District* reveals its urban ambition in its name. It is Jesolo's Rockefeller Center, the most ambitious and influential urban project on its completion. The neighbourhood was developed in steps, with *The Pool Houses* serving as the trailblazer together with *The Beach Houses*, followed by *The Summer Houses*, *The Beach Residences*, *The Sky Villas* and finally *Richard Meier Tower*. The strength of this project goes beyond the single building, and its uniqueness derives from the construction of an entire neighbourhood designed by the American architect, after whom the tower that would become a new landmark in the city is named.



Figure 92 Rendering of an aerial view of *Jesolo Lido Design District*.

Here, a ‘private club’ environment transforms design into the theme around which the complex’s aesthetic revolves. Even the streets are named after authoritative designers: Via Carlo Scarpa, Via Aldo Rossi and Piazza Le Corbusier. Architecture is present in every detail, merging seamlessly with the lives of its residents and elevating their status.

The indoctrination of residents begins with the brochure dedicated to *Jesolo Lido Design District* where a picture of Richard Meier surrounded by white maquettes outlines the key features of his work. Each new owner receives a monograph about the architect’s work when signing the deed, providing an opportunity to explain the uniqueness of their home to future guests.

Patrick Schumacher considers the evolution of cities into sorts of ‘clubs’ as part of the natural development of the neoliberal city. Exclusiveness which brought to an extreme in a free-market system leads to competition based self-ruling cities (or condominiums) offering different services (or amenities) empowered by the personalised governance of each closed system.²³

The *Jesolo Lido Design District* is not just white but ‘whiter’ than any other condominium, in the same way other condominiums aim to be the highest (*Torre Aquileia*), the most sustainable (*X-Lam Tower*), the most eco-friendly (*Torre Merville*), the most eccentric (*Podium*) or the closest to the sea (*G-House*).

²³ Arno Brandhuber and Christopher Roth, 25 September 2017, ‘The Property Drama’, ETH Zürich, online video recording, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4_TaW7Pquw> [accessed 11 July 2024]

The *Jesolo Lido Design District*'s innovative focus on the spaces between buildings sets it apart in Jesolo. The development considers landscape design and sea access an essential component for the success of the project by the local landscape architects CZstudio.²⁴

Despite this, and despite each building's emphasis on transparency, the condominium remains an enclosed entity. Its most significant relationship with its surroundings is financial: the increased value of adjacent plots driven by the building's successful and influential image.²⁵

To this extent, the *Jesolo Lido Design District* represents an exemplary development that over the course of twenty years has given a new identity to a non-existent location through the mutual positive influence between each block and with regards to the accessibility of the beach and the space between the buildings. An example of made up 'virtuality' or 'whiteness' which, even if the initial plot was not part of the densification area within Kenzo Tange's Masterplan, accurately interprets the Japanese architect's intention of reorganising the seafront through private initiative.

A new trend has emerged in the last few years: 'Blackness'. After Meier's influence turned Jesolo's subsequent developments into a sea of white buildings, white became the new norm, leading black to represent a new form of distinctiveness. Local developers have begun embracing black finishes in their projects, such as the *Seven* condominium by ANK Studio or the *Wave Twin Tower*, a bold and aggressive design with a Trump Tower-like aesthetic that hopes to be the next big thing in town.²⁶

In this case, black—borrowing the words of Valerio Paolo Mosco—functions as an "anti-kitsch device," a further form of disguise that conceals the building's true identity. In this building, among the various manifestations of black in architecture, we encounter the version associated with reflection through transparency, as noted by Corbellini. Reflection, in fact, operates in a manner akin to transparency, through its illusory, dematerialising qualities and its capacity to establish an automatic continuity with the surrounding context.

²⁴ This aspect is stressed by Peter Reichegger himself. When in the early 2000s he flew to New York to convince Richard Meier to consider their proposal, the American architect asked him who was going to design the exterior landscape of the project. No-one had considered this aspect before. This story not only highlights the developer's opportunism in 'selling' a feature of his product but, more importantly, underscores Meier's ability to negotiate for a superior outcome for his project and the developer's openness to new ideas. By considering the urban quality of the development from the beginning, Meier ensured a more holistic approach to the design. The landscape design was assigned to renowned Venetian landscape architects CZstudio.

²⁵ Reinier de Graaf, *Architect, Verb: The New Language of Building* (New York: Verso, 2023).

²⁶ Giovanni Cagnassi, 'Wave Twin Towers, ecco i nuovi simboli del lido di Jesolo', *La Nuova Venezia* (2023) <https://nuovavenezia.gelocal.it/regione/2023/07/20/news/jesolo_wave_twin_towers_appartamenti_quanto_costano-12955517/> [accessed 13 September 2024].

Again black (especially if polished) has a counterintuitive interesting capacity in this regard. The images sent back from very dark glass, metals, ceramics and marble return however a shimmering world, extremely sensitive to lighting conditions and with a ghostly, liquid quality, able to combine solidity and absence.²⁷

In Jesolo, therefore, contrary to the sense of estrangement—a spatial alienation through darkness that, as Bruno Zevi reminds us, is traditionally associated with architectural typologies such as catacombs or the interiors of Romanesque churches—black is instead imbued with a paradoxical ‘solar’ connotation.²⁸



Figure 93 Rendering of the *Wave Twin Tower* (2023).

Finally, at the end of his career in 2016, Richard Meier himself was asked to design a black building. The building, located on a prestigious plot in Manhattan, is wrapped in a black glass curtain and advertised as ‘Richard Meier’s First Black Skyscraper’.²⁹ The architect explained very frankly how this happened:

It wasn’t my choice to build a black building. Our client came to me, and he said, ‘Richard, I really like your work, but I want a black building. Would you do a black building?’ ‘Well’ I said ‘Why not? Why not try something new?’³⁰

²⁷ Giovanni Corbellini, ‘Nero/Black’, *Recycled Theory: Dizionario illustrato/ Illustrated Dictionary*, ed. by Sara Marini, Giovanni Corbellini (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016), 95-101 (p.98).

²⁸The term ‘solar’ recalls Gio Ponti’s definition of ‘*architettura solare*,’ used in the 1930s to describe the emerging architectural focus on holiday spaces associated with sun therapy.

²⁹ Leslie Anne Wiggins, ‘Richard Meier’s First Black Skyscraper Will Be in New York City’, *Architectural Digest* (2016) <<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/richard-meiers-first-black-skyscraper-new-york-city>> [accessed 6 September 2024].

³⁰Richard Meier, 2018, ‘Esistenza Tempo Spazio’, Plane, online video recording, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RT53kRtEPu8>> [accessed 6 September 2024].

Interiors

If James Wines' research—preceded by the notorious *New Yorker* vignette beloved by Koolhaas, as well as Le Corbusier's *Plan Obus* (1932)—centred on discovering a form of individual expression within the high-rise typology (famously illustrated by his drawing of a tower block in which each floor hosts a single-family home), in Jesolo, residents instead pursue a uniformity of message. One that can instantly signal their status as part of a shared social group, or serve as a means of connecting with a higher social class. At least this holds true in the prestigious and luxurious condominiums which are the subject of this research, while the opposite is often demonstrated in less affluent settings, where condominiums are frequently associated with forced communal living, leading to difficult coexistence. In some cases, living in a condominium with a notorious reputation can be a burden in itself.

In Jesolo's high-end condominiums, architecture is increasingly reduced to a façade, while the interiors follow a formulaic, market-driven script. Rather than encouraging individual expression, these spaces project social status through a curated minimalism designed for instant recognition. Interiors are detached not only from their surroundings—with layouts prioritising privacy, insulation, and controlled views—but also from architectural authorship.

The result is a visual language of staged neutrality, curated by decorators and real estate agents, where diversity can even prove counterproductive—particularly when bold architectural choices clash with market expectations—illustrating the risks of applying high design principles in a context that privileges familiarity over innovation.

The very etymology of the word 'apartments' suggests a sense of privacy and separation from others, positioning them as the primary space for individual expression within condominiums—though sometimes even this is limited.³¹ While sociological studies have explored how family structures shape interior spaces, in Jesolo the design of interiors predominantly reflects market demands. These interiors are characterised by two main features: the minimisation of service areas, including kitchens and bathrooms, reduced to their essentials, and a tendency for outdoor spaces, such as balconies, whose sizes are maximized. In fact, this can be identified as the primary exceptional feature when compared to its urban equivalent. The layout maintains the typical distinction between night and day zones, but the 'living' area components—such as

³¹ 'Apartment', Oxford Dictionary [online], <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/apartment_n?tab=factsheet#1032422> [accessed 29 February 2024].

the kitchen, dining table, sofa, and TV— are compressed into a single room that opens to the outside. During the summer months, this outdoor space effectively becomes an extension of the interior. Vacation settings, temporally suspending the routine of urban settings with fewer demands, change our relationship with the domestic space. Here one has the impression of a sort of staged reality.³²

To understand the prevailing aesthetic of contemporary interiors, one only needs to browse any online real estate platform, where a series of nearly identical interior renderings depict the typical modern apartment: white walls, light oak parquet flooring (or its synthetic equivalent), minimalist white kitchen cabinetry, and sporadic colourful furniture elements.³³

A discernible trend in these representations is the imperative that the images be immediately comprehensible and familiar, thus minimising the opportunity for the expression of the building's architectural identity. In rare instances, the design of interior spaces and the architectural composition of the building engage in a deliberate dialogue, although this approach is not consistently well-received by the real estate market.



Figure 94 Jesolo interior renderings from real estate agency websites (2024).

The visual content of renderings and photographs of newly constructed condominiums tends to be highly standardised. Typically, the first interior image in any advertisement is a wide-angle,

³² The concept of decoration holds intrinsic value for middle-class and upper middle-class households, who used it as a means of distinguishing themselves from popular or working-class housing. In Jesolo's condominiums, however, luxury is conveyed through an affinity for minimalism. The aforementioned 'staged reality' is not a reflection of deprivation but rather communicates a sense of detachment from the everyday, emblematic of a social class that can afford to prioritise experiences over material possessions, and quality over quantity.

³³ Despite these aspirations, the anti-decorative principles advocated by figures like Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier are only superficially adhered to. The resulting interiors, while cared for meticulously by their owners, often feel devoid of life. The emptiness is occasionally alleviated by strategically placed design objects, which inject splashes of colour into the otherwise neutral, impersonal furnishings. This is a minimalism stripped of substance, where natural materials are replaced by their cheaper, artificial, and easier-to-maintain replicas, offering texture but lacking authenticity.

two-point perspective shot that captures the kitchen, dining table, and living area, with a full-height window in the background revealing the balcony and the panoramic view beyond.

Home ownership has historically facilitated the growth of interior design, particularly in the period following the Second World War. However, with the expansion of home ownership beyond the upper middle class, coupled with the fact that consumer goods have become widely accessible to the broader population, it has become increasingly challenging for individuals to achieve self-celebratory or status-affirming effects through the personalisation of their homes.³⁴ This existential boredom underscores a deeper disconnection, an emotional void that luxury objects cannot meaningfully address. Such feelings of emptiness are further intensified in spaces associated with tourism, where boredom becomes not merely a possibility but an imposed condition.³⁵

As interiors have increasingly become spaces of consumerism and individualism and work, facilitated by entering of the internet of the domestic space, the most immediate parallels can be drawn to Koolhaas's concept of 'junkspace' and Augé's notion of 'non-place.' Here, as Koolhaas points out air-conditioning, as a prerequisite for complete detachment from the external environment, and interiors exhibit characteristics typical of consumerist spaces: disconnection from context and temporality, a lack of identity, simulation, fragmentation, and the paradoxical coexistence of overabundance and minimalism.³⁶

In addition to these two well-established spatial categories commonly discussed in architectural literature, the concept of holiday spaces introduces an additional layer to domesticity — what is often referred to as 'liminal space', a term popularised through internet culture.³⁷

The interior layout of a condominium in Jesolo serves as an illustrative example of this space. Upon entering through the front door, the visitor is guided through a reception area that leads to a vertically organised, 'transient and transparent' core, which includes both the staircase and

³⁴ Filandri, Loagnero and Semi, p.40.

³⁵ This phenomenon reflects the bourgeois tendency to legitimise personal desires and mitigate boredom through the acquisition of refined, and at times eccentric, objects - a theme explored in depth by Alberto Moravia in *La Noia* (1960). In Moravia's work, boredom is not merely the absence of activity or interest but is described as a 'lack of relations between the parts', representing a profound sense of alienation and disengagement from both the external world and the self.

³⁶ Rem Koolhaas, 'Junkspace', *October*, 100 (2002), 175-190.

³⁷ Liminal spaces are transitional areas, devoid of subjects, whether real or imaginary, which evoke a sense of unease and nostalgia. Vacation spaces fit within these categories, oscillating between the comfort required by tourists and the unease caused by vacancy outside the tourist season.

the elevator. Ideally, an underground parking garage provides a more discreet and private entry to the elevator, hidden from the gaze of others, which is convenient for everyday tasks such as carrying groceries or ensuring privacy in more intimate situations.³⁸ To further enhance the privacy of each individual unit, the opportunity for interaction between residents is minimised outside of shared amenities which, furthermore, are unoccupied for most of the year due to the seasonal nature of these spaces.

Moreover, beside the transitory shared spaces of the condominium, even the interiors of apartments, despite their non-transitory nature, can evoke a similar experience. In such spaces, a sense of familiarity merges with the unease stemming from artificiality and the awareness of a lack of permanent occupation. A feeling which is generally heightened in second homes, where the return to a setting shaped by different times — often left unchanged due to a lack of renovations — conjures sensations of nostalgia and remoteness



Figure 95 Interior view of *The Beach Houses* seafront apartment (c.2013).

In the case of *The Beach Houses*, the design of the interiors of the principle penthouses is realised by the local firm Attico Interni, using marketing features as design assets. These features

³⁸ See Appendix: Simone Gobbo, interview by the author, 25 September 2023.

respectfully deals with Richard Meier's 'concept' through 'neutral elements', 'neutral colours', but also 'objects with character'. Internal layouts where 'the keyword is 'filter' in the sense of a physical and visual diaphragm of transformability and flexibility.'³⁹ Although architecture often remains external to the individual units in this case, according to the local decorator Meier's architecture permeates the apartment itself.

In contemporary society, where social identity requires more signals and, more importantly, a more complex narrative compared to traditional societies, owning an apartment in a development like *The Beach Houses* signifies an awareness of architectural distinction. To be a 'Meierian' — that is, to possess such a space — offers numerous advantages, including the elevation of one's personal image.

These buildings transform the egalitarian and functional principles of modernism into symbols of elite status and power. More importantly, they are designed to retain their value over time. As one Internet ad describes:

A home NEVER LOSES VALUE; each house is unique in its structure, finishes, environmental characteristics, and location. For all these reasons, a home represents a real estate asset that preserves its ARTISTIC AND ECONOMIC VALUE over time.⁴⁰

As previously mentioned, *The Beach Houses* feature apartments that reflect Jesolo's configuration, with minimised service spaces and a strong emphasis on the exterior, suggesting a lifestyle where many functions are frequently outsourced to areas outside the home.

In contrast to the typical condominium, however, the spatial design here is meticulously managed with an almost obsessive attention to alignment, recesses, and custom furniture. This demonstrates that luxury is not only reflected in materials but also in the precision of spatial control. For instance, the careful alignment of the façade with the interior room divisions through a subtle joint creates a seamless continuity between the exterior and interior. Additionally, the structural elements, such as round pillars in living spaces, are thoughtfully exposed, while in the night areas they are seamlessly integrated into the interior partitions. In this context, interior design firms must carefully balance their interventions, adhering to a strict set of aesthetic guidelines established by the architect.

³⁹ Stefano Foffano, 9 August 2023, 'Attico Jesolo', online video recording <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNhQveJ8Css>> [accessed 12 November 2024].

⁴⁰ Trovit Case, *Quadrilocale in vendita a Jesolo, Lido Di Jesolo* (2024), <<https://case.trovit.it/listing/quadrilocale-in-vendita-a-jesolo-lido-di-jesolo.1V51lu1PC1fK>> [accessed 9 October 2024].

The extent to which Richard Meier's architectural references — such as his emphasis on cultural significance, control, lightness, and attention to detail — are fully understood by clients remains difficult to quantify, even for the developer of *The Beach Houses*.

In fact, the developer himself acknowledges that while many of these intricate details may go unnoticed or unappreciated by most clients, the objective of the project was not merely to minimise effort and maximise returns. This claim is supported by the challenges involved in collaborating with an architect located overseas, who constantly demands perfection in execution. However, this project becomes more feasible when considering that an apartment in a Richard Meier-designed building today can command more than double the price of any comparable property in Jesolo, even though the truth is that comparable examples do not exist.⁴¹

By contrast, an examination of other condominiums reveals that the involvement of a world-renowned architect can also produce unintended consequences—a dynamic exemplified by Carlos Ferrater's *Torre Aquileia*, which offers valuable insight into these complexities. The tower is the highest residential building in Veneto. Counting 22 floors, it surpasses the *Torre Merville* due to its top spire, reminiscent of a venetian *guglia*, reaching a final height of 94 metres. The tower is also part of a *PIRUEA*, whose approved volume derives from the rehabilitation of an area that today consists of a public square at the foot of the towers. What is interesting about this building is its plan and the concept behind it. If the architect's intentions behind *Torre Merville* could be summarised in the world 'mimicry', in this case the word would be 'privacy'.

⁴¹ The average cost per square metre in Jesolo Lido Est, currently the most expensive area in town, is €4,595/m². The scale of the *Jesolo Lido Design District*, a unique development within Jesolo, renders direct comparison with other projects difficult. Nonetheless, a brief comparison with structures offering similar features in locations equidistant from the sea highlights the exclusivity of this operation. In 2024 the price for an apartment in *Richard Meier Tower*, the highest-quality development in the area (24 floors) was around €13,000/m². This is nearly double the price of *Torre Merville* (24 floors) at €7,300/m² and *Torre Aquileia* (22 floors) at €6,800/m², and almost three times the price of a 'non-high' building such as *Marlin Tower* (15 floors) at €3,800/m². The Wave Twin Towers, a direct 'non-high' competitor (25 floors), stands at €9,600/m². (October 2024) *The Beach Residences*, seven floors by the sea, a development comparable with *The Beach Houses* apartments, stands at €16,000/m².

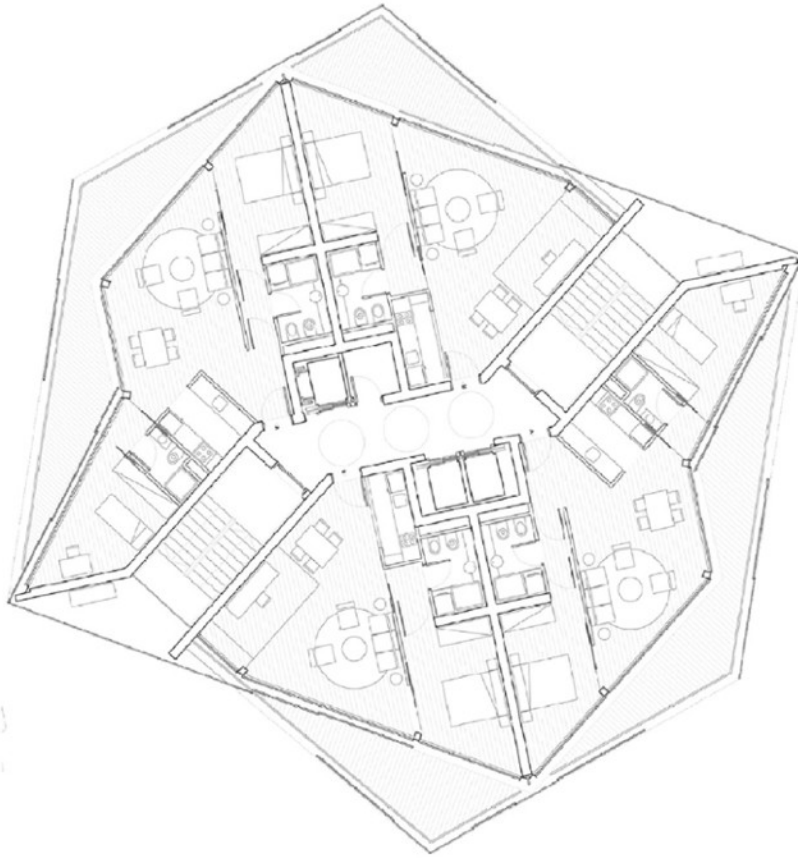


Figure 96 Torre Aquileia, Carlos Ferrater. Plan showing the intricate layout of the four residential units (2008).

'Privacy' is at the core of the plan of the building which comprises four units within an irregular octagonal plan. All units are served through a central core, with two staircase and four elevators connecting each floor to an underground car park. A vertical connection which guarantees residents maximum comfort but also discretion. Examining the floorplan in greater detail reveals that the octagonal shape is a deliberate design choice. This geometry minimises the points of intersection between the balconies of different units, effectively preventing any potential interaction between residents when outside. The subsequent complexity of the interior layout is the result of this choice and balances the building's octagonal exterior with the regular vertical elevator and staircase shaft, creating sharp spaces with triangular rooms and acute corners. A different approach compared with the average condominiums unit plan that can be found in all the previous examples.

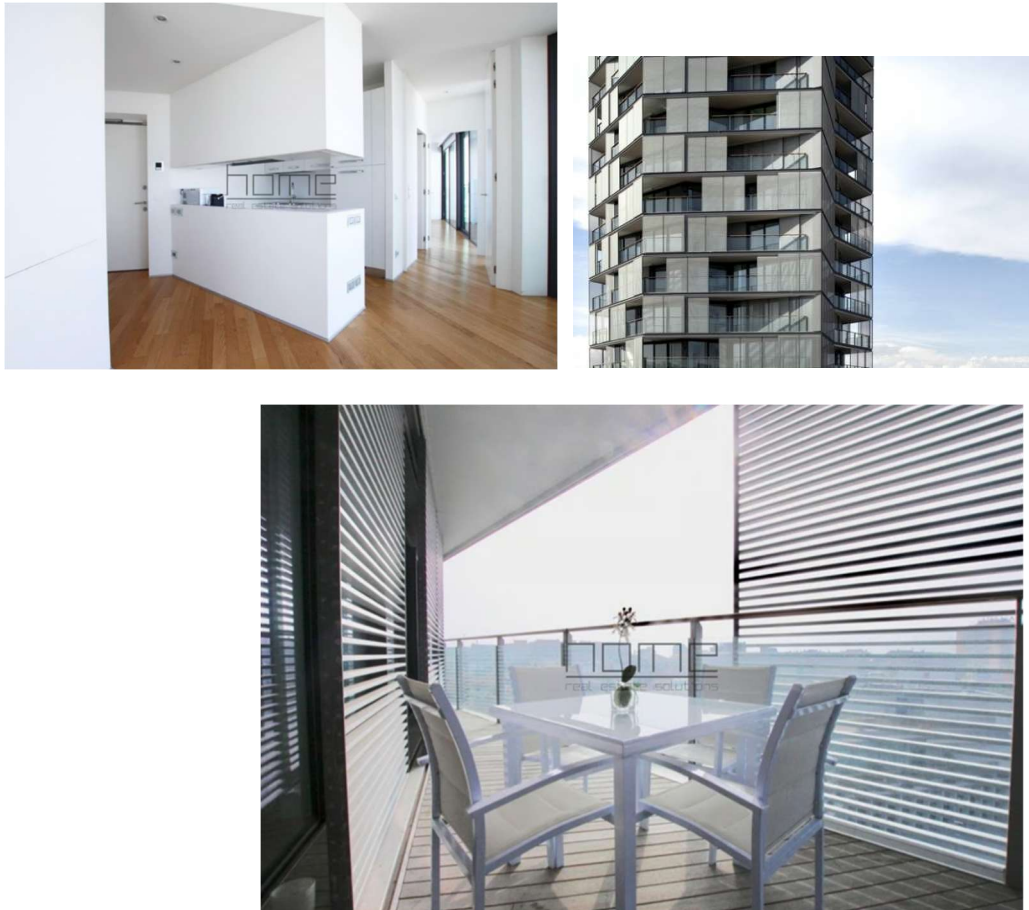


Figure 97 Element of privacy in Carlos Ferrater's Torre Aquileia. Interior images the 'sharp corner' spaces (2008).

The lack of orthogonality was the first reason for the failure of the operation, in which most of the units were left unsold. Customers were intimidated by the oddly shaped internal walls, which could cause a sense of unease among inhabitants.⁴²

An episode which illustrates how architects can not only fail but also do so intentionally. For example by overloading with architectural aspirations spaces such as the apartment interior, disrupting the regularity of the units dictated by the real estate market. As demonstrated by the numerous renderings online, the market favours solutions that are immediately understandable to potential clients, who often have preconceived notions about how an apartment should look. An episode that constitutes a dangerous precedent in the involvement of renowned architects in Jesolo, whose work, perhaps, could be limited to the design of an appealing building envelope.

⁴² Giovanni Cagnassi, 'Torre Aquileia a Jesolo invenduta: Ora si cedono le singole case', *La Nuova Venezia* (16 February, 2019), < <https://nuovavenezia.gelocal.it/venezia/cronaca/2019/02/16/news/torre-aquileia-a-jesolo-invenduta-ora-si-cedonole-singole-case-1.17761860> >.

Envelope

The application of the Las Vegas theories developed by Venturi, Izenour, and Scott Brown confirms the coexistence of the categories of the ‘duck’ and the ‘decorated shed’ in the buildings under examination. This coexistence is, for instance, acknowledged by the authors themselves in their description of the cathedral in Jesolo, where the simplified façade system evokes this form of hybridisation.

Moreover, this aspect underscores the inherent complexity of architectural objects, as affirmed by Thomas Schumacher’s article on ‘Façadism’. Both forms of architecture are valid, and the distinction between a ‘conventional shelter that applies symbols’ and a ‘special building that is a symbol’ is not as clear-cut as theoretical models often suggest.⁴³

The abstract elevation of *Torre Aquileia*, composed of sunshade elements, is punctuated by a top spire reminiscent of the Venetian bell tower. *Torre Merville*’s regular central core is enveloped by a glass façade, evoking Joseph Albers’ colour studies but ultimately serving as a mimetic covering. The schematic plan of The Beach Houses, comprising residential blocks, is surrounded by a detached façade of sunshades, conveying the image of a monolithic white volume. Meanwhile, the *Torri Drago*, being twin towers, inherently become ‘ducks’, yet their monumental transparent elevator shaft — reminiscent of the Contarini staircase with its spiral top — constitutes a ‘decorated shed’. This elevator shaft also glows in the dark, introducing a significant element related to the treatment of Jesolo’s building envelopes.

At night, Jesolo’s condominium façades must be visible. Here, the parallel with Las Vegas is essential, beginning with casino signs – the most emblematic medium of the decorated shaft – and including also buildings themselves that ‘are illuminated but not through reflection from spotlights they are made into source lights by closely light neon tubes.’⁴⁴ Illuminated façades have today reached their apotheosis through LED technology, the limitless possibilities and cheapness of which enable the construction of buildings like *The Sphere*, a glowing 112 metre-high and 157 metre-wide sphere that functions as an event venue in, not by chance, Las Vegas. In Jesolo this phenomenon interestingly manifests in the case of high architecture by spotlight illumination, with buildings reflecting light; while in the case of non-high architecture by LED stripes or ‘LED strips’ with buildings emitting light – highlighting particular architectural ele-

⁴³ Thomas L. Schumacher, “Façadism” Returns, or the Advent of the “Duck-orated Shed”, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 63.2 (1984), pp. 128-137.

⁴⁴ Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, p.53.

ments such as balconies of vertical partitions. While the latter compensate their poor composition by focusing the attention on a few elements and concealing all the rest, the former still believes in its envelope as a whole.



Figure 98 Torri Drago illuminated at night (on the left), with the Jesolo WPT Towers emitting light via integrated LED strips (on the right).

This said, the balcony occupies a fundamental role in Jesolo's building façade, often becoming the façade itself. As previously illustrated, its presence is incentivised by local building norms and it is an essential component of local real estate requirements linked with the resident's lifestyle. Its evolution spans from a projected isolated element attached to a 'box' to an integrated void within the building elevation. The balcony serves multiple purposes: it acts as a functional element that protects the south façade from direct sun exposure, a role often enhanced by sunshades. Additionally, it provides essential external space and symbolises a leisurely lifestyle.

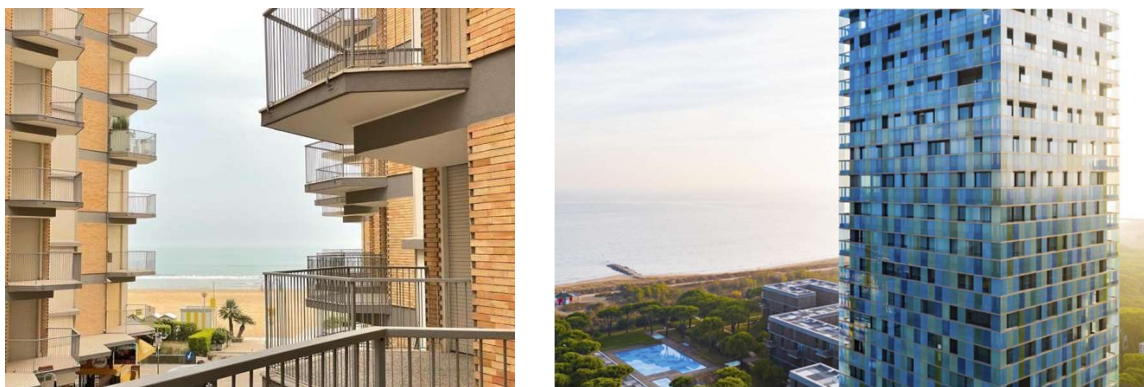


Figure 99 A comparison between the 1960's building *Centro Commerciale* where balconies are elements attached to a box and contemporary trends where the balcony is the façade. In this case *Torre Merville*.

After Latour's *We have never been modern* the distinction between a 'duck' and the 'decorated shed', between modern and postmodern, seems less relevant. If 'postmodernism is a symptom not a fresh solution' and moreover modernity has never occurred, 'non-moderns should seek for hybrids rather than polarities.'⁴⁵ Especially in the case of condominiums, whose hybrid condition is justified by the fact that they could be assumed at the same time to be technological artifacts that embody both human design and natural resources, they are environmental phenomena as they result from complex interactions between human activities and natural systems being assumed as a sort of built 'pollution', and finally they are an output of scientific research as their construction involves the interaction between human researchers (architects), tools, theories, and natural phenomena.

In Jesolo hybrids are the norm. For example, one could say that the only surviving 'duck' in Jesolo is the *Podium* building by ElasticoFarm, since it embodies most of the 'duck' features and heroism. But a closer examination of *The Podium*, whose original name was *Le batiment descendant l'escalier*, reveals that it was the building that more than any other kept its promise of 'suspension and hybridisation', both literally and figuratively.

In its Deconstructivist image, this building constitutes the perfect ending of Jesolo's architectural recognition, through which the architecture of modernity has been tackled through its International, Post-modern and Deconstructivist expressions. An architecture that finally put at stake the concept of purity of 'harmony from a unified whole' and above all, put at stake the same 'horizontalness' on which the Modern movement is based.⁴⁶

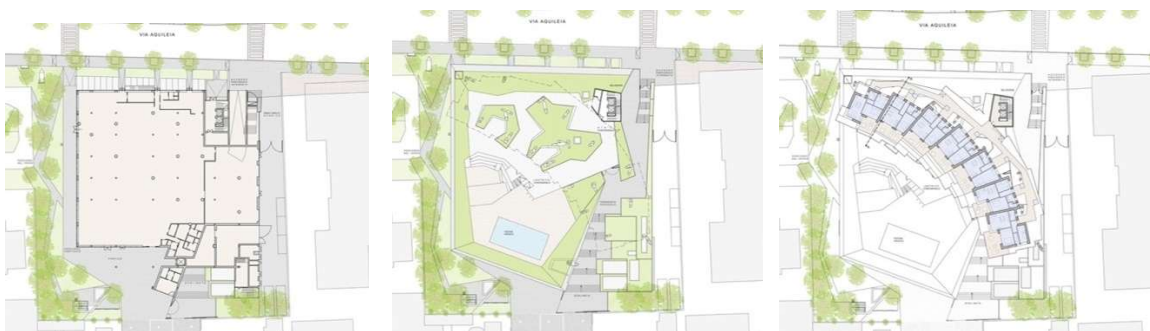


Figure 100 Plans of the three different programs of the *Podium* (2021).

⁴⁵ Bruno Latour, *We have never been modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁴⁶ Mark Wigley, 'Deconstructivist Architecture', *Deconstructivist Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 10-20 (p.16).

The building consists of a commercial basement on which a residential block is suspended through a series of inclined steel pillars forming an in-between void that houses shared amenities such as a swimming pool and a solarium. Despite its image, this ‘heroic’ building, in truth, is more pragmatic than it appears. The apparent arbitrary design of the pillars solves the connection of the basement’s orthogonal structural grid with the slightly rotated one of the residential block, offering a valid solution also to seismic bracing. The building rotation allows for a better exposition of each unit, facing south with a private terrace. Here privacy is achieved by offsetting each unit, preventing the direct line of sight onto neighbouring terraces through the extension of the interior walls. The envelope and structure are integrated into a unified form, with the exterior skin composed of a mosaic of vitrified tiles. These tiles, set with bluish grout, serve both to protect the building from sea salt exposure and to address colour variation, avoiding the starkness of absolute white.



Figure 101 Podium balconies and privacy (2021).

The back of the building is composed of suspended shared galleries connecting the free-standing elevator and staircase shaft with the apartment’s entrances. The building not only intelligently exploits the local regulations, expressively exploiting the zero-volume feature, but also mixes different condominium typologies, merging the third-row condominium with private swimming pool with the front-row one, where verticality and sea view balconies are the norm.



Figure 102 Podium exterior access balconies and elevator (2021).

The units respect commercial standards and are treated as '*objet trouvé*', the product of a *geometra* (local technician), assembled in a way the *geometra* would never have done. A sort of spatial collage that avoids the 'Ferrater effect' described above, becoming an evolution of the juxtaposition of elements typical of postmodern architecture.⁴⁷

The intricate design of the building makes it less comprehensible to potential buyers, who struggle to grasp its complexity when viewing plans on paper. This is a structure best understood through direct experience. The design skilfully balances the need for standardised, easily understandable interiors – essential for attracting buyers – with the more complex, external architecture that reflects the building's interaction with its urban surroundings. The result is a unique presence in Jesolo's urban landscape, a striking contrast that the architect described as 'an eyesore where the fist perfectly fits the shape of the eye'.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See Appendix: Stefano Pujatti, interview by the author, 5 December 2023.

⁴⁸ Ibid.



Figure 103 The *Podium*. The images of the interiors reveal a design that appears as standard as possible. JVL Immobiliare (2024).

Standing apart from the surrounding architecture, the building's expressiveness stems from an 'economic delta' – a surplus created by the favourable economics of the land it occupies. A financial advantage that in this case motivated the developer to invest in the architect's vision. From a developer's point of view this delta, in fact, measures the speculative power of the operation.⁴⁹

Examining, for example, one of the numerous condominiums resulting from the rampant urbanisation of the 1960s, this 'delta' appears to have reached its peak. The process relied on converting agricultural land into real estate developments, further capitalising on the construction of standardised and cost-effective solutions.

The distinctiveness of the Podium stems from the strategic reinvestment of a portion of the 'economic delta' into its architectural design. This calculated decision by the developer was not only aimed at enhancing the building's market appeal but also at leveraging the architect's role in the approval process. A decision that ultimately positively contributed to the broader urban landscape and the city's image.

⁴⁹ Ibid.



Figure 104 *The Podium* (2021).

This building resists homogenisation by initially adopting the stylistic conventions of real estate, only to subvert them. It demonstrates the value of authorship and uses architecture as a means of challenging the status quo and insert diversity within the urban fabric.

The result is a building that is as much ‘duck’, through its heroic image, as it is ‘decorated shed’ through the rearrangement and ironic/caricature-like juxtaposing of those modernistic elements that have become the new lexicon of non-high architecture (replacing traditional building technique and symbols). An historicization of the ‘must have’ modernistic elements that saves local architects from provincialism. Its Deconstructivist attitude, clashing with the imposed ‘horizontal’ governance systems of condominiums, through suspension succeeds in the fragmentation of Modern purity through a disquieting image.

The Podium is a hybrid, as any condominium is, where this condition is made explicit. Here, elements of traditional architecture are combined in novel ways, shaped by the programmatic complexity, logic of fantasy and desire that the world of the beach uniquely permits.

2.11 Suspension

Jesolo presents itself not as a city in the traditional sense, but as an urban apparatus suspended between reality and performance, a spatial construct where architecture is no longer rooted in permanence but in seasonal occupation, economic fluctuation, and aesthetic simulation. This conclusive chapter interrogates the architectural consequences of such suspension, focusing on the condominium as both protagonist and symptom of a broader condition: the commodification of emptiness.

As we have demonstrated, here, the building is not designed to be inhabited but to be perceived—its image calibrated to satisfy market expectations, its volume optimised for investment returns, its presence temporarily activated by tourism and dormant for the rest of the year. Jesolo becomes a paradigm, a Potemkin urbanism where façades suggest permanence but hide temporality, where architectural expression is tasked to create diversity, oscillates between monumentality and vacancy, between the symbolic and the speculative.

This condition is not unique, but in Jesolo, it is exaggerated to the point of revelation. Through statistical data, comparative urban analysis, and theoretical inquiry, the chapter charts Jesolo's transformation into a city that is at once hyper-real and artificially dormant.

Drawing from Stuart Cohen and Giovanni Corbelli's reflections on contextualism, and from digital landscapes explored by theorists like Jacob Geller, the chapter locates Jesolo in a new cartography of urbanism—one that is shaped as much by tourism and perception as by planning and structure. In this framework, context itself becomes ornament; architecture no longer reacts to its environment but performs a version of it, calibrated for seasonal consumption.

If the architecture of modernity promised universality, and the postmodern moment offered plurality, Jesolo exemplifies a third state: suspension—a spatial condition where the city exists in fragments, ready to be activated, consumed, and forgotten. Yet, paradoxically, this very fragmentation allows for the emergence of high-architecture, monumental gestures not in spite of ephemerality but because of it.

Jesolo is examined not as anomaly, but as anticipation—a model for urban futures shaped by experience over permanence, imagery over inhabitation, speculation over structure.

The extreme oscillation in occupancy between the high and low seasons represents one of the primary challenges and defining characteristics of holiday venues and invites significant architectural considerations since the condominium, alongside the expansion of the tourism industry, replicates this seasonal dynamic even within urban contexts.

Looking at data, the occupancy index of Jesolo’s residential buildings indicates that in 2021, out of 33,341 dwellings, 12,527 (38%) resulted occupied with 20,814 (62%) unoccupied.¹

These numbers confirm one of Jesolo’s primary urban challenges, which has been addressed by various masterplans throughout its history. However, despite the striking imbalance, it is important to acknowledge that, based on the initial values of Kenzo Tange’s master plan, Jesolo’s occupancy rates have increased by 37% over the last 30 years. This demonstrates the positive impact of the proposal on one of its most essential objectives and highlights the enduring value of the masterplan’s ideas.

| Jesolo occupancy rates by year | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------|--------|------------|--------|
| Year | Total dwellings | Occupied | | Unoccupied | |
| 1997* | 14.504 | 24% | 3.494 | 76% | 11.010 |
| 2011** | 28.172 | 38% | 10.627 | 62% | 17.545 |
| 2021*** | 33.341 | 38% | 12.527 | 62% | 20.814 |

Table 5 *Kenzo Tange Masterplan (1977); ** ISTAT 2011; *** ISTAT 2021

A comparison with other tourist beach destinations across Italy highlights Jesolo’s significance as a case study, particularly in relation to one of its direct competitors, Rimini. Jesolo’s unique condition is that, for most of the year, the majority of its buildings remain essentially empty. This recurring phenomenon within holiday spaces alters the perception of the city, portraying it as a place not solely built for its permanent residents but rather shaped by the transient nature of tourism.

¹ Censimento ISTAT 2021. The glossary specifies that Unoccupied dwellings are ‘dwellings that are empty or occupied exclusively by people who do not habitually reside there’.

| City | Occupancy Rate |
|--------------------|----------------|
| Rimini | 82% |
| Viareggio | 73% |
| Sorrento | 70% |
| Riccione | 69% |
| Positano | 57% |
| Amalfi | 57% |
| Forte dei Marmi | 40% |
| Jesolo | 38% |
| Lignano Sabbiadoro | 13% |

Table 6 ISTAT 2021. Analysis

To comprehend this emptiness as an essential feature of our urban environment, video games can provide valuable insights into the perception and purpose of Jesolo’s spatial dynamics.

Jacob Geller’s YouTube video about space perception within videogames suggests that game development creates ‘the illusion of a holistic space and continuous progression out of several distinct pieces’.² In other words, this means that in most videogames, if while we are playing a piece of a level is not visible, it simply does not exist.

In gaming interfaces, various illusions help developers confine these virtual spaces while mimicking the real world. What is of interest to us is that the façades of buildings in ‘open world’ video games, focusing on realistic urban settings — are often hollow, inaccessible, and deliberately constructed. Their precise purpose is to allow players to navigate an adventure through a Potemkin-like village, carefully designed to create an illusion of vastness.

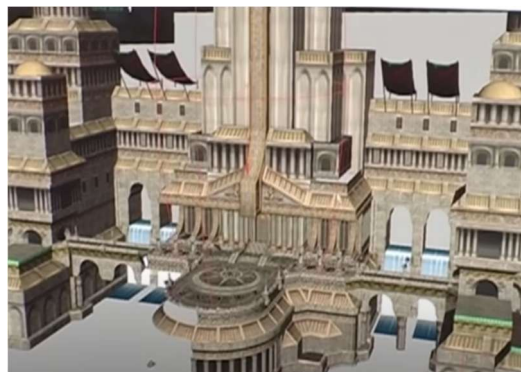


Figure 105 Video game scenographic construction of urban environment *God of War* (2023).

² ‘Games That Don’t Fake the Space - YouTube’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8511Fenc5w&ab_channel=JacobGeller> [accessed 8 September 2024].

At first glance, this logic may seem to align with the façades of Jesolo's buildings, which serve as a medium to convince any player or visitor that each structure was designed specifically for their stay, with an aesthetic deliberately tied to the realm of leisure. However, upon closer examination, the true essence of Jesolo's condominiums lies not in their hollow superficiality but in their intrinsic emptiness — devoid of content and perpetually vacant. The underlying logic of Jesolo, or any speculative venture for that matter, is more 'real' than it is 'illusory' or 'virtual'.

To move beyond the condominium's 'virtuality', reminiscent of Ballard's enclosed worlds, such as the infamous *High-Rise*, we should consider a game where this condition of 'real' emptiness serves as a central feature of its gameplay.

The videogame *Babddi* is set in a seamlessly abandoned brutalist town of the same name that is about 1% the size of a *GTA* map. Contrary to *GTA*, its peculiarity is that within this setting, there is no artificial impediment to go wherever you want. A brutalist playground where every interior space is visitable, every building is composed of actual floors, walls, and a roof. Deprived of its facades, the *Babddi* urban environment communicates that 'every piece of it is real, every piece is there'.³

Geller's description of this utilitarian city returns our gaze to Jesolo:

But Babddi feels big because its utilitarian art style implies that every building is truly there: nothing is a hollow façade, nothing fancifully painted with an extra texture of civilization. Maybe the best way I can put it is the objectives of the game aren't indicated by the design of the environment itself. The city doesn't seem built for the player to have an adventure in. It was built, existed and then sometime later the player stumbled in.⁴

Jesolo is 'virtual' due to its constant pursuit of novelty, façade-centric designs, emphasis on privacy, and focus on leisure. At the same time, Jesolo is 'real' because of its intrinsic emptiness, geographic location, market value, and commodification.

From this perspective the city was not constructed for its dwellers but rather to facilitate the commodification enabled by its condominiums, in other words, for the sake of property.

Jesolo's 'Culture of Suspension' demonstrates that in holiday settings dominated by tourism, the utilitarian role of architecture is emptied of its meaning, leading to buildings existing as property-per-se.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Condominiums exhibit a seasonal fluctuation between their functional role and their monumental, symbolic aspect, devoid of practical function, becoming the primary medium through which Jesolo's aspirations are manifested.

An environment such as Babbdi not only helps us to understand Jesolo's true nature but also highlights the limitations of modernism in the face of ecological collapse, where architecture represents a dormant technology of connection — neither fully integrated through computation nor entirely erased. Instead, it remains a hollow framework, an empty shell that holds potential for radical inclusivity.



Figure 106 Babbdi's environment with buildings deprived of their façade (2023).

On an architectural level, the understanding of Jesolo's condition of 'suspension,' requires few lines on the role of context within this (or any other) setting.

Stuart Cohen's article *Physical Context/Cultural Context: Including it All* offers a critical perspective on Venturi and Scott Brown's work, beginning with the comparison of the *Brighton Beach* apartment complex with Wells/Kotter's winning proposal for the same plot (1968).⁵

Not by chance, this setting, located on a plot facing the sea in the southern portion of Brooklyn, recalls Jesolo's conditions. The article raises various questions, starting with the distinction between *exclusivism* and *inclusivism* in architecture. The former stems from modern architecture's tendency to propose the purist and abstract use of geometries, seeking to impose a new order in confrontation with the existing built environment. In contrast, *inclusivism* is character-

⁵ Stuart Cohen, 'Physical Context/Cultural Context: Including it All', *Oppositions*, 2 (1974) 2-40.

ised by its ability to create meaningful works from any available resources: commercial or arcane symbols and forms, the relationship of a building to its site or context, the explicit markers of a culture, or a local vernacular style.⁶



Figure 107 Model of the proposal submitted by Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates for the Brighton Beach competition (1968).

What the article's author finds 'unfortunate' is that *inclusivism* now seems to focus almost exclusively on architectural imagery, suggesting that this has become the sole dimension for evaluation. Venturi's tendency toward a 'cultural contextualism' differs from the 'physical contextualism' typically accessed through strategies of response and the adaptation or deformation of ideal types to specific urban contexts that Wells/Kotter adopt.⁷

And, despite what Venturi's building might suggest — a sort of 'Learning from Brighton Beach' approach — its urban proposition ironically emphasizes modernist and utopian sources, while Wells/Kotter reveals the stubborn adaptation of types which nature is inherently *a priori*. In our interpretation, in both cases, the idea of 'context' follows an outward movement, from inside to outside, demonstrating that references to the context are nothing more than symbols. Consequently, as frequently proved also within Jesolo's architecture, the context itself is revealed to be merely an ornament.

Interestingly, and relevant to our discussion, the same article concludes by comparing the work of Robert Venturi with that of Richard Meier—Jesolo's modern architectural hero—whose position appears to lie at the opposite end of the spectrum.⁸

⁶ Ibid., p.3.

⁷ Ibid., p.22.

⁸ This parallel stems from a specific critique, forming a key point in *Learning from Las Vegas*. The well-known comparison between the *Guild House* and Paul Rudolf's *Crawford Manor* is marked as 'both simplistic and obvious,' raising doubts about whether Rudolf's formalistic building was too easy a target. Ibid., p.4.

Stuart Cohen focuses his analysis on Meier's Twin Parks Northeast residential complex, located in the Bronx, New York. In this project, Meier departs from his typical use of white, opting instead for carefully composed planar brick surfaces paired with oversized windows. These windows serve a dual purpose: they act as recognisable housing icons while also functioning as key compositional elements within a deliberately crafted architectural language.

The result is an urban solution that balances economic efficiency with clarity of planning, integrating seamlessly into the city without resorting to mimicry. Cohen suggests that the specific conditions of the Bronx, along with the project's constraints 'an empiricism and flexibility in dealing with physical, cultural, and architectural inputs to the process of design, and stressing the relativity of value judgment rather than its suspension.'⁹

Meier's proposal thus distinguishes itself by eschewing the picturesque, instead asserting contextual relevance through a building that successfully hybridises abstraction and figuration. The emphasis here is not on a notion of sincerity—if such a concept can even be applied to architecture—but rather on the intelligent orchestration of the building's image, and above all, on its hybridity.

On the contrary, Jesolo's environment seemingly demands not 'relativity' but a sense of 'suspension', implying a greater degree of liberty in the project's relationship with its surrounding context. This condition is continually challenged by the aforementioned reluctance stemming from various contingencies — most notably, the restrictive role of the *Soprintendenza*.

The role of 'suspension' in holiday settings, the beach in particular, is explained in the following quote by the sociologist Asterio Savelli:

The social world of beach vacations has its own structure, different from that of ordinary life. It is made up of elements from the real world, but these are combined in a new way, according to the logic of fantasy and desires. In this way, a world is created that, in certain aspects, has the characteristics of invention: the combination of the same elements outside of their usual context introduces a fantastic dimension to them; the perception of places is transfigured by the aspirations of the traveller, and it is as if a dream takes hold of the place¹⁰

Moreover, as outlined by Giovanni Corbellini's article on alpine tourist architecture, tourism-oriented architecture is inherently 'false.' Its relationship with context is both simple—rooted in the notion of the 'typical'—and complex, as it engages with dynamics such as the idyll as

⁹ Ibid., p.22.

¹⁰ Asterio Savelli, *Sociologia del turismo balneare* [2009], (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2015), p.164. trans. by the author.

discussed by Sloterdijk, the interplay between landscape and territory, and the tension between outsider and insider perspectives as explored by Cosgrove.¹¹

The contribution of architects to the invention of the architectural mountain idyll is, as Lootsma further reveals, early and decisive. It is they (we), the outsiders, coming from the city, who frame its aesthetic and landscape ‘invariants.’ And it is again they (we) who tackle the problems of coexisting with modernisation, clothing new functions in a compositional and decorative apparatus that aspires to harmonise with the ‘environmental pre-existences.’ However, this is an extremely difficult task, the translation of which into increasingly restrictive and defensive regulations has ended up encouraging kitsch tendencies of falsification and hindering the pursuit of logical and up-to-date solutions.¹²

In Jesolo—and more broadly along the ‘beach’—the notion of the typical continues to confront a form of Mediterranean modernism that often manifests as a falsification of contemporary architectural languages and solutions. The role of internationally renowned architects has precisely been to introduce new logics into this landscape, inserting diversity and critical variation into an otherwise homogeneous decorative and architectural framework.

Now that we have acknowledged the hybrid nature of the condominium and the condition of suspension inherent in its architecture, we are better positioned to understand how a building such as *The Podium* epitomises the evolution of Jesolo’s condominium architecture—both metaphorically and literally. This structure is not only physically and aesthetically detached from its immediate context, but more significantly, its deconstructivist approach can be read as a deliberate attempt to challenge the modernist principle of horizontality—a principle deeply embedded in the DNA of the condominium as a housing model.

Situated within a tourism-driven urban environment, *The Podium* responds not only to local contingencies but also engages with broader disciplinary debates. By twisting and warping its form, the building becomes a critical gesture, repositioning Jesolo’s architectural discourse within the wider framework of contemporary architectural experimentation.

Concluding our journey through Jesolo’s architecture, this condition of suspension ultimately invites further questions on the city’s essential speculative purposes, which are amplified by the tourism-driven foundation of its development. The concept of ‘volume’, as an essential measure of investment and a cornerstone of modern architecture, is extended to encompass its

¹¹ Giovanni Corbellini, ‘Continuità senza imitazione’, in *Tradizione, Traduzione, Tradimento. Riflessioni sull’architettura montana*, ed. by Federico Mentil (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2018), 16-31 (pp.23-24).

¹² *Ibid.*, p.27. trans. by the author.

relationship with the building envelope at the urban scale. This contributes to a broader analysis of the city's urban dynamics and its architectural evolution.

It is due to the 'Culture of Suspension' and the resulting increased economic resources that high-architecture has become a viable option. A seasonally 'monumental' environment where architecture is asked more than anywhere else to give to buildings an all year round meaning. A development that is further facilitated by the economic advantages of the luxury market, where high-end finishes and amenities can ultimately improve project feasibility and set a benchmark for Jesolo's built environment. As a result, architecture not classified as high-end, designed by local architects, is compelled to elevate its standards to meet evolving market demands and maintain its relevance. This elevation has significant implications for the surrounding territory, which are further amplified by the pervasive influence of contemporary tourism on today's society.

This unique condition positions Jesolo as a distinctive case study within its regional context, transforming its role from a mere catalyst for investment into one of aesthetic and architectural significance. The final section of this dissertation expands the scope once more, examining the recent implications of these developments within Veneto and Jesolo, through an even more condensed temporal lens, incorporating firsthand testimonies to evaluate the broader architectural fallout of this experience.

UNIVERSAL PROVINCIALISM

3.1 SkyscraperCity

The easiest job is always that of the ‘cultural moralist.’ The cultural moralist is someone who, with undeniable intelligence, identifies the emergence of new ethical, sociological, and aesthetic phenomena. But once this is done, they avoid the more perilous task of analysing these phenomena, trying to understand their causes, long-term effects, and the particularities of their ‘functioning’. Instead, they prefer, with the same sharp intelligence, to condemn them in the light of a supposed ‘humanism’ and label them as part of the negative outcomes of a massifying and science-fiction-like society.¹

In questioning Jesolo’s real estate market and its underlying dynamics, various sources outside the city itself can be consulted. These include local newspapers, real estate agencies, online platforms, academic articles, industry magazines, and local fairs. Each of these sources offers a distinct perspective: some emphasise the quantitative aspects of the real estate sector, while others highlight its political and socio-economic dimensions.

After establishing the significance of the condominium as a fundamental instrument of modernity through an extensive historical survey in the first section of this research, and subsequently narrowing the focus to its manifestations within Jesolo’s urban history — analysing its principal architectural characteristics, with particular focus on notable buildings designed by renowned architects as reference points for future development — this final section once again broadens its perspective.

This section explicitly examines the relationship between the city’s users, their tastes, and their expectations, focusing on the physical impact of the most ambitious and high-quality architectural projects. This analysis is framed through internal perspectives gathered from interviews with key stakeholders, alongside an exploration of its aesthetic drift - interpreted through the lens of online commentators' discourse. Serving as an introduction to the subsequent chapters, this chapter lays the groundwork for a deeper exploration of Jesolo’s architectural landscape. The analysis begins with the concept of an ‘unsubordinated architecture’ which defines the interdependent relationships between buildings that shape the city’s urban space, examined within a post-Internet context.

¹ Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati* [1964] (Milan: Bompiani, 2016) p.296. trans. by the author.

Subsequently, Jesolo's architecture is classified and assessed within the broader architectural discourse through the reinterpretation of cultural categories such as *midcult* and *masscult*. This serves as an exploration of the interaction between high and non-high architecture, with particular focus on the collective value that mid-level architecture holds within the urban environment.

In the concluding chapter, the phenomenon of Jesolo's architecture is contextualised within a framework of *universal provincialism*, questioning the value of condominium architecture in an era of touristic reproduction. This perspective positions Jesolo within a broader network, functioning as a 'signal repeater' of international architectural trends - absorbing, propagating, and imposing a tourism-driven iconography.

Jesolo exemplifies an imperfect form of globalisation, occurring in slow motion, which allows for a more precise deciphering of its sources and provides a basis for reflecting on the territorial repercussions of this phenomenon. This reflection is particularly relevant at a time when the boundaries that once defined tourist spaces are becoming increasingly blurred, extending their influence across both urban and non-urban landscapes.

'You would need a sociologist to understand Jesolo's urban dynamics,' says Danilo Gerotto, architect and key figure in the urban sector of the municipality during Kenzo Tange's master-plan realisation in 1998, referring to the complexity of the phenomenon, whose origins are related to the individuals involved, before its built manifestations.² Following this suggestion, this initial chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the environment within which Jesolo's current architectural production is based.

However, these lines do not necessarily delve into sociological aspirations, their focus lies on gaining insight into Jesolo's exceptional architectural dynamism, looking at professionals involved in its development and parallel manifestations including the internet forum '*Skyscraper City*', the world's largest online discussion on skyscrapers and urban-related topics. Revisiting Giovanni Corbellini's interpretation, what emerges — despite a core of shared knowledge or, more significantly, a shared awareness of what is unknown — is 'a certain amateurism and, at the same time, a neo-medieval atmosphere of a shared construction site without hierarchically dominant figures.'³

² See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023

³ Giovanni Corbellini, *Lo spazio dicibile, architettura e narrativa* (Siracusa: Letteraventidue, 2016), p.71.

The aim is to provide a cross-section of Jesolo's current state of development, both on the professionals directly involved in its construction and through the individuals who indirectly contribute to shaping Jesolo's image.

Starting with *Skyscraper city*, a website where real estate enthusiasts and amateur civil engineers share their thoughts about the latest urban developments in town. The website is organised on a basic internet forum interface, where people can hold conversations on various topics.⁴ In this case, the bond between the users consists of a peculiar pleasure driven from urban developments. There is little room for nostalgia in a community oriented toward the future, where attention is captured by the latest rendered images of forthcoming real estate developments.

The website's appearance is quite simple, the topics are divided into 'discussions' inside which each user is able to share information, pictures or links on a particular subject. On the upper bar it is possible to look for one of these threads and find the most popular discussion concerning the word we type in, in this case: Jesolo.

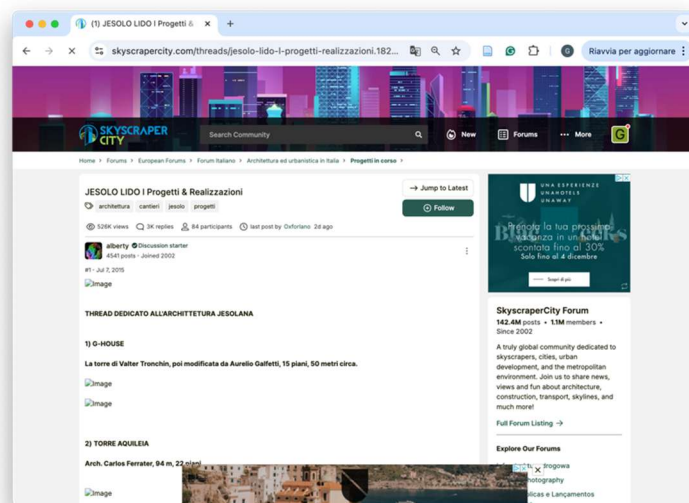


Figure 108 Skyscraper City webpage (2023).

Among various other threads, the most active appears to be: '*JESOLO LIDO, Progetti & Realizzazioni*,' an open discussion where since 2015 users have shared news and images on Jesolo's

⁴ This form of user experience was made obsolete by social platforms such as Facebook or Instagram but persists inside specific web communities that often rise around precise topics: the passion for miniature wargames, the need for programming code lines, the love for domestic animals.

urban developments, producing a disordered display of fragmentary architectural episodes.⁵ Its administrator is named Alberty, an enthusiastic user and architecture lover who encourages the other participants in the discussion to express their thoughts, opinions, and updates on construction sites.

Alberty is a man, he comes from Valdagno, a small inland town in Veneto, and proudly demonstrates his passion both for architecture and his homeland through his catchphrase under every post: a quotation from Goethe's *Italian Journey* which expresses the astonishment of the German writer (and tourist pioneer) when he visited Palladio's villa *La Rotonda* for the first time.⁶

The other members of the discussion appear to be mostly Italian men.⁷ The majority of them use more or less explicit nicknames, referring to their birthday year (Nicko87, Libero81), their Veneto origins (Dal Bo, Cuzzolin, Sonic from Padova), or their love for urban developments (Cementificatore). Some of them do not have any direct connection with Jesolo, and simply show their enthusiasm for the number of construction sites in town and the scale of the projects, 'Wow! o_O It looks like Miami!' comments Skyscraper87.

If the fact that 'many people like suburbia' was a sufficient condition for learning from Las Vegas, then the enthusiasm for real estate — particularly condominiums — in this community should make Jesolo worthy of closer study.⁸

This sample group of individuals aligns well with Jesolo's typical admirer, where most customers involved in real estate investments originate from the same region or neighbouring ones. 'Tourists here do not care about the sea, do not care about culture, they care about the lifestyle,' says Danilo Gerotto.⁹ For these users, architecture represents a status symbol — a coveted object of desire, social recognition or 'distinction', in the sense defined by Pierre Bourdieu.

Beside the entrepreneurial class that gave Jesolo its first stimulus, Jesolo's clientele after the Second World War can be likened to the *petite bourgeoisie* described by the French sociologist, 'characterised by individuals that have managed to escape the proletariat, which represents their

⁵ This is today's most active discussion on Jesolo. The thread was opened on 7 July 2015, and since then has delivered news and information on Jesolo's urban developments. Other information on Jesolo can be found on similar discussions or through threads dedicated to specific projects in town. *Jesolo Lido Progetti e realizzazioni* (2023) <<https://www.skyscrapercity.com/threads/jesolo-lido-l-progetti-realizzazioni.1829942/#replies>> [accessed 10 November 2023]

⁶ The mentioned quote is '*Forse mai l'arte architettonica ha raggiunto un tal grado di magnificenza*', found in: , Johann W.Goethe, *Viaggio in Italia* [1816] (Milan: Mondadori, 1993), p.57. trans. by Emilio Castellani.

⁷ The online forum discussion on 10 November 2023 included 76 participants.

⁸ Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour, p.154.

⁹ See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023.

past, while aspiring to enter the bourgeoisie, which represents their future.’¹⁰ To achieve the economic accumulation required for this upward trajectory, they compensate for limited capital through a form of work-oriented asceticism.¹¹

Owning an apartment in Jesolo is therefore a ticket to improving one's social status. And it is precisely in the realm of social life and related satisfactions (such as holidays) that the *petite bourgeoisie* makes its greatest, if not its most conspicuous, sacrifices.¹² An investment in the growth of its social capital.

Leonardo Del Vecchio, one of Italy’s wealthiest tycoons and a role model for local entrepreneurs, underscores with disdain Jesolo's place in the collective imagination of his era: 'If I managed to build all of this, it's because I didn't settle for a beachfront apartment in Jesolo like other entrepreneurs of my time.'¹³

It is a widely shared opinion among both professionals and administrators that, beyond political will, the foresight of certain key individuals has played a crucial role in shaping this pursuit of quality. Particular credit is given to the architect Danilo Gerotto, who was responsible for involving Kenzo Tange and later promoting the engagement of renowned architectural firms.¹⁴ He is a sort of Robert Moses for the Jesolo of the new millennium.

One of the primary conditions arising from the involvement of renowned architects was the deliberate creation of an offer tailored to a more affluent clientele, leading to the development of two distinct architectural products: one of high-quality, serving as a catalyst, and a secondary, more quantitative typology.

It is within this scenario that, as attested by architects such as Simone Gobbo from Demogo and real estate agents like Francesco Martin from Marina Immobiliare, high-quality architecture is expected to foster diversity and, in the most significant cases, uniqueness - while still adhering to the constraints imposed by the market.

The pursuit of uniqueness is explicitly reflected in some comments from our online forum. ‘Colours are kind of original; black and orange have never been done before,’ remarks Alberty, following a promotional video showcasing two new residential towers through a sequence of dramatic aerial views, accompanied by an epic soundtrack. ‘These are Benidorm standards’,

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinzione: Critica sociale del gusto* [1979] (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 1983), p.339.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p.340.

¹³ Tommaso Ebhardt, *Leonardo Del Vecchio* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 2022).

¹⁴ Danilo Gerotto is mentioned in the Peter Reichegger, Stefano Pujatti and Luciano Schiavon interviews.

adds Crivellermarco52, posting an image of the Intempo, the infamous skyscraper with golden finishes located in the renowned Spanish tourist destination.¹⁵

In this context, any discussion of taste is inevitably suspended, echoing Gilles Lipovetsky's observation: 'Who has good taste today? Capitalism doesn't care; what matters is making options available.'¹⁶ However, for the attentive observer, a common characteristic among Jesolo's projects, especially low quality ones, emerges: an ostentatious minimalism that defines much of the architecture, particularly in its individual elements.

While ancient cathedrals once conveyed human labour and virtue through the meticulous carving of architectural details, it is unsurprising that this aspect is largely absent in contemporary cities — especially in places like Jesolo, where labour itself is meant to be forgotten. This reduction elevates the role of the designer alone, erasing the presence of those who physically perform the work. Not surprisingly, these figures are often perceived as adversaries working against the architect's vision.

This latter aspect is evident in the often challenging relationship between architects, local architects, clients, and construction firms — particularly when the latter two coincide, eliminating any possibility of mediation between the parties.¹⁷

Particularly among the Jesolo-based interviewees, the role of local professionals — including engineers, surveyors, and architects — emerges as crucial for the success of any project. They provide essential market constraints and an initial design brief to foreign professionals while simultaneously translating design details into construction techniques familiar to the local workforce. However, when building production is considered solely at the local level, an over-reliance on local professionals — often favoured by medium and small-sized construction firms - may lead to a form of design stagnation, fostering uniformity and homogenisation through the widespread use of standardised solutions.

Moreover, the role of the local architect remains central to understanding Jesolo's environment. As Wigley describes, 'The strategic importance of the local architect grows exponentially with

¹⁵ Quotes from SkyscraperCity online forum.

¹⁶ *Estetizzazione*, Gilles Lipovetsky, (Festival Filosofia 2017), online video recording, YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNHQveJ8Ccs>> [accessed 12 November 2024].

¹⁷ Even less surprising, as noted by Luciano Schiavon, is the fact that the most challenging projects to oversee are those where the contractor and client are the same entity. This leads to an overlap where the architect's negotiating power is minimised. 'We had deep interactions with Codello from the superintendent's office, and our client had a lot of trust in us. Here, with all the merits of the builder, my only regret is that we couldn't control the execution details as we would have liked. This often happens when the builder is also the client.' See Appendix, interview by the author, 29 February 2024.

the increased mobility of the global designer.’¹⁸ And given that this condition is intrinsic to globalised architecture, Jesolo seems particularly suited to this observation — because it is also intrinsic to tourist settings.

Indeed, such contexts make explicit the condition of the architect defined by Wigley as ‘full-time tourist’, where the *foreign* architect ‘can see things the local cannot, local forms of blindness even, tourists often see more than their guides’. But at the same time, local architects are inevitably subject to a process of contamination, a condition intrinsic to the discipline itself. Wigley thus concludes his argument as follows:

Generic formal ideas are seen to be embedded into specific material situations. The very idea of form is the idea of the material world reaching outside itself to be touched by an outside order. Architects are agents of the outside. It is no surprise that they are always wandering, always reaching outside the limit of building for inspiration and legitimisation from other fields. The architect is a full-time tourist. This is why the local designer can so smoothly conspire with outside forces. The local architect is already a foreign agent. The resulting brutality of architecture is inevitable, unending, desirable.¹⁹

While interviews with various Jesolo stakeholders help reconstruct the internal processes behind the city’s architectural forms, online comments and images offer a different perspective — one shaped by the ‘state of distraction’ of those who, ‘being immersed in the built environment, often fail to perceive it consciously’ and where architectural brutality appears ‘desirable’.²⁰ Forum users, in fact, do not interpret these buildings as architects do; instead, they describe Jesolo’s architectural programme with disregard for the facts, aiming instead to capture its underlying intentions. While professionals pragmatically reconstruct architectural events, this online forum reveals Jesolo’s nature as a provincial town aspiring to a cosmopolitan future. Where summer density makes it possible to seasonally visualise this dream, and architecture makes it real.

This theatre of leisure benefits from its strategic location near Venice, positioning itself as its ‘a-cultural’ counterpart. Jesolo orbits around an urban vision that looks to Miami as its primary reference. Where, in place of the Atlantic Ocean, Jesolo offers a flat yet equally unremarkable sea; in place of the flooded grasslands of the Everglades, there lies the Venice Lagoon.²¹ Within

¹⁸ Mark Wigley, ‘Local Knowledge’ in *Phylogenesis*, ed. by Foreign Office (Barcelona: Actar, 2003) pp.101-109 (p.103).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.109.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.108.

²¹ Dubai also presents the same characteristic of natural compression, between the sea and the desert. ‘The position of Dubai in relation to water is especially interesting because the city is located by the desert, surrounded by

these natural constraints, condominiums — or ‘condos’ as they are known along the oceanfront - serve as Jesolo’s means to emulate its overseas counterparts and meet market demand. Here, architecture acts as a springboard for international recognition, lending the area a glamorous and desirable appeal. It is within these aspirations that architecture continues to function as a mediator among various contingencies, excelling in reinforcing the recognition of its own discipline. By developing urban plans that facilitate private investment in building replacement, architecture resolves the tension between private and public quality, becoming both an instrument for transforming public space and an opportunity for disciplinary advancement.

It is through architecture that global influences are integrated into Jesolo’s territorial sphere, shaping the evolution of the built environment — either by cyclically counteracting homogenisation or by imposing new architectural languages.

dunes on one side and the Arabian Gulf on the other.’ Virginie Picon-Lefèbvre, ‘Dubai manifesto: Dubai’s relationship to water’ in *The Superlative City, Dubai and the urban condition in the early twenty-first century* ed. by Ahmen Kanna (Cambridge: Harvard Graduate School of Design, 2013), p.84.

3.2 Unsubordinated architecture

Has anyone seen how Meier is progressing? (crivellaromarco52, 12 October 2023)

So, in my opinion, Meier's style is perfectly suitable for Jesolo, which doesn't have its own architectural identity. | The other major projects seen in the city haven't set a trend... no one so far has copied the style of the *Drago*, *Merville*, or *Aquileia* towers. | Instead, the Meier style was copied right from the start, but often in a mediocre way. The 8-storey beautiful white building with glass railings has become the starting point. Then each architect adds their own touch, and depending on the client's available budget, a nice building sometimes emerges. | Let's say it's a very normal thing everywhere. | In Milan, for example, not all new projects are like *Bosco Verticale* or the *City Life* residences. (Alberty, 13 October 2023)

You can't have Meier for every project... also because not everyone is a millionaire. | But every project has its own rationale: contemporary style, lots of glass, almost always a light exterior colour, spacious balconies for dining, and the inevitable pool — because these new residents will hardly ever go to the sea or the beach. | It's only a matter of selling. (Alberty, 6 February 2019)¹

Condominiums enjoy a privileged position within the forum, and it is no mere coincidence that the first post in the thread comprises a captivating series of images showcasing diverse residential buildings.

The forum presents not only works crafted by renowned designers but also their lower-tier substitutes. The former category includes buildings designed by architects such as Richard Meier, Gonçalo Byrne, Aurelio Galfetti (LVL) and Carlos Ferrater, and unbuilt projects from Zaha Hadid and Jean Nouvelle. The latter, meanwhile, encompasses buildings designed by professionals (architects, engineers or *geometri*) who have never been part of the architectural discourse.²

In a context where 'the project narrative itself is a form of speculation', architecturally significant buildings play a crucial role in introducing diversity into Jesolo's urban fabric, thereby differentiating the city's architectural offerings.³ As Simone Gobbo observes, 'This component of uniqueness is crucial in a market like Jesolo's, where the more iconic the projects become —

¹ Comments from the Skyscrapercity online forum.

² A *geometra* is a technical professional in Italy specialising in land surveying, construction design, and project management, particularly within small- to medium-scale residential and commercial projects. Beyond their technical expertise, *geometri* play a crucial role in navigating bureaucratic procedures, serving as key intermediaries in dealings with local administrations and regulatory bodies. Their knowledge of zoning laws, construction permits, and compliance requirements makes them indispensable figures in the Italian planning and building process.

³ 'This component of uniqueness is crucial in a market like Jesolo's, where the more iconic the projects become — in our case, the tallest wooden building — the better they can position themselves in the market. Each project aims to carve out a kind of 'best of.' The same approach applies to the actors involved in the operation, from renowned international studios to emerging Italian ones. The project narrative itself is a form of speculation.' See Appendix: Simone Gobbo (Demogo), interview by the author, 25 September 2023.

in our case, the tallest wooden building — the better they can position themselves in the market.’⁴

Consequently, instances of particularly successful architectural interventions often lead to patterns of replication among residential condominiums that belong to the city's lower-tier real estate production, which constitutes the predominant segment of Jesolo's built environment. When examined objectively, these developments reveal distinct architectural trends.

Most of these buildings adhere to a modernist aesthetic, frequently characterised by a repetitive copy-paste approach. In many cases, they incorporate elements inspired by renowned architects, albeit adapted to more constrained financial and spatial contexts.

The power of architectural replicas, especially in the context of ‘copycat architecture,’ has been widely discussed. In countries like China, it has reached such a degree — especially in low-tier cities — that the central government banned it, stating that ‘plagiarising, imitating, and copy-cattening designs is prohibited in new public facilities.’⁵

Copycat architecture is often associated with scenic reproductions of well-known landmarks or entire cities, one of the most replicated cities being Venice, a historical and cultural icon that has inspired replicas worldwide.⁶

This aspect is significant because our case study, Jesolo, is located only 30 kilometres from Venice. And since it was founded, Jesolo's market positioning has been shaped in direct contrast to its imposing neighbour. To differentiate itself, Jesolo has embraced an approach that is intentionally a-historical, a-cultural, and a-conservative, establishing a unique identity that avoids direct competition with Venice's rich historical and cultural appeal.

Following these initial insights, despite a few episodes of exotism (*The Caribe Bay* amusement park) or picturesque developments (*Residence Cascina del Mar*), Jesolo's references, especially since Kenzo Tange's masterplan, have been global leisure cities such as Miami.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ‘China “copycat” Buildings: Government Clamps down on Foreign Imitations’, 8 May 2020 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52585684>> [accessed 3 December 2024]. The same topic also rises in other developing countries or rising economies as in Dubai. Khaled Asfour, ‘Cultural Crisis: Analysis of the Arab World's Practice of Borrowing Architectural Designs from Other Cultures’, *Architectural Review* 203.1213 (1998) 50–51.

⁶ These replications began with notable examples such as *The Venetian* in Las Vegas and have since spread across various locations, including China, Dubai, Manila, and Baku. Venice, therefore, stands as one of the most symbolically ‘borrowed’ cities, its architectural essence recreated in multiple forms around the globe.

The theme of copying also recurs in the pages of *Learning from Las Vegas*, where Le Corbusier is identified as the ‘high source’ of various stylistic influences. For example, the *Miami Beach Modern* motel in Delaware, which takes inspiration from hotels in Miami and indirectly references the ‘international stylishness of a Brazilian resort’, which in turn derives from the ‘International Style of middle-period Corbu.’⁷ Similarly, in the same book, another parallel is drawn between Le Corbusier’s *La Tourette* in Eveux, France and the *Neiman Marcus store* in Houston, Texas — a commercial adaptation of the renowned Swiss architect’s monastery.⁸

The point and novelty of this analysis for its time was that the authors’ interest did not lie in the ‘high source’ (Le Corbusier) or any analogous ‘middle source’ (such as the aforementioned American architect Edward Durrell Stone), but rather in its commercial adaptation.

In this sense, our focus should shift from Richard Meier to his legacy, condominium production that apparently mimics the youngest American Pritzker prize winner in history.

The presence of a ‘*Meier formula*’, as defined by architect Stefano Pujatti, is an established reality within Jesolo’s built environment.⁹ This fact is further corroborated by the experience of local architects Studio Antonello and the words of the local constructor Edoardo Marin:

We took inspiration — you always have to take inspiration from the strongest. Some concepts worked less in our context, so we tried to tailor the project to our situation while certainly taking inspiration from Meier.¹⁰

It is evident that during the first three decades of the new millennium, Richard Meier’s architectural legacy has significantly influenced the built environment of Jesolo — and beyond. The city appears to embody, in the words of Umberto Eco, a place where ‘plagiarism is no longer a crime but the ultimate and most complete fulfilment of market demands.’¹¹

If architecture serves as a disruptive force within a market driven by ‘the homogenisation of collective taste and its sclerosis into fixed, unchanging demands’, Meier’s example demonstrates how success in this context relies on the careful introduction of novelty. As this case

⁷ Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, p.8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.138.

⁹ ‘Even emulating Meier’s buildings, I doubt, could lead to satisfactory outcomes, but in his case, a ‘Meier formula’ actually exists. (...) Meier has a language that can be emulated, and in Jesolo, there are some examples. He is an architect whose main theme is abstraction, including the materiality of the building. When opting for abstraction, it involves an abstract attitude, unlike our project, which engages with the surrounding conditions. See Appendix: Stefano Pujatti (Elastico Farm), interview by the author, 5 December 2023.

¹⁰ See Appendix: Edoardo Marin (Dema costruzioni), interview by the author, 21 January 2025.

¹¹ Umberto Eco, p.278.

illustrates, ‘innovation is introduced cautiously, in small doses, to ignite buyer interest without disrupting their inertia.’¹²

Unlike Las Vegas, Jesolo is not ‘tacky’ enough to serve as a revolutionary counterpoint.¹³ However, the reality of Jesolo’s mid-to-high-level professional architectural interpretation can still offer insights into how the discipline operates and evolves, identifying distinct trajectories among groups of buildings, particularly by tracing their origins back to their initial sources.

When considered through a Post-Internet lens, this phenomenon acquires new meaning. The term coined by Marisa Olson does not allude to the fact that ‘the Internet is over’ but that it has entered an era in which the awareness of its existence is mainstream and generally acknowledged.¹⁴

In the article *The Image Object Post-Internet* by American digital artist Artie Vierkant, Post-Internet is defined as the result of a moment ‘inherently informed by ubiquitous authorship, the development of attention as currency, the collapse of physical space in networked culture, and the infinite reproducibility and mutability of digital materials.’¹⁵

In an ‘Internet-aware’ society, where ‘the photo of the art object is more widely dispersed and viewed than the object itself,’ architectural replicas take on new significance.¹⁶

To quote Vierkant:

In the Post-Internet climate, it is assumed that the work of art lies equally in the version of the object one would encounter at a gallery or museum, the images and other representations disseminated through the Internet and print publications, bootleg images of the object or its representations, and variations on any of these as edited and recontextualized by any other author.¹⁷

Post-Internet objects do not need to result explicitly from any digital process intended or designed for the web, as demonstrated by *Skyscraper City* and any web real estate portal. Even if you are not actively seeking the Internet, the Internet will find its way to you.

For our purposes, this means that *The Beach Houses* by Richard Meier exists not only in its physical form along the shore of Jesolo but also in its various representations: in the rendered

¹² Ibid.

¹³ According to Simone Gobbo, this phenomenon is also linked to the sociopolitical attitudes of the people of Veneto, where Catholic and conservative values - evidenced by the significant post-war success of the Christian Democracy party - inevitably generate numerous contradictions with Jesolo, often perceived as a ‘land where everything is possible’. See Appendix: Simone Gobbo, interview by the author, 25 September 2023.

¹⁴ Gene McHugh, *Post Internet* (2010), <<http://122909a.com>> [accessed 18 November 2024]

¹⁵ Artie Vierkant, *The Image Object Post-Internet* (2010) <https://jstchillin.org/artie/pdf/The_Image_Object_Post-Internet_us.pdf> [accessed 15 November 2024], p.3.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.5.

images published prior to its construction, in the images circulated after its completion, in the author’s monograph — including the copies gifted to each apartment owner — in architectural magazines, plans, sections, models, brochures, real estate portals, social networks, and even in our *SkyscraperCity* forum. But most importantly, *The Beach Houses* also exists in those buildings that are recontextualised and modified variations by other authors — commercial, lower-tier manifestations spread across Jesolo.

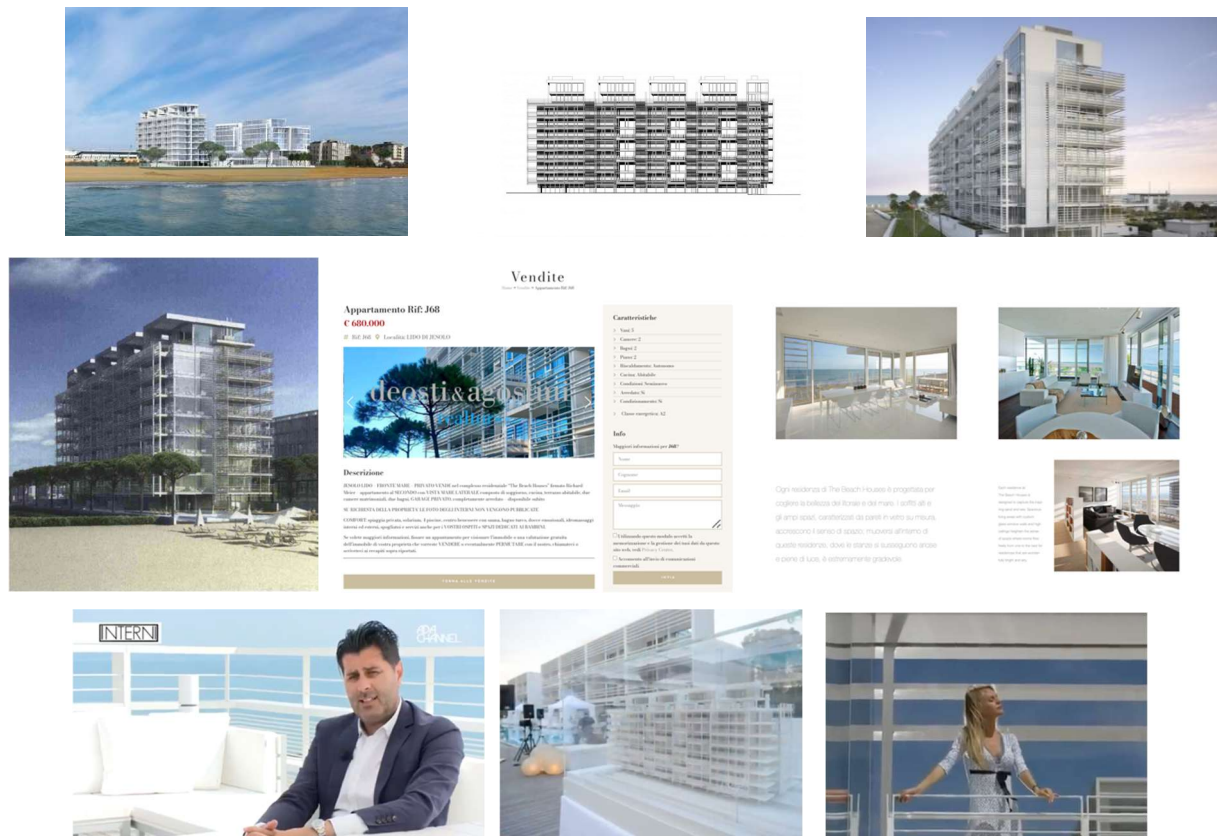


Figure 109 Media depicting Richard Meier’s *The Beach Houses* on and outside the Internet (2024).

Since for objects after the Internet there can be no ‘original copy’, Viekant suggests that:

Even if an image or object is able to be traced back to a source, the substance (substance in the sense of both its materiality and its importance) of the source object can no longer be regarded as inherently greater than any of its copies.¹⁸

Vierkant’s argument is especially true when the same source is replicated through different mediums. But also when *The Beach Houses* is translated through the same media (a building) into one of the lower-tier buildings that mimic its aesthetic and propose an alternative method

¹⁸ Ibid., p.5.

of representation without ever supplying a way to view their source.¹⁹ The idea of a ‘source building’ exists. But the way this lower-tier building is represented denies both the need for an original and disregards the norms behind the ‘source’ programme and construction., such as the case of Jesolo’s condominium *Playa Dorada* (2021) built by the local constructor *Costruzioni Taschin*.²⁰



Figure 110 *The Beach Houses* (2013), on the left, *Playa Dorada* on the right (2021).

The artwork *Visions* by Oliver Laric is a video essay that delves into the themes of image replication, transformation, and the fluidity between originals and copies.²¹

Through a sequence of images and brief sentences narrated by a digital voice, the artist reveals an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one. The flaws of the real (the source) are framed as gaps in representation, while questioning the subordinate status of its reproduction—in most of the cases deemed less relevant—becomes ultimately unproductive.²² Adapting Laric’s words to our discipline, architecture, is therefore a story retold with subtle variations where the same sentence serves to express a different point. The interplay of ‘more’ or ‘less’ inevitably leads to a new perspective. It is a matter of distinct and divergent narratives, as though each point of view reveals an entirely unique landscape.²³

¹⁹ In this design approach a set of drawings is assumed as the starting point but according to each architect the methodology could easily be a model, a rendering, or even an object, including, of course, other buildings.

²⁰ Costruzioni Taschin, *Playa Dorada* (2021) <[https://www.taschin.it/realizzazioni-costruzioni-edili/playa-dorada-a-jesolo-\(ve\).aspx](https://www.taschin.it/realizzazioni-costruzioni-edili/playa-dorada-a-jesolo-(ve).aspx)> [accessed 21 September 2024].

²¹ The artwork comprises three videos. One from 2009, one from 2010 and one from 2012. Net Art Antology, *Versions* (2010) online video recording, <<https://anthology.rhizome.org/versions>> [accessed 19 November 2024].

²² Oliver Laric, *Versions* (2010) online video recording, <<https://oliverlaric.com/vvversions.htm>> [accessed 19 November 2024].

²³ Ibid.



Figure 111 Snapshot from the video *Versions* (2012) by Oliver Laric.

In a Post Internet framework, the work of Richard Meier in Jesolo is not limited to the buildings of the *Jesolo Lido Design District* designed by the American architect but comprises any other lookalike building across the city, a collection of ‘unsubordinated architecture’.

The term ‘unsubordinated’ does not stand for ‘disobedient’ or ‘undisciplined,’ but rather descends from financial terminology. It alludes to a revaluation of architecture ‘in debt’ to higher references whose status compared with picturesque copies nevertheless guarantees aesthetic returns.²⁴ Oliver Laric’s video ends with a warning: ‘Hybridise or disappear’, which resonates so powerfully that it inevitably brings us back to Jesolo’s architectural revivalism.²⁵

According to Philip Johnson’s preface to the catalogue of the exhibition *Deconstructivist Architecture* held at Moma in 1988, every -ism comes from conventional case studies or better, ‘from anonymous examples for purely non-aesthetic aims.’²⁶ For example, Modern Architecture came from factories, cruise ships and barns; Post-modern from Las Vegas decorated sheds and duck shaped buildings, while Deconstructivist architecture, as Philip Johnson describes, came from a fuzzy spring house as a symbol of violated perfection. The symbolic value of all

²⁴ Julia Kagan, *Unsubordinated Debt: What It Means, How It Work* (2021) < [²⁵ Laric, *Versions* \(2010\).](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/u/unsubordinateddebt.asp#:~:text=Unsubordinated%20debt%2C%20also%20known%20as,debtor%20goes%20bankrupt%20or%20insolvent.> [accessed 10 December 2024]</p></div><div data-bbox=)

²⁶ Philip Johnson, ‘Preface’ in *Deconstructivist architecture*, ed. by Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley (New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1988), pp.7-9.

these examples does not lie in their materiality or technological advancement (since even Venturi's Long Island duck was made of *ferrocement*, like one of Le Corbusier's buildings), and more importantly their image does not strictly belong to the time of their examination. They might have already existed and what changed was not the object itself but our 'receiving eye'. This research suggests that today's 'spring barn', that is to say, the symbol of architecture of our time, has come incredibly close to its examiner, to the architect's eye. And even if today's temptation is to use the virtual world like Venturi's 'Las Vegas', this would just be simplistic and over metaphorical. Instead our symbol could lie in the relationship between authorial architecture and its relatives.

Keeping in mind that the strength of our symbol does not lie in its novelty but in our perception, we can assert that the object we should look at already exists regardless of present trends. The virtual world has already changed our perception, and this fact is already enough to render our sight contemporary, even if our symbol is not made of bits.

Following the construction of 'unsubordinated architecture', this research explores how today's symbols overlap with architecture itself, where the building's image encapsulates its various manifestations across different media.

From this perspective, a building such as *The Beach Houses* represents a much more carefully considered piece of architecture than it might initially appear. Its image engages with its speculative purpose, its authorship, and Jesolo's ambition to redefine its identity.

Moreover, beneath its seemingly reactionary, dogmatic, or proselytizing appearance, this building establishes a dialogue with the city - a dialogue that flows in both directions, where previous works are as influenced by this interaction as the current ones.²⁷ Its 'unsubordinated architecture' thus transforms reactionary into conventional, dogmas into ambiguity, and proselytism into context.

The key point is that even if Richard Meier may no longer be at the forefront of architectural discourse (even less so with regard to ethical principles), his work — within a Post-Internet

²⁷ Laric, *Versions* (2010).

framework — remains a gravitational centre.²⁸ It contributes to ‘a constellation of formal-aesthetic quotations, self-aware of its art context and built to be shared and cited’.²⁹ It is image architecture itself.

²⁸ In 2018, Richard Meier stepped down as head of his firm following sexual harassment accusations from several women, going back decades. Acencies and Staff, ‘Prize-winning US architect Richard Meier accused of sexual harassment’, *The Guardian* (14 March 2018) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/14/prize-winning-architect-richard-meier-accused-of-sexual-harassment>> [accessed on 12 September 2024].

²⁹ Vierkant, p.10.

3.3 Massarch and Midarch

The problem is the old 70s stuff surrounding these new projects. | :lol: | Anyway, it's worth appreciating the fresh wave of innovation in the last 10 years in Jesolo. (Dorocka, 6 February 2019)

It changes too fast for Google Maps (Oxfrolano, 25 November 2024)

It is a small city but the most magical of all 100% (Crivellerroberto7, 25 November 2024)¹

If intentionality was a sufficient condition for architecture, Jesolo would count as many pieces of architecture as buildings; or even more, considering temporary structures, street furniture and amusement parks. Intentionality is today's urban 'white noise,' an indissoluble condition, consequence of the contemporary 'Society of the Spectacle' where according to Guy Debord: 'The spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image.'² However, since the existence of unintentional architecture can also be excluded, the words of Norwegian architect Christian Norberg-Schulz help clarify a distinction between intentional creativity and that which is not.

The creative intention therefore aims at intermediary objects, and presents itself phenomenologically as an indistinct want. Such intentions are present in all perceptions, of course, but the creative intention combines poles which have not earlier been brought together. The result is not always significant, but often it tells us something essential. (...)

Real creative activity, of course, transcends the repetition of known reproductive schemata. Generally it has to be characterised as a deviation from normal behaviour, and important artists rarely find immediate recognition. But the deviations should not be *accidental*. Only if they arise from hidden conflicts in the form of life may they be defended as real solutions to actual problems, preferable to the more traditional intentions which only apparently are adequate.³

Thus, understanding the existing 'conflicts' within any given context appears to be an essential component in advancing the discipline. This process involves replacing established intentions that, despite their assumed validity, no longer align with contemporary reality.

The involvement of internationally renowned architects in Jesolo has, therefore, brought these conflicts to the forefront, generating both scepticism and new solutions through architectural diversity.

¹ Quotes from Skyscrapercity online forum.

² Guy Debord, *La società dello spettacolo* [1967] (Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2017), p.38.

³ Norberg Schulz, *Intentions in architecture*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The MIT Press, 1968), pp.78-79.

It is through the interrelation of Jesolo’s various architectural components that the disciplinary implications of its urban development can emerge. As Nicolas Bourriaud states, ‘It is up to us as beholders of art to bring [unforeseen associations] to light [...] to judge artworks in terms of the relations they produce in the specific contexts they inhabit.’⁴

Consequently, by acting as interpreters, transcribers, narrators, and curators — who document and critically engage with these evolving architectural phenomena — a new relational framework emerges.

Within this perspective, the reinterpretation of contemporary works such as John Rafman’s *Nine Eyes of Google Street View* (2008) — a collection of snapshots from Google Street View that critically examine the state of photography in an era of automated, large-scale image production — can serve both as a reference and as a conceptual meditation on the evolving nature of architectural imagery.⁵ A survey that confirms how the reconstruction of Jesolo’s urban history, along with interviews with its key interpreters, has further contributed to revealing a distinct absence of extremes and kitsch, unlike Venturi’s Las Vegas.

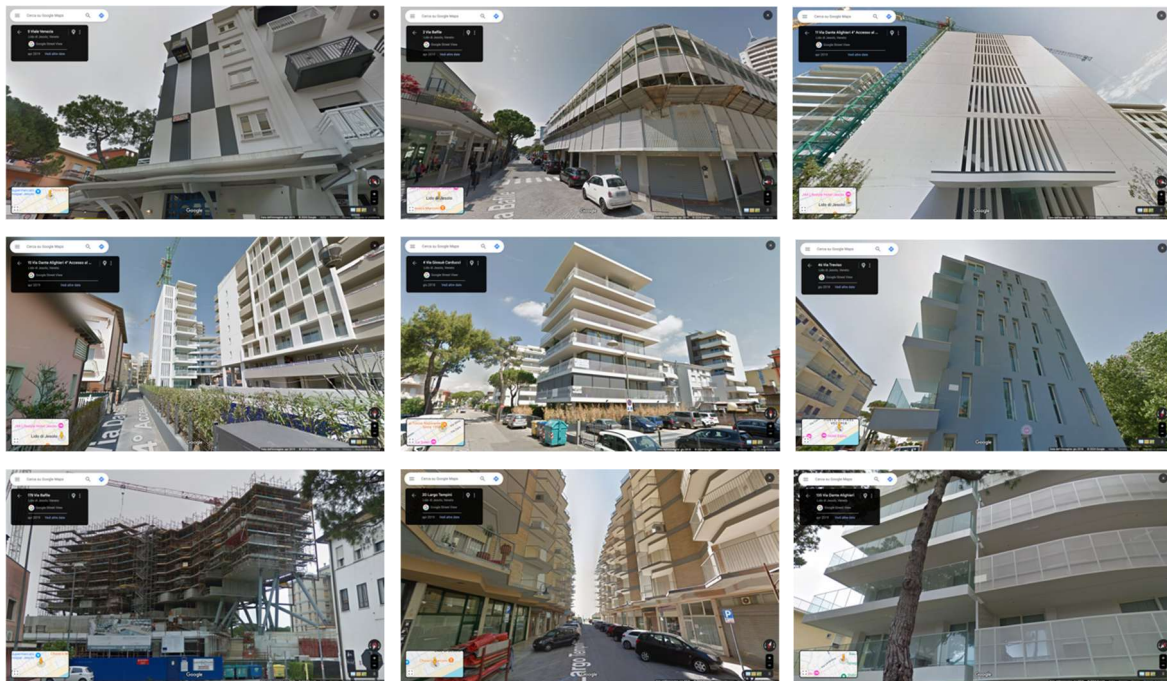


Figure 112 Google Street View images of Jesolo (2024).

⁴ Nicolas Baurriadus, *Postproduction* (New York: Lukas and Stenberg, 2002), p.94.

⁵ John Rafman, *Nine Eyes of Google Street View* (2008) <<https://9-eyes.com/>> [accessed 21 November 2024].

The 1960 book *Masscult and Midcult* by Dwight MacDonal critically examined contemporary cultural production, addressing the distinction between low culture (Masscult) and high culture while theorising the rise of a new, intermediate type of culture (Midcult) — one that the author deemed ‘insidious.’⁶

Although MacDonal was accused of having aristocratic and snobbish attitudes, his work offers a valuable interpretation for understanding Jesolo’s real estate production and for theorising a distinction within the same categories in the architectural domain: Massarch and Midarch.⁷

If Massarch is the architecture of resignation — produced to please, to function, to sell — then Midarch is architecture with anxiety. It aspires, self-consciously, to elevate, to negotiate between vision and viability. Yet its ambition is constrained by the very frameworks that allow it to exist: clients, costs, codes, and conventions. It seduces not through purity, but through negotiation—its success lies not in transcending the system, but in infiltrating it.

High Architecture, by contrast, is rare, almost speculative and uncompromising. But Jesolo teaches us that this is not always what architecture needs. What matters is the *transferability* of architectural intelligence—how authorial gestures infect the wider context. In this, the city’s Midarch acts as a viral medium: replicable, scalable, and ultimately transformative.

Translating MacDonal’s words into the architectural domain, our Massarch consists of buildings that answer the taste for ‘breaking everything down and mixing it all together, creating what could be described as a homogenized culture.’⁸ It is an architecture that ‘pleases,’ a simplistic and repetitive system that standardises, pushing the audience to desire a specific product.⁹ It eliminates barriers of class and taste, removing any cultural distinction, where everything becomes indistinguishable and the audience is treated as an object.

Compared to MacDonal’s time, the ‘white noise’ of intentionality and architectural ambition — even in the lowest forms of architectural expression — has become the new norm. This shift

⁶ The American critic’s discussion must be placed within a broader context, where Clement Greenberg’s artistic thought was dominant. MacDonal aligns with this perspective through the use of two neologisms, which reinterpret the already existing terms *lowbrow* and *middlebrow*, brought to prominence by Virginia Wolf and Van Wyck Brooks. Additionally, he emphasises the dangers of *kitsch* - a concept dear to Greenberg - for the culture of that time. It is no coincidence that Pop Art and Minimal Art emerged as reactions to this cultural climate (or regime), which was later overturned by the Postmodern movement. It is also no coincidence that, in the 1960s, Venturi developed his theories, partly in opposition to the dominance of Greenberg’s ideas.

⁷ Dwight Macdonald, *Masscult e Midcult*, [1960] (Prato: Piano B edizioni, 2018)

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.27.

⁹ *Ibid.*

demands a new sensibility in addressing the topic, which has consequently led to an overall reduction in the distinctions between the categories of Massarch and Midarch.

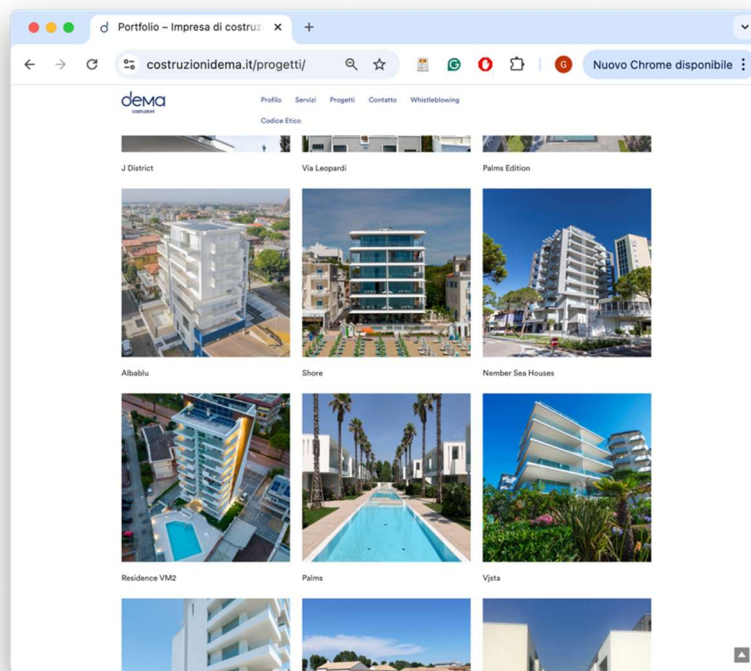


Figure 113 Dema Costruzioni's website (2024).

Dema Costruzioni, for instance, is a construction company based in Jesolo whose production falls squarely within the realm of Massarch. Its output predominantly features holiday condominiums catering to both the lower and upper middle class, depending on their location.¹⁰ The buildings are mostly white, their aesthetic ostentatiously modern and characterised by cubes or horizontal planes, though occasionally proposing picturesque complexes.

The design of these buildings does not necessarily involve architects but is also managed by engineers and *geometri*. More importantly, it primarily engages local professionals who possess an in-depth understanding of market demands and necessities.¹¹

The projects are tailored to market demand for clean lines, spaciousness, outdoor views, energy efficiency, covered parking and above all large south-facing terraces — elements that have become almost dogmatic requirements for modern living. According to its founder:

¹⁰ 'Costruzioni Dema Impresa edile' <<https://www.costruzionidema.it/>> [accessed 26 November 2024].

¹¹ As stated by Edoardo Marin: "It is essential to study and develop the project with someone who knows the territory and market needs, whether it's an agency or an architect - the important thing is that they know the area. Because in Jesolo, not everything sells - people say everything sells in Jesolo, but the market changes entirely just by moving 100 metres." See Appendix: Edoardo Marin (Dema costruzioni), interview by the author, 21 January 2025.

From an architectural point of view, there is the possibility of experimenting, but Jesolo has a commercial type of clientele, so you have to create things that hold up. The Podium, for example, in my opinion, is a bit forced, while Richard Meier is redeveloping the area and is more justified.¹²

Experimentation is therefore met with reluctance. Born from market research and empirical observations, these buildings primarily respond to dimensional and efficiency requirements rather than spatial and qualitative considerations, and they never challenge the status quo.

Even in cases where the *economic delta* – as highlighted by Stefano Pujatti and emphasised by Lorenzo Schiavon as a *litmus test* for a project's quality — is present, it remains minimal, often to the detriment of architectural design.¹³ Instead of fostering original spatial solutions, prestigious locations tend to result merely in higher-quality finishes rather than substantive innovations.

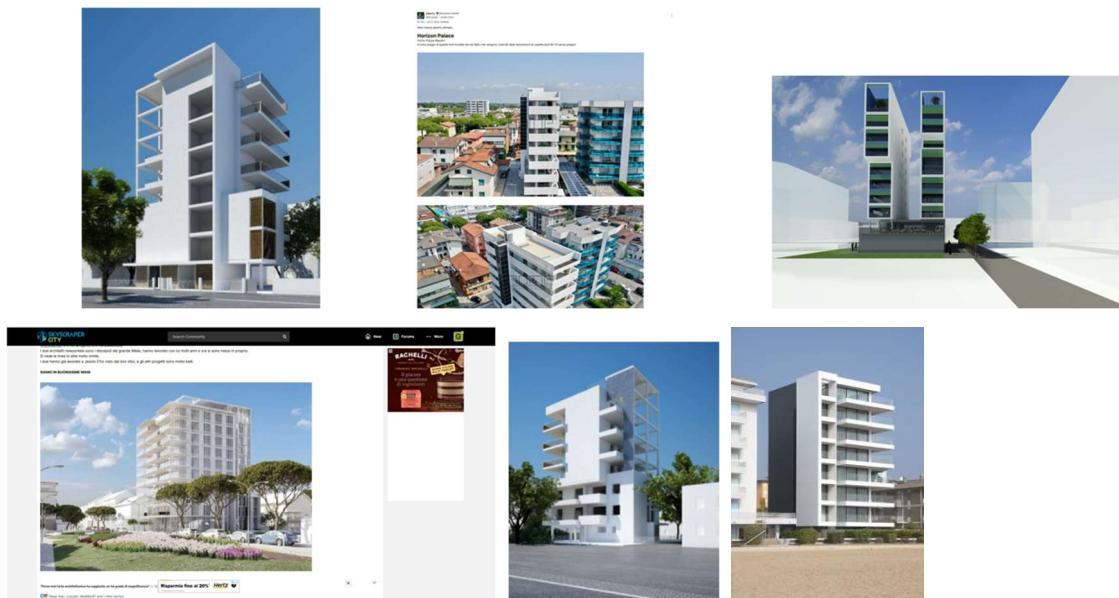


Figure 114 The selection of images within *Skyscraper City* reflects recurring visual elements and shared associative patterns (2024).

At the dawn of modern architecture, Hitchcock and Johnson’s analysis of American factories led to the conclusion that their dignity derived from the fact that ‘buildings where the client expects no money to be spent on design are better buildings and at least negatively purer in

¹² See Appendix: Edoardo Marin (Dema Costruzioni), interview by the author, 21 January 2025.

¹³ Economic feasibility is an essential factor in any architectural project. While Luciano Schiavon emphasises that the market value of a given location serves as a fundamental investment metric within a project’s budget - where ‘the cost per square metre of the intervention is unlikely to exceed the average market value of the area’ - Pujatti highlights, as previously mentioned, that the ‘*economic delta*’ between investment and profit is one of the key conditions for ensuring architectural quality. See Appendix: Luciano Schiavon (LVL), interview by the author 29 February 2024. Stefano Pujatti (Elastico Farm), interview by the author 29 February 2024.

design than those constructions where the architect is forced by circumstances to be more than an engineer.’¹⁴

In Jesolo, however — unlike the American factories of the 1930s — the architecture of low-tier condominiums is not solely defined by its function, which in this case is residential and leisure-oriented. Rather, it consistently exhibits traces of architectural ambition, serving as a strategic tool for redefining product identity while remaining within the boundaries of public acceptability.

While, in the hands of skilled architects, this approach has led — *as previously demonstrated* — to architectural diversity and the affirmation of distinct stylistic languages, in the hands of less-skilled professionals it often results either in repetitive design choices or in forced formal decisions with limited disciplinary success. A notable example of this is the *Cube Palace*, a ten-storey condominium built in close proximity to Meier’s project.

Compared with Dema Costruzioni’s production, this structure belongs to another trend, different from Meier’s abstraction, that opts for an approach reminiscent of Dutch schools, such as the three-dimensionality of MVRDV buildings. The building not only fails to emulate its reference but even disregards the advice of one of its founders. As Winy Maas suggested: ‘Instead of mocking the culture of copycats, design could learn better how to make good fakes: fakes good enough to beat their references.’¹⁵

As shown by its renderings, in this ten-storey building the designer initially used the structure as a vehicle for an idea — the vertical juxtaposition of cantilevered ‘boxes’ coloured with different shades of brown serving as balconies — but ultimately diminished the building’s expressive potential by reducing the ‘boxes’ to ordinary framed balconies.

Temporarily suspending any value judgment on the idea behind this building, it is nonetheless evident that there is a clear disparity between ideation and construction. This highlights a lack of control by the professionals involved in its execution, who were unable to negotiate effectively with the various stakeholders to uphold the integrity of the idea. An incurable error and definitive evidence that this building belongs to Massarch.

¹⁴ Henry Russel Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, p.53.

¹⁵ Winy Maas, Fleix Madrazo and The Why Factory, Eds, *Copy Paste: the badass architectural copy guide*, (Nai010 Publishers, 2017).



Figure 115 *The Cube Palace*: on the left, a rendering; on the right, the completed building (2023).

Another example of Massarch in Jesolo is the eight-storey condominium, *The Horizon Palace*. This building presents an intriguing character; and by adopting the perspective of Bourriaud's 'semionauts,' we can attempt to resemanticise it — bringing to light its unspoken intentions.¹⁶ The building's elevation, in its apparent conventionality, seems to conceal something cultured and contradictory. Unusually for Jesolo's standards, the building's mass is expressed rather than obscured. Observing the east façade, the structure presents itself as a solid volume, carved to create a series of juxtaposed cantilevered balconies. Its materiality is emphasised by a reflective finish, reminiscent of an exterior Venetian stucco. Ribbon windows, seamlessly flush with the façade, extend these interruptions inward, enhancing the legibility of the compositional shifts in the balconies.

Above the fourth storey, the balconies recede slightly, introducing variation to the façade. This sense of solidity contrasts with the other façades, where the parapets transform into lighter, ribbon-like elements that encircle the building. A slender vertical parallelepiped, seemingly constructed from horizontal white metal shutters, accommodates the services and elevator shaft. This component stands as an independent element, intersecting and contrasting with the main volume of the building.

It appears to embody a form of (likely subconscious) contemporary 'cultured professionalism', blending conventional design with subtle, International Style revivalism with more sophisticated undertones.

¹⁶ Its rendering was shared on the forum and was not well received by the community, with user Alberty describing it as an 'architectural abortion'. Posts related to the Horizon Palace appear on 6 August, 10 September 2020, 6 June 2022. < https://www.skyscrapercity.com/threads/jesolo-lido-l-progetti-realizzazioni.1829942/page-15?post_id=169242800&nested_view=1&sortby=oldest#post-169242800> [accessed 27 November 2024].



Figure 116 *The Horizon Palace* (2020).

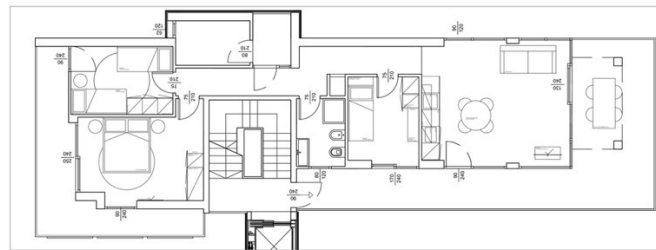


Figure 117 *The Horizon Palace*, plan (2020).

Again, these intentions are highly compromised in the construction. The ‘solid’ façade is the most disappointing, deprived of its original reflective materiality and reduced to an ordinary dark grey plastered surface. Window frames lose their flush continuity with the façade, becoming more noticeably interrupted by bulky white pillars. The light, vertical, independent service core is gone, replaced by a simple white plastered protrusion with four windows that disrupt its intended integrity.

If *Cube Palace*, previously used as reference for Massarch, reflected a dull idea with an even duller execution, *Horizon Palace* represents a promising design compromised by excessive concessions during construction.

This further reinforces, as philosopher Nelson Goodman notes, the idea that architecture is an art of two phases: conception and construction. And that, despite the long tradition of ‘paper architects’ and the emphasis on project over construction, often cited for instance in discussions of Aldo Rossi’s work, architects are still tasked with engaging directly with reality — whether that reality exists in the digital or physical realm.



Figure 118 The *Horizon Palace* (2022).

These *errors*, while undermining the architectural coherence of a building, do not necessarily compromise its commercial success. This is exemplified by the words of Edoardo Marin: ‘Many times, even if I focus a lot on solving certain architectural details, in the end, the client doesn’t notice those aspects but rather notices others that you would never expect.’ Massarch buildings, despite their relative lack of architectural significance, effectively meet the needs of their clientele — often even more efficiently than projects belonging to the realm of architectural discipline. This effectiveness stems precisely from their direct and literal translation of market demands.

At this point, however, having acknowledged the significance of Massarch within the architectural landscape of Jesolo, our focus must shift to the manifestations of Midarch — a concept whose relevance is further emphasised in the writings of MacDonald. From MacDonald's perspective, Midarch is not, as one might initially assume, merely a higher-quality version of Massarch. Rather, it represents a distortion of High Culture while simultaneously maintaining distinct advantages over Massarch.¹⁷

This controversial passage illustrates what MacDonald profoundly dislikes about Midculture — its deceptive nature. He condemns it with the following words: ‘Though it too is ‘completely subservient to the spectator’, to use Malraux’s definition, it is capable of passing as genuine culture.’¹⁸

What emerges, much like in Venturi’s perspective, is a deep aversion to the Latin motto ‘*In medio stat virtus*’ — the idea that virtue lies in the middle. On one hand this polarised view jealously protects High Culture, almost fearing its dissemination, and on the other hand, respects Masscult. Because, despite its banality, it at least has a deep historical justification,

¹⁷ According to McDonald, Midarch, in a word, subtly fulfils the elitist desires of its users while, in appearance, inviting them to partake in a privileged and challenging experience - an object of sophisticated and unique design.

¹⁸ Dwight Macdonald, p.59.

‘since, although it refers to the avant-garde, in its unreflective functionality, it does not raise the issue of a reference to high culture nor does it impose it on the mass of consumers.’¹⁹

On this point, from Umberto Eco’s perspective, MacDonald’s interpretation appears highly rigid and unidirectional, suggesting a constant flow of entropy from High to Medium, where ‘superior art’ remains unquestioned — a viewpoint that reflects a rather aristocratic notion of taste.²⁰ In this framework, it seems that as soon as High Architecture becomes accessible to a broader audience, it must immediately be downgraded.

From this perspective, it is precisely within condominium developments—where, due to the number and nature of stakeholders, the demand for compromise is greatest—that the skill of architects such as Meier, Byrne, Ferrater, and Demogo becomes most evident in asserting the values and integrity of their discipline. In the most emblematic cases, such as Stefano Pujatti’s *Podium*, the status quo is challenged to such an extent that it not only redefines contingent architectural conventions but also escapes both mannerist parody and the commercialised interpretation of its creator’s original intent.

Consequently, a key distinction between Midarch and Massarch lies not only in the visionary ideas of their authors but also in the heightened level of control over design and execution that these professionals achieve. Midarch projects exhibit a coherent vision that frequently addresses structural and contingent challenges with the architectural sensitivity of their individual creators. Even if these aspirations are not shared by all stakeholders involved, including developers, professionals, builders, and even the clientele drawn to this type of buildings, the architects still prove their fundamental role. Architecture can sometimes suffer from its own ambition for sophistication — as in the case of Torre Aquileia interiors — but it is these aspirations that generate qualitative spillover effects, influencing the surrounding public space.²¹ Thus, we can say that, despite Venturi’s scepticism toward this category, there is much to be learned from middle-ground sources, whether they take the form of well-executed adaptations of high architectural examples or commercial exercises by renowned architects.

¹⁹ Umberto Eco, ‘La cultura di massa sotto accusa’ in Dwight Macdonald, pp.137-141.

²⁰ Umberto Eco, ‘La cultura di massa sotto accusa’ in Dwight Macdonald, pp.137-141.

²¹ Paradoxically, beyond its problematic interior arrangement - described in the previous section - another major weakness of the project, according to Edoardo Marin of Dema Costruzioni, lies in the public square designed by Ferrater himself. This space is perceived as noisy and in conflict with the expectations of tranquillity and privacy sought by potential buyers. ‘There’s a risk that this less fortunate example becomes proof for developers for avoiding involving well-known architects,’ says Stefano Pujatti, 5 December 2023.



Figure 119 Ferrater's Torre Aquileia, coherence from conception to realization.

Having examined both Massarch and Midarch, we can conclude our *ascension* toward high-brow architecture by turning to the most emblematic contemporary building in Jesolo: Elastico Farm's *Podium*.

Commercially, this building occupies an upper-middle segment, positioned between beachfront condominiums such as *Tahiti* and second and third-row developments with pools.²² The radical nature of this project is met with both scepticism from some local developers and fascination from certain tourists.

Unlike Meier's work, this building emerges from such a specific set of contingencies that its replicability becomes secondary. It distinguishes itself not by fulfilling the functional or aesthetic desires of its occupants but by actively challenging the architectural status quo through its interplay of imagery and construction techniques. This does not suggest that only eccentric buildings belong to high culture; rather, it underscores the role of such works in interrogating disciplinary norms and expanding the conceptual boundaries of architecture.

Midarchitecture thus finds itself in the middle of a fluid exchange that moves in both directions, often without even being fully aware of its own references. Further examples of High Architecture can help refine the definition of this 'pure' category. To achieve this, Jesolo's architecture

²² 'Residence Podium 7F, case ed appartamenti in affitto' <<https://www.immobiliarejvl.it/Case-ed-appartamenti-in-affitto-turistico/Residence-Podium-7F-in-affitto.aspx?NumeroCamere=&DataDa=04-05-2025&DataA=11-05-2025&LuogoAffitto=>> [accessed 27 February 2025].

is used as a benchmark, while analogous counterparts belonging to High Architecture are identified elsewhere. In particular, apartment buildings that, at first glance, exhibit seemingly similar aesthetic characteristics provide a useful basis for comparison.²³

The first comparison is between Z10 (2017), an unbuilt residential building overlooking the sea in Jesolo, designed by M12, an architecture studio from Apulia with a portfolio demonstrating expertise in tourist developments, private residences, and condominiums, and House with a Missing Column (2015), a residential project facing the lake in Zurich, designed by Swiss architect Christian Kerez. While the classification of Z10 within Massarch or Midarch may be debatable, its exclusion from High Culture is certain. In contrast, House with a Missing Column perfectly embodies contemporary High Culture within the architectural field.²⁴

The briefs for the two projects are similar and despite their geographical distance they tend to resemble each other. Both projects are characterised by the layering of horizontal concrete slabs, large full-height glass windows, and the placement of vertical circulation elements outside the main volume of the building.

Both also adopt an aesthetic that is, in a certain sense, 'commercial', where there is no evident attempt either to amaze the spectator or to employ modest materials that oppose current trends, legitimising themselves through historically or locally contextualised references, decorative patterns, or signs of scholarly professionalism.

At first sight these buildings appear to be the product of the most superficial 'real estate' trends, unapologetically so.

²³ The fact that the comparison is made between two buildings, one of which an unbuilt project and the other constructed, might be subject to criticism. However, since this comparison is based on their image and construction concept, it is considered valid.

²⁴ < <https://www.m12ad.it/progetti/villa-z10/> > [accessed 24 November 2024].



Figure 120 On the left Z10 (2017) in Jesolo and *House with a missing column* (2015) in Zurich.

Venturi's words help untangle this parallel, particularly when discussing what makes architecture conventional:

Architecture may be ordinary, or rather, conventional in two ways: in how it is constructed or in how it is seen, that is, in its process or its symbolism. To construct conventionally is to use ordinary materials and engineering, accepting the present and usual organisation of the building and its financial structure and hoping to ensure fast, sound, and economical construction.²⁵

In this case, both architectures appear conventional in their image but radically differ from a constructional (processual) perspective. For both designs, the external placement of vertical connections is dictated by local regulations, ensuring these elements do not contribute to the building's volume, thus maximising the internal usable space. While the Z10 resolves this with a standard floor plan, where slabs, despite their generous span, are supported by a series of load-bearing walls, the Swiss architect pushes the same idea to its conceptual and structural limits. In Kerez's building the three vertical shafts, shared by the various apartments, and housing the staircase, elevator, and utility installations, form the load-bearing structure. 'The house resembles an intriguing version of a very common scheme like a rectangular desk with three legs,' says the Swiss architect.²⁶

As a result, the beams that support the slab and extend the interior space toward the exterior possess extraordinary dimensions, especially for what is otherwise a relatively modest floor plan.²⁷ The steel structure supporting the individual slabs introduces a monumental scale to

²⁵ Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, p.129.

²⁶ 'House with a missing column', *ElCroquis: Christian Kerez 2010-2015, Junya Ishigami 2005-2015*, 182 (2015) 46-67, p.48.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

each apartment, which is the primary purpose of this structural scheme. Internally, the complete absence of vertical structural partitions allows for entirely independent spatial definitions, achieved through lightweight wooden walls.²⁸

This suggests an optimisation of internal spaces, which consequently enhances the usable area and increases the commercial value of the building. This effort has been effectively realised during the construction process, allowing the building to be recognised as an exemplary case of High architecture.

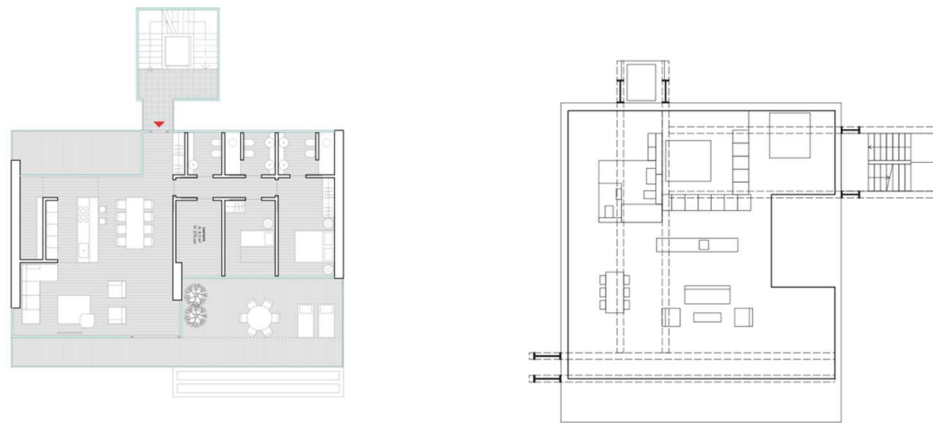


Figure 121 Z10 second floor plan and *House with a missing column* second floor plan.

If the image of the Podium was unconventional both in its design and construction, and Kerez's building proves to be unconventional in its construction but conventional in its visual representation, it becomes necessary to examine a final possibility: a building where a conventional structural system contrasts with an unconventional image.

One such example that would seamlessly integrate into Jesolo's urban fabric — while simultaneously representing an extreme reinterpretation of the terrace as an architectural element — is *L'Arbre Blanc* (2019) in Montpellier, designed by Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto.

Compared with *JBlue Resort* (2023), a development within Jesolo's *Pineta* that rather conventionally replicates the city's architectural elements — particularly balconies and sunshades — *L'Arbre Blanc* presents a distinct alternative in terms of building imagery and design approach.

²⁸ Ibid.

Despite the use of conventional technology (a steel structure with three internal concrete cores), Fujimoto's building achieves an unconventional appearance through a series of numerous isolated cantilevered balconies that entirely surround this curvilinear building. Duplex apartments are enriched with external staircases, accompanied by overhanging shading systems that reinforce the image of a tree canopy.



Figure 122 the *JBlue Resort* in Jesolo (2023) and Sou Fujimoto's *L'Arbre Blanc* (2019).

That said, returning to the works of Meier, Ferrater, Byrne and Galfetti (LVL) in Jesolo, we can assert that while these projects may not represent the pinnacle of their architectural production — especially considering that their most renowned buildings are certainly not condominiums — the significance of their presence lies elsewhere.

Rather than being extreme and difficult-to-replicate architectural statements, their contribution to Jesolo's urban landscape is rooted in the fact that the authorial architectural transformations they introduced are more accessible and adaptable.²⁹

This, in essence, represents the most successful aspect of Jesolo's architectural experiment — particularly in the case of Meier. Through a distinguished form of Midarchitecture, Jesolo has provided accessible frameworks and architectural languages that have elevated the standards of Massarch production. According to Danilo Gerotto:

What became clear after Tange's master plan was the need to educate local entrepreneurs on a new vision which was able to project Jesolo towards an international panorama and towards new clients. This was achieved through the involvement of external entrepreneurs such as Peter Reichegger of the Hobag group, a key figure in this process who set the standard in creating a new product for Jesolo.³⁰

The significance of initiatives such as *Jesolo Lido 2012 – The City Beach* lies in their capacity to cultivate and subsequently generate through diversity a cluster which then propagates and

²⁹ Per Meier possiamo considerare case unifamiliari, Musei o chiese, per

³⁰ See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023.

sustains itself over time. It is not about the monument, but the network—the ecosystem in which different modes of architectural production coexist, clash, and cross-contaminate. In this messy interrelation, Midarch is not a lesser form—it is the most honest. It acknowledges contradiction as condition and accepts the necessity of compromise as a form of critical agency.

Crucial to the introduction of ‘foreign’ architects — following Mark Wigley’s definition — is the involvement of ‘tourist’ developers, external to preexisting market dynamics, as exemplified by the visionary role of Peter Reichegger, alongside local professionals who play a vital role by providing the necessary pragmatic constraints essential for the project’s success, effectively blending the universality of architectural language with local expertise.

This process, which has also contributed to the inclusion of emerging firms from the surrounding region, such as *Demogo* and *Enk*, now appears to be entering a new phase. Increasingly, it is precisely *unsubordinated architecture* that absorbs its predecessors, demonstrating that it is a process requiring continuous renewal through both political and professional commitment.

In conclusion, Jesolo’s mid-to-high-tier professional architectural landscape provides valuable insights into the functioning of the discipline — where the authorial process appears more collective than traditionally expected. However, despite the intellectual temptation to prioritise this collectiveness over individual authorship, Jesolo also demonstrates that architecture is not merely the product of forces shaped by a complex interplay of financial resources, regulations, physics, labour, power, and embodied carbon but still the result of the architect intentionality and ability to mediate.

It is true that no ‘genius’ emerges in a vacuum, as James Bridle observes regarding creativity, but it is important to consider that, beyond the pursuit of geniuses, architecture must continue to be embodied by professionals who question the status quo.³¹

In Jesolo, particularly between the first two decades of the new millennium, whether acting as a facilitator, as in the case of Danilo Gerotto, or as an author, the architect plays a decisive role. Without these key figures, Jesolo as we know it today would be significantly diminished — reduced to an inert entity, stripped of its distinctive energy, allure, and architectural vitality.

³¹ James Bridle, ‘WePresent | Writer James Bridle Explores Creativity and AI’ <<https://wepresent.wetransfer.com/stories/james-bridle-on-creativity-and-ai-collaboration>> [accessed 11 September 2024]

Midarch, even if in a ‘deceitful’ manner, has the merit of using expertise and quality to continually prove the relevance of architecture to a wide public. It reveals that architecture today is not solely about the monument, but the network — the ecosystem in which different modes of architectural production coexist, clash, and cross-contaminate. In this messy interrelation, Midarch is not a lesser form—it is the most responsive. It acknowledges contradiction as condition and accepts the necessity of compromise as a form of critical agency. Midarch may not represent the height of architectural discourse or the pinnacle of the discipline in a given period, but it is most likely where the majority of us, as architects, ultimately find ourselves — hopefully.

3.4 Jesolo Wave

I hope that someone in the municipality takes a little vacation to Dubai and, upon returning, contemplates how damn far behind we are... (Creivellaromarco52, 15 October 2023)

Yesterday the Italian Miami, tomorrow the Italian Dubai. | Poor Jesolo, without a soul anymore... (I say this with enormous affection) (Osoppo, 24 February 2023)

What small-town folks (*provinciali*) we are... (ilmoretto, 17 August 2022)

Ehhh... it's clear you don't get round Jesolangeles much... (...) Jesolo is an immense open construction site, and there's always something new to see.. (JesManuel, 17 November 2023)¹

Through this research, we have come to understand that Jesolo stands out as a city built primarily for tourism and real estate development, without an apparent organic relationship with its inland territory. Unlike Venice, intrinsically tied to its lagoon, or other Venetian cities defined by a strong urban identity, Jesolo presents a different case—an urban-commercial product that developed in parallel with the rise of tourism along the Adriatic coast.

We also know that, from a territorial perspective, Jesolo was reclaimed from marshland—an initial step toward the monetisation of land, which, through the condominium, could continue vertically, multiplying across horizontal planes. Jesolo's unwavering orientation toward the sea makes the beach its primary public space and key commercial discriminator, with the architectural offer and urban solutions recalibrated according to their proximity to the shoreline.²

But more importantly to our discussion, Danilo Gerotto further reinforces the city's market-driven nature: 'Jesolo is not a traditional city; it is a tourist product. Its form has been shaped by the market, not by history.'³ This commercial character is complemented by the subversive identity highlighted by Simone Gobbo, who asserts: 'Jesolo is a Venetian Las Vegas — a place designed for entertainment, detached from everyday life.'⁴

Regarding its relationship with the inland cities, Treviso, Padua, Vicenza and Verona, from which the majority of apartment owners have historically originated, Danilo Gerotto observes:

¹ Comments from SkyScraper city online forum.

² Both Stefano Pujatti and Luciano Schiavon note: 'Jesolo could have developed a connection with the lagoon, but instead, it chose to isolate itself by focusing on the sea.' See Appendix: Luciano Schiavon (LVL), interview by the author 29 February 2024. Stefano Pujatti (Elastico Farm), interview by the author 29 February 2024.

³ See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023.

⁴ See Appendix: Simone Gobbo, interview by the author, 25 September 2023.

‘Venetians (*Veneti*) see Jesolo as a holiday destination, not as a city.’⁵ This perception underscores the fact that tourism remains the city’s strongest economic driver. Its development has been driven by explicit speculative logic and, over the past thirty years, has seemingly adopted an increasingly international rather than local vision, drawing inspiration from models such as Miami and Benidorm. This shift reflects an effort to adapt to an increasingly competitive market, which now includes a growing presence of Eastern European clients alongside the already well-established German and Austrian tourists who, however, tend to prefer hotel stays or rental accommodation.

This said, a careful observer might contest, as Francesco Martin asserts, that: ‘The real economy of Jesolo is the real estate market, not tourism.’⁶ Condominiums, in this context, represent the apex of this economy — the most tangible manifestation of Jesolo’s ambitions, which take shape through multiple actors and resonate in the words of one of its most visionary developers, Peter Reichegger: ‘We had to create the place. Before, there was nothing here.’⁷

This approach has led the city to construct an identity fundamentally antithetical to that of Venice — a city that, by contrast, remains primarily oriented toward its lagoon and inland territory. ‘Jesolo has built its own identity, independent of Venice,’ adds Reichegger.⁸ This evolving identity is further shaped by the works of architects such as Meier, Ferrater, and Byrne, which represent some of its most recent contributions.

The frequent comparison with Miami, while somewhat approximate and distant, nevertheless leads to interesting reflections. Despite Jesolo’s different degree of international exposure, it operates within a global tourism market in which it cannot compete with destinations such as Miami or Dubai — cities that, beyond tourism, also host tertiary-sector activities that mitigate seasonal employment fluctuations. However, Jesolo finds its strength in its continental location, benefiting from accessibility by car and its proximity to regional markets.

If Miami’s rise as the ‘capital of postmodernism’ between 1975 and 1980 was driven by the emergence of the New Right, which successfully exploited the shifting cultural and economic landscape shaped by postmodernism, Jesolo, too, experienced a delayed form of postmodernism, emerging from the rise of a new right-wing movement in the mid-1990s. This shift was

⁵ See Appendix: Danilo Gerotto, interview by the author, 16 March 2023.

⁶ See Appendix: Edoardo Marin (Dema Costruzioni), interview by the author, 21 January 2025.

⁷ See Appendix: Peter Reichegger, interview by the author, 26 September 2023.

⁸ *Ibid.*

also reflected at regional level, where it replaced the historically dominant moderate conservatives of the *Democrazia Cristiana*.⁹

This is particularly relevant because, within a broader framework, it allows us to better understand Jesolo's relationship with its territorial surroundings, functioning as an outlet supported by a political and economic system favourable to its development.

While according to John Beverly and David Houston Miami's global rise was made possible by the influx of capital from South American nations — establishing connections with cities such as Caracas, Medellín, and Buenos Aires, serving as both an international banking hub and a playground for their ruling classes, while simultaneously coordinating economic and political strategies across the Caribbean, Atlantic South America, and Central America — Jesolo, in turn, finds its economic engine in the cities of its hinterland.¹⁰ This dynamic has given rise to what can be described as a form of *universal provincialism*, a condition that shapes Jesolo's architecture and offers a clearer understanding of its origins.

Following Koolhaas urban intuitions, Jesolo's recent history and built expansion could see it labelled as a 'Generic city': without history, born from a *tabula rasa*; where new identities overlap over time; formed from the fractal repetition of the same structural element (the condominium).¹¹ Here, what does not work is abandoned, tropicality is as much of a destiny as pedestrianisation, verticality substitutes horizontality and all possibilities are available (all kinds of condominiums, campsites, hotels).

Jesolo is sociology in itself, open to visitors at times when tourism is independent from its destination.¹² Jesolo Lido could assert itself as a unique example of an Italian 'Generic City' with few competitors given the historicity of Italy's built environment. As demonstrated through various case studies, it is a city where 'only redundancy matters', where Massarch functions as a litmus test for broader aesthetic and social phenomena, while High-architecture and Midarch serve as urban catalysts and differentiators.

⁹ In 1994, the election of Mayor Renato Martin, a member of the emerging Lega Nord party, marked a shift in political direction after years of governance alternating between the Christian Democracy and the Socialist Party. At regional level, Veneto experienced a similar transition during the same period, with the election of Giancarlo Galan, who aligned the region with Silvio Berlusconi's new right-wing political movement - a trajectory that has since been continued by the current governor, Luca Zaia (also Lega Nord).

¹⁰ Beverly and Houston, p.22.

¹¹ Rem Koolhaas, *S,M,L,XL* [1995] (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998), pp.1248-1263.

¹² *Ibid.*

However, Jesolo's condition — despite being 'Generic' in the meaning attributed by Koolhaas — should not be generalised. It is the result of specific territorial forces whose acknowledges the impossibility of an objective point of view, emphasising the depiction of a partial phenomenon. In this case, it highlights the inadequacy of a *local vs. global* dichotomy, as suggested by Bruno Latour.

Rather than focusing on the scale of a given phenomenon, the French sociologist prefers to examine its connections within mobility systems and flows, which become the primary explanatory factor for territorial development. In this sense, Jesolo serves as an observatory for understanding its overseas counterparts. Architecture, within this context, functions as a *catalyst* for these connections, revealing Jesolo's true *grandeur* — where certain experiences demonstrate how qualitative aspects can emerge from within quantitative frameworks.

As Bruno Latour affirms:

Thus, it's the quality of what is transported from place to place that creates asymmetries between sites: one can be said to be 'bigger' than some other, but only as long as connections are reliably maintained. It's never the case that one site is more universal, more encompassing, more open-minded than any other, in and of itself. Once this radical 'flattening' of the land has been obtained, once every global view has been firmly localized into one specific site, once attention is focused on the connecting networks, it's possible to ask a second question: since we see something only thanks to what circulates between sites, how can we be made aware of the fragility of our own interpretations?¹³

These asymmetries in Jesolo emerge through the intersection of universalism and provincialism, converging into a singular aesthetic output where high and non-high architecture reciprocally influence one another. It is a place where the belief that distancing oneself from local traditions equates to greater universality prevails — yet, paradoxically, where new traditions simultaneously take shape in the form of tourist attractions.

The city's development is driven by investments from a catchment area that includes Treviso, Padua, Vicenza, Udine, Brescia — particularly in the case of Lido dei Lombardi — and ultimately Bolzano, following Peter Reichegger's involvement.¹⁴

Notably, this territorial network largely coincides with the former inland possessions of the Venetian Republic. Jesolo capitalises on the existing transport and economic infrastructure of

¹³ Bruno Latour, 'On the difficulty of being glocal', *Domus*, 867 (2004), pp.44-45.

¹⁴ The inland territory of the Republic of Venice included much of northeastern Italy, notably the regions of Veneto (Padua, Verona, Vicenza, Treviso), eastern Lombardy (Brescia, Bergamo, Crema), Friuli (Udine, Cividale), and parts of Trentino and Romagna. The Republic of Venice ended on May 12, 1797, when Napoleon Bonaparte invaded during his Italian campaign.

the *Serenissima*, effectively reversing the capital flows that, during the 16th century, facilitated the construction of Palladio's villas. Yet, paradoxically, it is within Jesolo's *a-cultural* identity — its stark contrast to Venice — that this phenomenon assumes the contours of an authentic cultural expression.

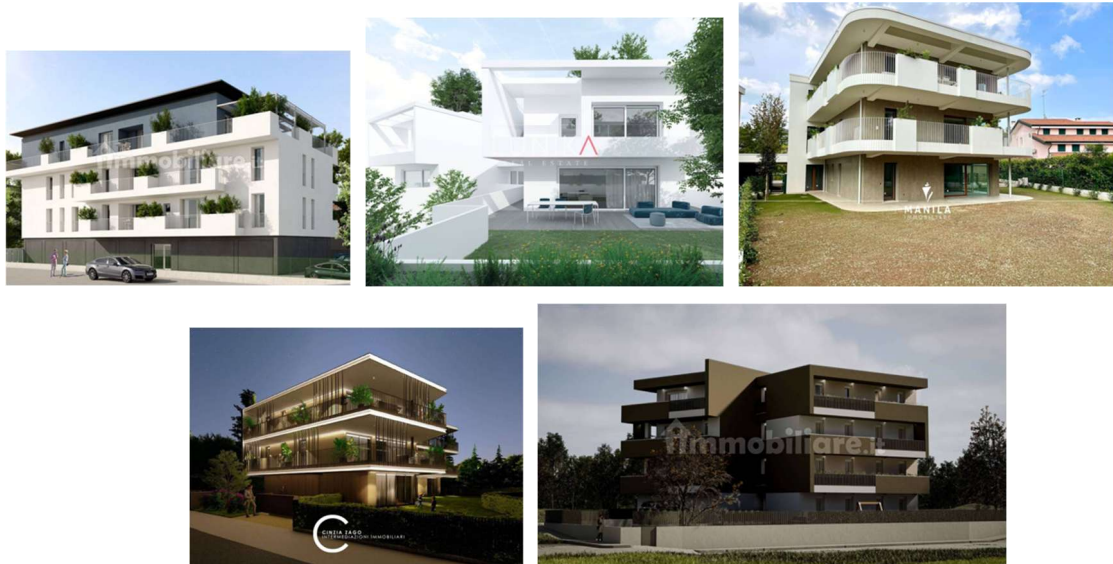


Figure 123 Buildings featured on real estate portals from inland cities such as Padua, Vicenza, and Treviso reveal the reapplication of architectural elements characteristic of Jesolo's condominium. (2024).

If, in Rem Koolhaas's *Delirious New York*, Coney Island served as a testing ground for Manhattan, Jesolo can be understood as the experimental field for an inland territory that spends its summers on its beaches. Architectural features such as large balconies, LED lighting, glass parapets, and extensive sunshading are often replicated in inland contexts where their use appears unjustified, producing a sense of maritime estrangement. This condition becomes emblematic of the *forever tourist* mindset, increasingly pursued even within the urban environment.¹⁵

To draw a literary parallel to Jesolo's condition, Francesco Maino's novel *I morticani* (2023) proves to be a valuable reference.¹⁶ It serves not only as a linguistic parallel to the architecture of Jesolo but, more significantly, as a territorial one.

¹⁵ The contradictions observed are numerous: from the unjustified use of LED lighting in peripheral contexts, to transparent parapets with no view to frame, oversized green balconies in areas already surrounded by greenery, and sunshades employed purely as aesthetic elements.

¹⁶ Francesco Maino, *I Morticani* (Trieste: Italo Svevo editore, 2023).

Set in the Veneto region, the novel portrays the protagonist's mental breakdown through a schizophrenic stream of consciousness, intricately weaving together diverse linguistic elements without clear distinctions. These include local dialects, Anglicisms, registered trademarks, formal juridical Latin, local slang, and an extensive range of hypertexts that require annotation to be fully understood.

Despite the absence of explicit architectural references, the text functions as a mirror of Jesolo's built environment — an interplay of images generating other images. In this way, Maino's novel reveals an '*amplified and intensified*' province, where the city — renamed *Hiessolo Bulgaria* instead of Jesolo — becomes part of an imagined region called *Veenetken*, rather than Veneto.¹⁷

Rather than adopting a 'Learning from Jesolo' approach, this critical overview aims to open a window onto an architecture of hyper-realism. In line with Lev Manovich's vision, Jesolo can be understood as a node within a broader global network, one that shares common aesthetic standards — now 'arguably the only category capable of transcending international boundaries.'¹⁸ And despite contemporary forms of communication, this phenomenon remains predominantly physical, not driven by digital impulses but by tangible 'waves' that link both proximate and distant territories. Jesolo exhibits a form of '*productive schizophrenia*,' caught between local specificity and the pressures of global aesthetic and economic alignment.

Observing new buildings or real estate advertisements online reveals an architecture that emerged from a critical detachment from the postmodern movement, ultimately evolving by utilising the same collage techniques, and symbols of modernism as a new toolbox.

Here, whiteness, free-pillars, hanging balconies, transparencies, brise-soleil and minimalism are some of the essential element of 'true' architecture, whose forms are formally shaped by professionals, including architects. Intentionality is a prerequisite; unintentionality is not an option.¹⁹ This architecture draws inspiration from itself, as shown with Richard Meier experience, resulting in self-referential behaviour that, through repeated iterations, can generate 'glitches' within the system—as exemplified by the caricatural aesthetic of *The Podium*.

¹⁷ Francesco Maino, *I Morticani* (Trieste: Italo Svevo editore, 2023).

¹⁸ Len Manovich, *Post Media Aesthetics* (2001) < https://manovich.net/content/04-projects/032-post-media-aesthetics/29_article_2001.pdf > [Accessed 29 November 2024]

¹⁹ A condition that concerns us all. And if Rimbaud once declared that 'one must be absolutely modern', today it is impossible to avoid to belong to postmodernity. In other words, as Maldonado suggests, 'one cannot transgress without also imitating.'

It reflects a form of shared intelligence, in which buildings combine real estate imperatives with aesthetic ambitions, juxtaposing high and non-high architecture.

Jesolo's modern revivalism reflects a key postmodernist principle: the rejection of the idea that a single label can sufficiently account for the complexity of a global reality defined by multiple speeds and trajectories. Charles Jencks characterises this era of pluralism through the metaphor of waves, using it to articulate the layered and overlapping nature of architectural and cultural discourse, as follows:

Placing the various modernisms within this overarching long wave, one could say that there are at least two historical medium waves that develop roughly since the 1960s, the Late- and Post-ones that agitate the waters. Wave theory is, of course, just another branch of physics and a metaphor for historians, but it helps to illuminate the question. If the big wave is made up from the three aspects – modernity, modernisation and Modernism – and I believe it is, then the globe is still very much in a modern period. It rules, not OK as far as minorities and ecologists are concerned, but it still dominates most cultures. Nevertheless, its critics and creators have moved elsewhere, to adopt a spatial metaphor, both forward and back and to the side, creating these medium waves as they do so. So, while it is true that Post-Modernism is really a part of the bigger wave and has not yet fundamentally changed its force or direction, the cultural movement has, I would argue, deepened its quality and thought.²⁰

According to Jencks' discourse, architecture continues to operate within a fundamentally modernist framework—as demonstrated in our case by the ongoing consolidation of the condominium as a housing model. And although it is simultaneously subject to constant hybridisation, driven by the upheaval of various cultural forces, it remains largely governed by the logic of modernisation.

Jesolo's adoption of the neo-modernist language of architects such as Richard Meier—particularly through the condominium—emerges from a context in which globalisation unfolds in slow motion. This process is mediated by enduring cultural structures, a pronounced blend of conservatism and escapism, and is further reinforced by the socio-economic dynamics of real estate and tourism speculation, operating under the influence of local administrative control.

²⁰ Charles Jencks, 'What then is Postmodernism?', (John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2009) < https://medien.umbreitkatalog.de/pdfzentrale/978/047/074/Leseprobe_I_9780470748671.pdf > [accessed 22 November 2024]

This seemingly diluted form of modernism—constrained, for instance, by the aforementioned *Soprintendenza* (whose offices, not coincidentally, are located in nearby Venice) — is reinterpreted by Jesolo’s local professionals and finds its most legible expression in the condominium, which emerges in this context as the clearest embodiment of pragmatic modernism.

In contrast to the architectural readings of 1970s Las Vegas, Jesolo’s built environment does not reference Pop Art. Instead, its visual culture draws more subtly from Duane Hanson’s hyperrealism and David Foster Wallace’s avant-pop—where *appearance* and the *staging* of tourist space permeate every social realm, including the domestic and the public.²¹



Figure 124 Duane Hanson’s hyper-realistic sculpture, *Man with Camera* (1991).

With these aesthetic references in mind, the city of Jesolo appears as a mirror of a deeply contemporary condition—one that Boris Groys, in his text *The City in the Age of Touristic Reproduction*, articulates through the paradoxical relationship inherent in tourist spaces, whose boundaries today can encompass the entirety of a territory, including areas not explicitly designated as ‘touristic’.²² The text examines the transformation of urban spaces, wherein through history the aspiration for an isolated utopian city is progressively supplanted by an increasing fascination with tourism. As Groys asserts:

The rigid distinction between romantic world travellers and a locally based, sedentary population is rapidly being erased. Cities are no longer waiting for the arrival of the tourist — they

²¹ Dean MacCannell, p.56.

²² Groys Boris, *Art Power* (Cambridge, Mass; London : The MIT press, 2008)

too are starting to join global circulation, to reproduce themselves on a world scale and to expand in all directions. As they do so, their movement and proliferation are happening at a much faster pace than the individual romantic tourist was ever capable of. This fact prompts the widespread outcry that all cities now increasingly resemble one another and are beginning to homogenise, with the result that when a tourist arrives in a new city he ends up seeing the same things he encountered in all the other cities. This experience of similarity among all contemporary cities often misleads the observer to assume that the globalisation process is erasing local cultural idiosyncrasies, identities, and differences. The truth is not that these distinctions have disappeared, but that they in turn have also embarked on a journey, started to reproduce themselves and to expand.²³

And if, as suggested, ‘present-day urban architecture has now begun to move faster than its viewers’, Jesolo offers a context in which this motion is perceptibly slowed—a reduced speed that allows the frames composing the film of globalisation to become more legible. In this way, Jesolo exemplifies this evolution on two overlapping levels.²⁴

First, regionally, through the oscillating relationship that stands in reciprocal correspondence between the inland ‘urban’ sphere and the ‘holiday space’ next to the beach and vice versa. Second, internationally, Jesolo aspires to emulate globally renowned destinations such as Miami, Dubai, and Benidorm, while contending with local societal and normative structures that compel prudence, and the moral burden to not satisfy one’s own impulses.

Recalling Wigley’s concept of the architect as a *full-time tourist* and our definition of the *forever tourist*, Groys extends this notion beyond architects to encompass buildings themselves, and by extent entire cities.

This architecture is almost always already there before the tourists arrive. In the race between tourists and architecture it is now the tourist who loses. Although the tourist is annoyed to encounter the same architecture everywhere he goes, he is also amazed to see how successful a certain type of architecture has proved to be in a wide range of disparate cultural settings.²⁵

From this perspective, Jesolo’s architectural development, despite its varying degrees of quality and the homogenising forces from below, aspires — through the contributions of skilled architects — to assert its identity and integrity through architectural diversity, regardless of its broader contextual framework.

At a national level, what distinguishes Jesolo from its closer counterparts, such as Lignano Sabbiadoro, Bibione, and Caorle, as well as more distant counterparts like Riccione, is not merely the volume of annual tourist arrivals — a number it shares with Rimini and Cavallino

²³ Ibid., p.105.

²⁴ Ibid., p.107.

²⁵ Ibid.

Treporti. Rather, it is the rupture of an established urban narrative that emerged at the turn of the last millennium. This disruption, facilitated by forced architectural interventions and external influences, has led to a radical renewal of the built environment, incorporating new external inputs within established architectural languages.

And to fully understand the nature of Jesolo—particularly the ‘universal’ dimension of its ‘provincialism’—Groys observes:

With this, the strategies of postromantic, total tourism are now supplanting the old strategies of utopia and enlightenment. Redundant architectural and artistic styles, political prejudices, religious myths, and traditional customs are no longer meant to be transcended in the name of universality but to be touristically reproduced and globally disseminated. Today’s world city is homogenous without being universal.²⁶

He further adds:

It was formerly believed that attaining the universality of ideas and creativity depended on the individual transcending his own local traditions in the name of universal validity. Consequently, the utopia hailed by the radical avant-garde was reductive: one was first expected to aspire to a pure, elemental form stripped of all historical and local traits in order to claim its universal and global validity. This too was how classical modernist art proceeded - first reduce something to its essence, then spread it around the world. Today’s art and architecture, by contrast, are globally disseminated without even first bothering with any such reduction to some universally valid essence. Nowadays any cultural phenomenon can proliferate without being required to make claims for its own universality. Universal thinking is being supplanted by the universal media dissemination of any kind of local ideas whatsoever.²⁷

If *Massarch* architecture in Jesolo exemplifies homogeneity, and *Midarch*—though international in scope and falling within the category described by Groys—lacks any utopian vision or claim to universal applicability, both nonetheless have helped establish the preconditions for architectural experimentation. In a logical progression, the globalised architecture of Meier—today considered the *non plus ultra* of its kind, though still situated within the *Midarch* category—aims, and indeed succeeds, in achieving reproducibility and widespread media dissemination. This directly responds to Jesolo’s core requirement: to engage with diversity while circulating within global architectural discourse.

²⁶ Ibid. p.107-108.

²⁷ Ibid.

From this perspective, the involvement of international architects demonstrates Jesolo's role as an *architectural repeater*—a place that retransmits architectural signals within the global network, echoing the very waves to which Jencks also referred in his description of pluralistic, postmodern circulation.

This condition not only reveals Jesolo's capacity to propagate and impose its iconography onto nearby inland cities, but more significantly, it generates the very substratum from which certain singularities—such as the *Podium*—can emerge. In their rootedness, these seemingly local solutions paradoxically articulate the universal condition that Jesolo itself embodies.

What might initially appear as a form of burgeoning provincialism—a belief in occupying the centre of something uniquely significant—ultimately reflects Jesolo's awareness of its position within a broader and more complex network.

Jesolo's 'universal provincialism' thus endowed this seaside locality with a form of self-awareness distinct from the ambitions of larger-scale competitors such as Miami, Dubai, or Benidorm. The uniqueness of Jesolo's urban evolution must be understood within the Italian context, where—through the actors involved in the first decade of the 2000s—it demonstrated the potential to shape urban strategies through architectural concepts. Should a departure from this approach lead to a new homogenisation of the market, the responsibility will lie with the political decisions made in these years. However, as this study has shown, within this framework, architecture — and in particular the condominium — continues to play a central role in negotiating the pressures of private initiative within the urban context and in the evolution of its own discipline.

APPENDIX

The following interviews were conducted during the course of the doctoral research. The questions addressed cover common themes related to condominium development in Jesolo, with specific focus depending on each interviewee's field of expertise. Although the majority of those contacted agreed to participate, not all were available—either due to time constraints or lack of response. Among those who did not participate are Stefan Scheiber Loeis (Meier & Partner), CZ Studio, Adriatica Immobiliare, and Immobiliare JVL.

1. Interview with Danilo Gerotto

The following interview was held in Venice at Palazzo Contarini Mocenigo on the 16th of March 2023.

GM: You lived Jesolo's expansion in first person both as a citizen and as part of the municipality's urban sector, department where you covered different mansions from 1992 to 2004, making you an exceptional witness of Jesolo's evolution. Could you expand on those years during which you could see these changes from the inside?

DG: After the crisis of the First Republic in 1994, the first direct municipal elections took place and consequently, after the settlement of the new mayor, a new experimental approach to the city began. The municipal council was composed of a rather young equipe, which decided to work together with Bocconi University in Milan in order to focus on the right questions and thus give the right answers. At that time there were 20/30 privately owned buildings that had never been completed, a situation of decay that could not fit with Jesolo's aspirations, a city that randomly took form in the 1960s and that aimed for a leading role in the Italian touristic sector. During those years of *economic boom*, those with money would simply build, and in 1985, when it took place the first *condono edilizio*¹, a sort of amnesty on buildings infractions, there were 8000 requests for regularization on 6000 buildings. How can urban planning work when everything is already built? In times in which the idea of a 5-star hotel in Jesolo Lido was a dream, the only option was to find a way to attract investors to renovate the dilapidated existing building environment and also to bet on quality instead of quantity or affordability, differentiating from the Romagna Riviera characterised by affordable accommodations for short stays.

¹ The *condono edilizio* is a sort of amnesty on building infractions that allows citizens to regularise unauthorised buildings interventions and also contributes to an exceptional cash inflow to the state coffers. Three of them occurred since the foundation of the Italian Republic: 1985 (Craxi I), 1994 (Berlusconi I) and 2003 (Berlusconi II).

GM: This situation led to an international competition won by Kenzo Tange, which aim was to set new standards based on an international scale and increase the residential population through a city that could be lived all year long.

DG: The competition focused on the strip of land between the Adriatic Sea and the Venice Lagoon. After some initial studies, Kenzo Tange won the competition and was involved in the planning of Jesolo, bringing an international perspective to our local administration. I must anticipate that the plan was not perfectly realized; for example, the heights of the current towers were not taken into account at that time, as they are part of Aurelio Galfetti's following proposal. What became clear after Tange's master plan was the need to educate local entrepreneurs on a new vision, which was able to project Jesolo towards an international panorama and towards new clients. This was achieved through the involvement of external entrepreneurs such as Peter Reichegger of the Hobag group, a key figure in this process, that set the standard in creating a new product for Jesolo.

GM: Kenzo Tange is the first of a series of renowned architects that took part in Jesolo formation. What role played architecture in the formation of the city?

DG: At that time only the city of Salerno addressed similar topics: architectural issues answered by world-class architects². Kenzo Tange was the first of many architects among which the most significant figure was Richard Meier. He initially did not want to be involved, due to his previous 'Italian experience' in Rome with the project for the Ara Pacis; he was eventually convinced by Reichegger's determination and the municipality's vision, a collaboration that led to the realisation of various projects on the coast. To this virtuous spiral took part other architects such as Gonçalo Byrne, Manuel Mateus, and Ferrater. Although not all outcomes could be controlled, beautiful things were sold to a higher-quality audience, aided by the fact that the euro's introduction pushed real estate investments. The product was successful and the development strategy worked.

GM: What role played condominiums in this process?

DG: Inside Leonardo Delvecchio's biography, it is mentioned that having an apartment in Jesolo had become a trend among his colleagues, evidence of the successful strategy adopted during those years. The development revolved around condominiums. In the beginning, underused hotels were the first to be converted into condominiums, a symptom of the changing perspective in the tourist population and

² After 1993 elections, Salerno's new mayor Vincenzo De Luca similarly decided to bet on urban intervention guided by renowned architects. Various projects related with culture and tourism took form among which Zaha Hadid's cruise terminal *La Stazione Marittima* is the most known outcome.

in our vision. New hotels are also scarce and those that were built are the result of dealings in which developers are given the possibility to build also condominiums in exchange. This can be explained by the fact that hotels as an investment decrease their value with time, while the cost of an apartment in Jesolo skyrockets as the years pass by.

Condominiums work in Jesolo because, apart from stable residents, many holiday houses are part of a system based on loyal tourism. Owners come from the hinterland frequently and all year long, a signal of a successful product for Jesolo, which is a city that was born for tourism and whose citizens willingly accept it. It is also a cultural factor, the *Jesolani* live off tourism. I remember that when I was a kid it was normal for my family to host people to make a living. Earning money out of tourists is the normality and what could be seen as speculation, to a local is seen as part of the territory development: 'If I build on my land it is a right, if my neighbour is building, it is speculation.'

Life in Jesolo is tied to condominiums, which are seen as an opportunity; they build loyalty through the generation of tourists. Tourists here do not care about the sea, do not care about culture, they care about the lifestyle. That lifestyle that the condominium enhances through the services it offers and the possibility to be contaminated by different activities, as opposed to camping sites that work as closed systems.

GM: On this topic, why condominiums instead of other tourist facilities?

DG: Condominiums represent value while camping has a rather conflicting connotation, as they are enclosed facilities mainly used by visitors coming from outside; Germans do not buy houses as entrepreneurs from Trentino, Veneto or now, even from eastern Europe, do. Do not misunderstand me, campsites are excellent products too, as confirmed by Cavallino Treporti³, and they are part of the beauty of the Venetian Coast that offers a multitude of excellent products. Towers, however, are not that successful, even though they practically are condominiums, they still do not have the same appeal they have in venues such as Benidorm. This typology was brought to Jesolo by Aurelio Galfetti who wanted to build three towers along Jesolo Lido's strip: one north in the *pineta*, one at the centre and one south close to the lagoon. The intention was to make Jesolo measurable from the distance, both inland and from the sea. But towers did not work, and although the new housing plan increased building volumes (I consider the 2009 housing plan a disaster), it did not have an economic return; most of them failed compared to regular condominiums.

GM: Is it just a matter of value in the end?

³ Cavallino Treporti is today the fifth most visited touristic venue in Italy, mainly because of its camping sites. The town counts 13.000 inhabitants and reaches more than six million visitors every year.

DG: People do not buy an apartment in Jesolo to make a profit out of it. People go to Jesolo because they want to live in it, accepting the urban dimension of the beach. The price value of the houses never decreases and this is related to the courage of the politicians who decided not to follow Rimini but focused on quality. Also the world of business understood that quality paid off and consequently raised the bar of their investments. A discussion on quality rather than efficiency. I think that at this moment the product should be recalibrated, as the city should be conceived as a product itself; we just need the intellectual honesty to approach the city for what it is.

2. Interview with Peter Reichegger, RIV Group

The following interview was held in Jesolo at RIV Group Headquarter on the 26th of September 2023.

GM: Developers and investors play a fundamental role in the realization of large-scale private projects, as in the case of Jesolo Lido Design District. The world of architecture often focuses on architects, overlooking the visionary role of developers as centralizers of necessary economic resources and promoters of the project itself.

Jesolo Lido Design District is currently the most ambitious undertaking by a single designer in Jesolo. You were one of the first investors to believe in creating a high-quality product for Jesolo, even through the involvement of an internationally recognized architect. How did the idea of Jesolo Lido Design District come about? What intentions led to the involvement of Meier Partners, and what role does the architect play in this project?

PR: This is true, and at the time of conceiving the Design District, there was nothing like it in Jesolo, an ambitious project that revolutionized the city's skyline.

The project originated from an initial study of the area involving four different designers. Eventually, the Vudafieri Severino studio from Milan was entrusted with the task. Given the significance of the intervention, we decided to engage an international studio to initiate a new phase of city development, aiming to renew it over the next 20 years, following the concept proposed by Kenzo Tange's masterplan.

When undertaking a project of this type and scale, one doesn't immediately grasp the challenges ahead. I never imagined that I would end up buying the entire area. Initially, I had purchased the land where we are now, along with the one facing the sea. The one where the Hotel Frankenstein is currently located was not part of this initial phase. Everything started with a project that, initially, followed normal criteria—a project with good architects but not of international renown: the Vudafieri-Severino studio, known for its work in the fashion and retail world with very interesting projects. We collaborated on an ambitious project in Piazza Torino, one of the most ambitious projects of that time (1999).

As it was a highly ambitious project, after initial discussions with mayor Renato Martin and architect Danilo Gerotto, we realized that we needed to focus on renewing the city's image. The idea of doing something truly grand didn't originate with me; I wanted to create a beautiful and ambitious project since the land demanded it, but they envisioned something even larger and more significant. Through Tange's masterplan, they aimed to elevate Jesolo to another dimension, at a time when this cultural shift was not yet evident. The name Jesolo was still associated with a beach for 'guardians;' the middle-low class Germans were the main visitors, along with many people from the East—essentially a lower-middle-class level. There were numerous tourists but without a distinct identity until Tange was commissioned to transform the territory, an impressive operation for that era.

Following the success of the initial projects, Jesolo Lido 'The city beach 2012' was born, where Jesolo was identified as the replica of Miami—a key reference for the spirit of the administrators, who aimed for successful international influences. This Jesolo, named 'The city beach 2012,' envisioned the construction of the first skyscrapers, enormous ambitions that clashed with technical implementation regulations, urban plans, and the supervisory authority—factors that hindered the area.

The project, more modest compared to the current one, was presented to the administrators and appreciated. However, they wanted it to be just the first step of a more extensive development. Speaking of these things now is easy in hindsight; at that time, without investors, it was challenging to imagine. At that point, I called the architects in Milan and communicated that we wanted to change architects. Thus began a series of trips across Europe to seek references, such as Jean Nouvelle in Brussels and Lugano, where I entered a hotel and realized it wasn't what I wanted—very dark with black walls, not in line with my initial idea.

A friend from Berlin, where I worked, recommended Richard Meier for his surreal architecture made of transparent glass and light. We contacted him; Richard was interested, as his son was studying in Rome at that time and was completing the project of the Jubilee Church. After the first contact, he showed interest, as, in general, he was interested in any project by the sea. After establishing the initial budget, we went to New York, presenting Jesolo with its new skyline. Initially, Meier thought we wanted to show off, but he reconsidered, and afterwards, we began discussing the proposal.

The project that was pursued and indicated by the administration was the tallest tower in the Veneto region by the sea. Project and counter-project began in a period when the currently available lots were not yet available, and we had to look at municipal areas to accommodate all the volumes. The intended use was residential, but in a hotel redevelopment area, so it was important to create a reception structure that offered volume bonuses to develop the residential urban project. The architect drafted the initial sketches and visited the area. He also presented the project to the Municipality and the Region, much to the satisfaction of all parties. The building included 24 floors by the sea, and even the meeting with the

Venice Supervisory Authority with the same architect was positive, with great admiration from the involved offices. However, once the project was approved by the Municipality, with a clear direction, the Supervisory Authority decided to deny it, 'urban and environmental criteria are not compatible,' was their verdict.

This incident resulted in a year's worth of lost work for us. We had a defined project down to the last detail, and surprised by the Supervisory Authority's verdict, the technician told me he 'couldn't do it' and thought the architect would have the sensitivity to understand the location and act accordingly.

Another problem was related to the territory's planning regulations, as tower structures were not possible due to distance regulations. The 90-degree rotation, thus the projection at a 45-degree angle, made it impossible to realize any tower. At that point, the administration itself understood that not only a master plan was needed but it also had to be translated into a new zoning plan. Years of revolution ensued, as we grappled with these issues firsthand. After lengthy considerations with the superintendent, we realized the Beach House condominium, 10 stories high.

In the end, the tower, along with all the others, was cancelled, arriving at a solution of 10 stories, 8 plus a duplex—a division that has become a standard in Jesolo today. From 2007 to 2012, we built the Beach House with initial success, only to fall into a full economic crisis in 2008. Nevertheless, we managed to sell and finish everything as planned.

GM: In the book *Form follows finance*, Carol Willis describes the genesis of American skyscrapers in New York and mentions the first three rules of New York developers: 'Location, Location, Location.' Jesolo has grown steadily following Kenzo Tange's master plan, confirming itself as one of Italy's most successful tourist destinations. What freedoms do locations like Jesolo grant to an entrepreneur? On the other hand, what impediments more significantly hinder and shape the final outcome of a project like The Beach Houses? In Jesolo, do location, building regulations, and clientele allow greater freedom for execution and architectural experimentation?

PR: The interesting thing is that the location didn't exist. We had to create the location ourselves. Today, this area is the benchmark for any residential project in Jesolo. The image was crafted by us through architecture and landscaping. The particular attention to the landscape was a rare focus for Jesolo, a requirement that originated primarily from Richard Meier himself. Nowadays, no project is conceived without a landscape architect, as it forms the foundation upon which the architect's building stands. To the extent that today, the Design District stands out precisely for its attention to the landscape.

I remember that initially, the municipality planned to remove all the pine trees, but convinced by our intentions, it adjusted the zoning plan to a new landscape design. This also sets us apart for the design of open spaces, which are unique for Jesolo.

Despite this area being extremely depressed for Jesolo (Jesolo Lido ended before the hospital), it was the only place where we could develop our project, being an area occupied by former summer colonies. At the time, the project was not yet readable and deemed impossible, but over time, it became achievable.

Initially, there was considerable skepticism from the public about the project, including the construction systems used, such as the unusual prefabricated systems for that time. Until we finished the first building, and people realized, completely changing their perception of these architectures. Design choices that represented obstacles to overcome in the client's beliefs. Like the large windows, opposed for both climatic and privacy reasons but gradually understood and accepted, embracing different lifestyles. To this day, to preserve the architecture, the condominium even renounces placing umbrellas by the pool. It's a disturbance for a building that was designed without them, with the architect himself choosing the types of sun loungers.

The interior of this project exudes peace, something not usually found in Jesolo. Perhaps fourth in line, but with a Caribbean atmosphere with palm trees and sand, while here there's a particular focus on the territory. Then, the user, even if wealthy, doesn't immediately understand, but when they see it finished, even if they don't know why, they like it.

We're talking about projects defined in every detail. We've worked with architects who don't compromise, and even the smallest change leads to a new definition of the plan.

'Location, location, location' is valid for the client buying today, finding a place where prestige can only rise. At that time, if I had followed the same criterion, this investment wouldn't have made sense, unless you consider the waterfront as the only element. Because the same project inland would have been much more difficult to make work.

In the case of the complex known as The Pool Houses, it was a project that convinced residents to stay instead of moving to the waterfront when it became possible.

Another episode concerns a plot of land near ours, where the municipality encouraged the development of another significant project, the Stella del Mar Hotel, commissioned to Jean Nouvelle. In this case, the developer did not embrace the idea of unity and dialogue with modern architecture. Instead, they opted for a modern project that imitates Venice, with *altane* (balconies), and apartment sizes unsuitable for the Jesolo market: 200 square meters, not easily sellable in Jesolo, as it deviated from the buyers' habits and was too expensive. The project was outside economic and architectural standards, extremely ugly and out of place. Venice cannot be copied, especially here in Jesolo. Considering that it did not meet economic criteria either, they ultimately failed to continue the project, and we bought it, expanding the Richard Meier project.

The superintendent stated that the project was ‘too white,’ at which point I asked Richard how to proceed, considering involving a different architectural firm. The decision was to continue with Meier and the choices made, trying to make it acceptable. Some years later, the superintendent agreed with us. Since the projects of individual buildings are nevertheless different from each other, this confirmation removed any doubts about how to proceed.⁴

At that point, having already completed several buildings, the need arose to distinguish the project with a global name: Jesolo Lido Design District. Today, with clichéd names like ‘Beach’ or ‘Palm,’ it is impossible to stand out because every project can evoke something exotic and distant. In our case, the intention is to evoke not a single building but a whole ensemble. A fundamental difference from other operations in Jesolo, which has led us today to the completion of the last part of this neighborhood. A new area that replaces the project of a local architect with the new tower and two lower residential buildings.

Despite having done lower-level projects in our experience, the experience with Richard Meier dictated a true change of direction for Jesolo. Today, all projects are replicas of the Jesolo Lido Design District, a project that has set the benchmark. Then, of course, there is a difference because you cannot copy architecture from a photograph, even if clients don't fully understand it. I say that our experience has been a good thing because we have contributed to the qualitative development of the city, improving the quality overall.

Today in Italy, after Milan and Rome, taking into account the different population numbers, there is no other city where as much is being built as in Jesolo. This is a chain reaction where one client calls another, people tend to copy, triggering mechanisms that bring in more and more clients. The Beach Houses project was completed, and once finished, it led to the realization of other projects.

Over the years, one cannot expect the enthusiasm to remain the same; needs change, and administrations aim for different goals. At the time, everything was done to give a start and momentum with ambitious projects; today, this goal has been achieved and surpassed.

The present is different from when we started: there were stricter criteria, then the 2008 crisis, and the housing plan that increased the volume of existing buildings but left the municipality without income since the money went to the region.

⁴ ‘«Jesolo, edifici con troppo vetro e troppo bianco» La Soprintendenza bacchetta lo stile dell'archistar Meier’, La Nuova Venezia, 12th October 2023 <https://nuovavenezia.gelocal.it/regione/2023/10/12/news/jesolo_soprintendenza_stile_meier_archistar-13778564/> [accessed 25 October 2023].

From there, it was decided to pause a bit to establish new rules. Today, every new project has its public part, roundabouts, and subservices. In this project, a public square will also be created. Reviving a territory that has been dead until now, with three access points to the sea. A project that takes into account a broad audience, a project for the entire community.

GM: Condominiums are now the most commonly used tool for the development of residential complexes. This is also the case in Jesolo, where they represent a more lucrative investment for the investor compared to hotel structures, also contributing to the creation of 'resident tourists.' Is the condominium the best product for Jesolo? How is this product defined?

PR: Today, undertaking the development of a condominium in good times may be more cost-effective. It is a challenging task, and everyone must take it seriously. Similarly, for a capable manager, an hotel can be equally profitable. A hotel is very different; it is both a financial and hospitality project, and the better the hotel performs, the better the chances of placing the product in real estate funds. It's a separate job. Even while paying the instalment of a mortgage, the cash flow from the business already pays its value.

Today, there is a shortage of professionals in the hotel industry, and we see more professionals in the real estate field. During an entrepreneur's career, there are not only favourable periods. Economic cycles last 5/6 years and are inevitable. Whether it's Lehman Brothers or the war in Ukraine raising the price of raw materials, these are conditions that cannot be predicted but must be prepared for.

The hotel in Jesolo also takes into account that it is not in a large city with international chains operating at full capacity all year round. Here, hoteliers still think there is a season of only 3/4 months. Therefore, smaller hoteliers are involved.

GM: It is often said that the best projects often arise from the best clients, and Jesolo Lido Design District is an example of this. Do you think this project may have influenced the architectural production in Jesolo? Has architecture become a strategic asset for private construction?

PR: Eighty percent of what we do is not perceived and not understood by the client, but our job is not simply to minimize effort and maximize returns; otherwise, I wouldn't have chosen to undertake these kinds of projects.

In this specific case, it was not easy to communicate with American architects, administrators, and all the consultants necessary for such a project. A multitude of technicians need to be coordinated. At the

engineering level alone, I think there are about 15/20 people working. The project is very ambitious. If I were to give the client half of what he receives, he would be satisfied anyway. But that's not what we want, and the final result rewards us.

We don't have to invent anything but find the right examples. That's why we travel to see other operations and how similar projects are realized. Now there is often a commingling of hotel and condominium programs, sharing some amenities. In this case, there was no existing structure, and we created the necessary amenities: gym, pool, and sauna.

Everything is regulated by the condominium regulations, and the majority of tenants agree to pay more because the service offered is impeccable, like a hotel. An upgrade from traditional condominium administrations.

The condominium is alive, compared to other structures that die outside the season; ours live throughout the year. Even though winter may not be as attractive, various services are always guaranteed. Everything is designed, for example, within the amenities; only towels with the structure's logo can be used, a detail that is appreciated as they then feel part of an elite.

Architecture has come to influence every single user who embraces the idea of light and transparency, appreciating every aspect down to the bathrobe, influencing a community.

For each buyer, we provide a book personally signed by Richard Meier, delivered at the notary's office. Owners keep it in their library and show it to their guests.

Design architecture is a strategic asset for private construction. But not only architecture, nobody ever talks about the importance of the landscape, which distinguishes our project from all the others in Jesolo. We are talking about almost twenty thousand euros per square meter for the penthouses. Every space is studied, and accordingly, one understands why a client is willing to pay the price.

3. Interview with Simone Gobbo, Demogo

The following interview was held through phone call on the 25th of September 2023.

GM: The Cross Lam Tower, an unrealised residential building in Jesolo, aimed to be the tallest wooden tower in Europe, featuring an an exceptionality that distinguished it from other structures. Can you provide a brief overview of Demogo's involvement in this project and describe the the factors that influenced the selection of this construction system?

SG: Our experience in Jesolo is relatively unsuccessful considering the final outcomes of the operation. Various legal and non-legal issues have led to the interruption of the project and therefore have had several repercussions on the entrepreneur leading the operation: UrbanBio Srl.

Despite these negative aspects, Jesolo has been an exceptional testing ground, providing the opportunity to deal with unique themes and demands within the Italian context. In our case, the request for the construction of a residential tower translated into the project for the tallest wooden tower in Europe.

The technological and ecological aspects have thus become the main marketing tools for the operation. During the years when cross-laminated timber (xlam) technology was gaining prominence, we found interesting to use it as a starting point to distinguish the building from existing product on the market. This component of uniqueness is crucial in a market like Jesolo's, where the more iconic the projects become – in our case, the tallest wooden building – the better they can position themselves in the market. Each project aims to carve out a kind of 'best of.' The same approach applies to the actors involved in the operation, from renowned international studios to emerging Italian ones. The project narrative itself is a form of speculation.

GM: It seems that the market dictates the request for exceptional features in the design process. What other dynamics make Jesolo exceptional?

SG: Another interesting aspect is represented by the creation of a status symbol through the building itself. The construction of an imaginary projection on the territory, to which the people from Treviso are apparently attracted to demonstrate the achieved social and economic status. The anonymity of architecture is rejected, in a mechanism that becomes a strange accelerator that produces interesting processes. A screenplay between Vanzina and Woody Allen, absurd. On the one hand, I could glimpse certain dynamics from the inside, and it seems like there is a new coastal capitalism, on the other hand, architecture, which in Italy is accustomed to operating on different levels, finds in Jesolo a land where

everything is possible. The dynamics of the market are the real mystery; from a rational perspective, they are not justified. We are talking about an environment of marshy and unattractive origin. The most frequent answer to why this success is linked to the services offered, which must be specified are all self-contained and often only involve the ground floor of individual buildings. The analogy of the archipelago comes to mind, where each building is like an island. There are also projects like ours that fail due to greed, which is at the same time a reason for entrepreneurs to seek new possibilities and, therefore, a sentiment with positive repercussions in a certain sense.

GM: In your project, a technological feature serves as the defining element that characterizes the building, yet it seems challenging to convey this quality externally. What other elements contributed to the overall identity of the structure?

SG: The name CLT tower, Cross Laminated Tower, comes from the technology used, a wooden building that was intended to be sustainable. A marketing mechanism similar to the Bosco Verticale in Milan, a '*Boeri de noatri*,' so to speak. A rhetoric that we avoided by delving into various seemingly secondary aspects resulting from the choice of this construction system, far from a maritime imaginary. In this regard, we studied the ceramic cladding of the building with references drawn from Gio Ponti. The idea was to use unique slabs that would act as sunshades, conveying an idea of Mediterranean architecture. Wood and the Mediterranean, a challenging combination but one that led to interesting reflections. How to realize it in a similar context? These in-depth studies and requests are often not understood, leading to misunderstandings between the client, the architect, and the developers who try to characterize the building in some way while considering their wallet.

The kind of projects are difficult for users to accept as well. Usually, the most successful and commercially viable projects are the 'stupid' ones. Projects that simulate architectural research but whose result is quite superficial. The purpose of these projects is to sell things that seem exceptional but lack substance. This is because they lack architects who can question the status quo, but rather involve second-tier architects who are not required to undertake any design research and must adhere to an established commercial model. The opposite can also happen, where renowned architects agree to 'sell out themselves.'

GM: The elevation of the building is characterized by the division of the tower into two slender volumes, delineated by two linear elements that vertically run along the façade and horizontally enclose it at the top of the structure. Could you provide further insights behind this architectural choice?

SG: A significant architectural element can be identified in today's large terraces, distinguishing them from the isolated and serial balconies of Jesolo in the 1950s. The terrace becomes itself the facade of

the building, influencing and generating recurring solutions. An approach adopted by all Jesolo's new buildings. The facade is in fact Jesolo's essential architectural element inside every project, translating many of the initial design requisites into a codified system.

Another variable visible in the façade is the possibility of playing with duplex solutions. The penthouses, in fact, are self-contained worlds that require the lower floors to be occupied by other tenants to fuel their success, along with that of the higher floors in general.

Obviously, the 'sea view' must be sold at all costs, even if one is relatively far from the coast.

GM: What other contingencies condition the plan?

SG: A fundamental element for the realization of the floor plan is, of course, represented by the vertical distribution used as a division between the units. Any visual contact between the units is discouraged, minimizing any form of promiscuity. In this regard, the dividers of the terraces also become a theme. We decided to work on 'tracks' to produce the required units in series, and despite the partitioned structure, we managed to propose multiple scenarios for the living area.

There is a significant design division between the exterior and the interior of the building. The interior travels entirely on its own, being entrusted to other entities and leaving the tenant free to do as they please. Inside the apartments, the architect can hardly intervene, being replaced by the trusted furniture store decorator or the users themselves. The designer, in fact, has no contact with the users, i.e., the future tenants, but only with the developer, who categorizes users based on their profiles. A clear division between the architect and users, as desired by the developer. After all, no one should be concerned about how you will live inside your home, and any correspondence between the exterior and interior of the building is lost.

In this perspective, the exteriors must allow recognition, unlike the interiors left to the users, expressing their autonomy. On the issue of interiors, the private affairs of various users open up, some of whom seek such privacy that it leads to requests like the now essential underground floor with a garage. This allows entering the building in one's car without being seen, alone or with companions, a scruple aimed at privacy. After all, we are talking about entertainment homes, not strictly residential in the traditional sense – a Las Vegas of Veneto where you can do things you wouldn't do at your own home. It is a place for the family but at the same time an escape. The true role of Jesolo is never explicitly stated, also due to social and Catholic impositions.

GM: Would you describe Jesolo as an exceptional context for architecture? What distinctions can be identified when comparing it to other locations?

SG: Our reference entrepreneur had founded a company named 'Urban Bio,' thinking it was a good commercial idea. He asked us to ground this idea through an architectural project. Everything was trying to convey this message aimed at ecological choices, from the letterhead with grass drawings to the first references of questionable taste that it brought us, you can imagine...

Our job was to transform this project into a design and research opportunity, overturning the initial project constraints and pursuing a goal: to create architecture without bending too much to continuous various demands. These demands come from the initial project brief based on indications from the market itself and its trends. A market where parameters are provided by real estate agencies that receive client requests and pass them on to developers.

The big slogan is 'do something that is not yet in Jesolo.' The chain is difficult to identify but can be summarized as follows: identification of the user, then the seller or real estate agency, the developer, and lastly the architects, who honestly go crazy and at the same time must also face requests from a core of companies and suppliers ready to dive headfirst into this business.

The municipality is an accomplice, fuelling the world I referred to and legitimately supporting the idea of the city in which it is investing.

4. Interview with Stefano Pujatti, Elastico Farm

The following interview was held through video call on the 5th of December 2023.

GM: Places like Jesolo attract significant investments from the real estate sector and allow the realization of ambitious projects, where design becomes a crucial asset in the development of products intended for both the middle class and wealthy clients. Elastico Farm, along with other international studios, including Meier Partners, Carlos Ferrater, and Gonçalo Byrne, has taken part in the creation of one of the most significant buildings in this contemporary Jesolo.

What dynamics led to ElasticoFarm's involvement? Do contexts like Jesolo allow for design freedom?

SP: I believe that Jesolo benefited from the presence and 'power' for a certain period within the territorial management of Danilo Gerotto. He had the merit of understanding that a city is born through urban planning vision and the involvement of the private sector in the city's dynamics. It was necessary to convince the private sector that by doing quality things, things would be better for both the individual and the city. A person capable of placing his own culture, not bureaucracy, at the center. Being an architect, he contributed as an architect, not directly as a designer but as a manager and indicator of potential. This needs to be mentioned because it explains the involvement of several renowned architects later. A story that occurred before our involvement in Jesolo (Gerotto was no longer part of the technical office of the town), but his influence remained on some initiatives. He deserves credit for what happened in Jesolo.

By the way, as I mentioned, our situation was slightly different. Although our administrators and investors were aware of the benefits of Gerotto's approach and when they needed to decide whether to continue with the project, they deemed it appropriate to proceed.

I do not see enlightened entrepreneurship in Jesolo but rather a long wave of a past territorial management that is currently waning. Meier's project seems like the final piece, its tower could be the conclusion of this process. I am not sure if there are still operations that believe in the power of architecture.

What really made the difference was a push linked to the political and administrative will, a group of people within the public administration that wanted to make Jesolo something exceptional. Otherwise, the realization of more interesting examples compared to Caorle, Lignano Sabbiadoro, Bibbione, and Rimini would not be justified. The exceptionality does not lie in Jesolo's location by the sea or inside Veneto but in its administration, that decided to accept the risk to directly operate on the city. A process that, it is important to remember, began with Kenzo Tange's urban plan, with a broad international vision, a push that today seems diluted.

GM: It is evident that Jesolo's momentum has weakened today. Nevertheless, these projects have established a higher quality standard. In your case the building literally stands out among the existing built environment. How did the projects reach that level of architectural research?

SP: The real problem lies in entrepreneurship. An entrepreneur asks to design a building to me, to Meier, to you, primarily thinking that the product created will sell sooner and sell better, there is nothing else. We are in the hands of real estate speculation, and there's little to be done about it. Entrepreneurship wants to profit, that's the main theme. If you as Richard Meier to design your building, probably the municipality will be more cooperative; you will obtain building permits more quickly and be supported. At the same time, Jesolo has the possibility to improve its image, and you can sell more quickly and at higher prices, attracting more customers.

In our case, the entrepreneur had acquired the land at a commercially good price and therefore felt confident in realizing a more experimental and ambitious project. They knew that this delta (the difference between the final selling price and the sum of acquisition costs with project implementation costs) would guarantee them a profit in any case, even if the project failed. Just secondly, I think the entrepreneur had also some architectural aspirations.

The entrepreneur actually realized the quality of the project only at the end of construction. A building that didn't appeal to 60% of people, but a significant 40% found convincing. Only at the end they understood that they had done a good job. Of course, it's not a building for everyone; these are luxury apartments. But compared to a rather standard original project, investors obtained a hybrid structure that combines together the third-row condominium, the one with the pool, and the one with a sea view. The rotation of the residential block allows all apartments to face south; from the third floor and above, all have a sea view, something that wouldn't have been possible with different layouts.

But again, all these qualities were understood only at the end, even after that some apartments had to sold at a discounted price. This is a type of building that was difficult to sell on paper and was only truly understood once completed.

I think this building would need a sequel, even though it is a challenging structure to replicate. Despite appearing as a building with a strong formal character, it arises from specific needs. I emphasize this not to justify its form, but if someone wanted to emulate it by placing four sticks under a building and some nets on the facade, I doubt they would achieve comparable results; it would be architecturally futile.

Even emulating Meier's buildings, I doubt, could lead to satisfactory outcomes, but in his case, a 'Meier formula' actually exists. An example of it is the episode of the competition for the Paris Opera, where

the winning project was selected thinking it was by Meier himself, while it was actually a proposal by a lesser-known architect.⁵

Meier has a language that can be emulated, and in Jesolo, there are some examples. He is an architect whose main theme is abstraction, including the materiality of the building. When opting for abstraction, it involves an abstract attitude, unlike our project, which engages with the surrounding conditions. So, it's entirely the opposite, a relationship with contingencies that doesn't manifest in a mimetic way. Despite our project being an eyesore, it's an eyesore in which the hand has the right form for that eye.

GM: In some cases, there seemed to be a tendency to impose a sense of uniqueness, to create a standout product in the market. Could you provide more insight into the specific details outlined in the initial project brief requested by your clients? Did the notion of achieving exceptional or distinctive features play a role in these requests?

SP: In our case, the client did not make any requests for exceptionality. This is a very Treviso-like attitude: wanting the most, the utmost of something. In our case, the project almost quietly took shape. As mentioned, the entrepreneurs needed a seaside project, knowing of the availability of an economic reserve to do something special, and we did our job. They trusted us, even if at some point, I think they might have had doubts, but today, at the end of the operation, they are satisfied with the outcome.

The provided program was very standard, and the main constraint was that a part of the building had already been sold, a supermarket with a very dry and clear structural scheme. The development of the project occurred in response to this initial condition, turning this problem into the quality of the place. There is no building in Jesolo developed on such an important podium so freely, with a pool and a covered space with shade for staying both when it's too hot or when it's raining.

Our intention was also towards the possibility of having a building to be a part of the city. The staircase crosses the podium itself, allowing everyone to cross this elevated public level. A desire that weakened when, in the management of this space, the ownership and administration agreed to grant it entirely to the property alone.

I hope that one day the possibility of crossing will be restored because it would make everything more interesting. As architects, our task is to leave a seed, hoping that sooner or later it will mature.

⁵ This episode refers to 1982 international anonymous competition for the construction of the Bastille Opéra House in Paris. Tender wanted by the French president François Mitterrand. The winning proposal was chosen among 700 entries as it was attributed to the renowned architect Richard Meier. In reality, the jury was wrong because the chosen 'Meier-like' project was of a young and unknown Uruguayan architect by the name of Carlos Ott. The selection was made, and he officially became the architect of the Opéra.

GM: As you noted, a building that may seem the result of an uncompromising idea is, in reality, shaped by specific contingencies. While it appears that few compromises were made, could you elaborate on the specific details that required particular attention during the design process?

SP: Among the various parts of the building, the elevator shaft is a problematic element. The building itself without the shaft would be more interesting, completely suspended. But this is architecture, and I won't look for excuses. Our studio doesn't work like Kerez, which just an uncompromising idea. For us, the project is more like judo, transforming something negative into positive.

The same happened at the beginning of this project where the rigidity of the structure of a supermarket was transformed into something positive.

Another example is the elevator shaft, that was initially supposed to be in concrete with completely open stairs. Their appearance was thought to be in continuity with that of the walkways. However, the municipality deemed that the stairs should be enclosed. It makes no logical sense, given the presence of the walkways already on the outside, but the regulations did not allow it. After the first project proposal, the volume of the stairs was still made of concrete until it was definitely changed by the supervisory authority. They also wanted the shaft to be plastered and coloured instead of being exposed concrete. All these aspects may be bothersome to a project but don't destroy our architecture since it is not assertive, but adaptable.

Looking at the building today, sometimes you might notice some issues, but perhaps I think that the merits shine through more. It is a form of research, and like any research, it contains its own margin for error.

GM: Your research subtly appears also in the façade, both for its materiality and colour. Was that also entirely an architectural choice?

SP: The choice of the facade cladding, 2x2cm white tiles with azure grout, was not difficult to get accepted. From an architectural standpoint, these choices are made by the architect, and for this type of contractor, it was straightforward that the architect had to choose. The selection of this solution stemmed from technological aspects. Being a seaside building where surfaces are exposed to weather and humidity from all directions, plastered surfaces, once wet, would have led to smudging. In contrast, a crystalline and vitreous cladding ensures long-term quality. It's been five years, and it's still impeccable. A plastered building, as seen around, would already be deteriorated.

Then, about this solution I am sure there could be some improvements in terms of colour. The 2cm square tile achieves the desired effect, but perhaps 1cm tiles would have been even better. It will be challenging for us to do it because we have already understood what would work.

GM: Privacy seems to play a pivotal role in various projects in Jesolo, with instances where it forms the very core of the building's design. The Ferrater tower stands out, highlighting the insistence on avoiding any shared relation between terraces. How is this aspect addressed in your project?

SP: The shape of the building doesn't pose privacy issues. The building is oriented towards the south with the main facade on this side, scaling in section and rotating in plan with separation walls between the apartments. It's only by leaning out that it becomes possible to see the neighbour. This aspect wasn't necessarily a foundational element of the project. Architecture is always a combination of different aspects, and certain things are done simply because it is the right thing to do.

The case of Ferrater represents one of the problems of Jesolo because the building, commercially speaking, was a failure, and there's a risk that this less fortunate example becomes a proof for developers to avoid involving well-known architects. There's a risk that an entrepreneur might say, 'I went to Ferrater, and he got everything wrong,' and consequently, the message could be conveyed that if you rely on famous architects, you risk failing, even if it's just a single case, perhaps merely unlucky or not well understood. This was one of the elements that immediately alerted us, and the entrepreneur told us they didn't want something like that.

In fact, the floor plans of our apartments are very simple and designed by the company itself with their distribution schemes. If we had to chase our own architecture to configure those rooms, there would have been the same risk as Ferrater, with subsequent commercial issues. We accepted that our building was the composition of an 'objet trouvé,' the product of a *geometra* (local technician), which we then assembled in a way the *geometra* would never have done.

GM: Interiors vs exteriors, somehow this division appears as a limit in the design process.

SP: There is a difference, therefore, between saying 'I do the facade' and our project. Today, the big discussion in cities like Milan, Toronto, or Miami, is that the architect is called to sign the skin, the last 20cm of the building. This is not our case; we saw how the apartment was made, taking into account the position of the main spaces. Then it's true, we didn't go into the details of the bedrooms, but that's because you can do whatever you want there, and it's not our job. We defined the apartments in the important parts but not in the use.

This also provided the opportunity to see how, in some cases, other architects delved into the details of certain penthouses, creating fantastic examples, partly because we did not condition the interior.

GM: For entrepreneurs, penthouses represent a lucrative economic opportunity due to their higher sale prices and increased demand. In some cases, the issue is to fill the gap between the ground and the upper floors, which will be sold more rapidly. How was this challenge addressed in your project?

SP: In our case, the attempt is to make all the apartments as 'penthouse-like' as possible, quite a democratic choice.

Actually, the best view is from the common balconies on the back, where you can see the mountains and the Venice lagoon in the distance. The sea, in reality, is simply a line. Especially our Adriatic Sea, where apart from a few rocks, it's just a line, which is why it seems to me that the view of the mountains and the lagoon is more interesting.

GM: Does tourism play a crucial role in this experience?

SP: Tourism has on its side the fact that the designed spaces are not made to be lived in all day. The design possibilities for apartments are different from those in historical centers, for example. In our case, this aspect does not compromise the quality of what we do because we always try to make the project stimulating for those who live there. A project that doesn't immediately reveal itself to those who live in it but that requires time to be understood. This aspect can sometimes be counterproductive from a commercial perspective, as clients may want to understand everything immediately. I am sure that in 10 years, this building will be more interesting than it already is now.

5. Interview with Luciano Schiavon, LVL architettura

The following interview was held in person at LVL office in Padova on the 29th of February 2024.

GM: This research views Jesolo as an exceptional testing ground where your firm has worked on various projects. What insights can be offered on this topic?

LS: It's a very interesting subject. In fact, in 2006, I organized a conference with INARCH, founded by Zevi, Veneto section, called '*impresa architettura*' ('architectural enterprise'). It explored the relationships between architecture and private, speculative initiatives, whose negative connotation often misleads. On that occasion, Galfetti together with a sociologist, spoke to understand the relationship between architecture quality and the market. Often, quality is associated with public initiatives, museums, and sometimes religious architecture.

From my experience over the years, I have developed a concept that is more urban and territorial. The true way to impact the urban fabric, stemming from Galfetti's thought, which I have inherited, is that a city improves more from the treatment of empty spaces than from filled ones. Architecture impacts a formal level, but it's the voids—the public spaces—that truly determine the quality of a city. The redesign, the 'regeneration,' of a city happens through the creation of public spaces, which originate from a design with urban significance. It's very difficult for this to be done by private entities, though it happens in rare and enlightened cases. We have an example here (indicating the complex where the office is located) where an entrepreneur prioritized public interests over private ones. Galfetti used to say that the real Net Center is the square, not the tower.⁶ The city hasn't yet understood this because architecture, being an image, often makes us forget about space. This is where project efforts should be directed.

Architecture as an image and design—the *Bosco Verticale* is an example of how important this is—often comes at the expense of public space. Consequently, private investments follow this trend. Even the laws that have been enacted do not help. Consider that all five projects completed in Jesolo were carried out under the special law of the Regione Veneto named Piano Casa, which gave a building bonus to those who transformed and rebuilt an outdated building. Positive law on one hand, but it didn't allow for significant urban reorganization, it didn't divert energies in the right direction. Efforts should be put into interventions with an urban dimension, and the reward should be the creation of public space, considering that the major limitation to these processes is private property.

⁶ The Net Center is a business complex completed in 2007, featuring a central plaza surrounded by two glazed buildings and an 85-meter-high tower. Schiavon's office is located in the northern block.

GM: In your case, the interventions are situated in confined lots without the possibility of reorganizing public space. How did you address these contingencies?

LS: My regret is that our interventions were on very confined lots, each belonging to a single private owner who benefited from these special laws and building increases. Thus, we did what we could within the available scope. We aimed for an architecture that sought connections with the territory, a special territory, conducting in-depth research on territorial relationships. This was done in a culture that favors sea views, with the shoreline as the focal point, even though the territorial values of the place include more: the lagoon, the mountains, and the nearby context of the city. The beachfront house overlooking an unspoiled landscape is not the case in Jesolo; one must contend with the city.

GM: How did your work in Jesolo start? Was it an attempt to bring prestige to certain operations like in the case of Richard Meier?

LS: The first step happened in a manner similar to Meier's. It started with a call from the superintendent. The case of the G-house, for which we are only the exterior designers, involved a building that was already constructed to a rough state and became a major conflict in the municipality of Jesolo, between the superintendent and the municipality. At the time, the superintendent was Renata Codello, who opposed massive development and did not appreciate the Tange plan, which led to a dense city that would alter the natural balance between the town and the coastal landscape.

This had many legal repercussions. When Danilo began, there were no landscape constraints, and with Codello's battle, these were introduced. We entered this transitional period. The superintendent operates in a discretionary manner, which from an architectural point of view, cannot be reduced to regulations. Regulations, which I consider the beginning of a disaster, especially from an urban planning perspective, act like an early form of artificial intelligence that doesn't yield good results.

Our intervention, therefore, stemmed from a call to resolve a judicial rather than an architectural issue. This tower, designed by Valter Tronchin, was already standing when we intervened, and we gave it a new image without demolishing any floors, contrary to the initial intent. This was done through a dialectical relationship with the superintendent and the municipality. Our profession is one of thought; we need to be prophets to imagine the future and shamans to involve the will of others: administrations, investors, and the superintendent.

Along the way, we realized that architectural quality, especially in a high-end market, had its interest since a concept of branding had formed. This aspect can be detrimental, but rather than ignoring architecture, this is an improvable path that allows achieving results. Especially in the case of the second

building, the Sea Beach, which received a lot of positive feedback from the municipality, the superintendent, and the market. The same developer told me that we set a standard followed by many.

However, we worked on five lots owned by a single proprietor and could not achieve what Meier and Byrne did, in my opinion, with great success, where a sufficiently large intervention area allowed the creation of public space.

GM: It seems that the territorial urban planning component is fundamental in your way of doing architecture. How does it relate to the economic needs of the projects?

LS: The future of the city lies in public space. In my view, there should be a design for parts of the city. If you look at the current layout of Jesolo, it's not a city but a suburb, with houses and cottages, where the only public space is the beach. I am convinced that a city is truly a city if it is dense, which is a necessary condition to make the city attractive. However, volumes must be arranged more orderly and concentrated. The superintendent has always viewed tall buildings negatively, which I consider extremely necessary. Freeing up ground space for public use and allowing sea visibility from the hinterland is crucial. Jesolo lacks a sea square and even a proper promenade.

What needs to be done? It's evident that private entities must invest the money, and if they invest 100, they need to make 150, which is a market logic we can't escape. However, there should be an incentive for aggregation—a building bonus for entities that combine different properties. We worked with Galfetti on the Hotel Sorriso project, which combined about ten different properties, proposing a public space and visual corridors to the sea. However, the refusal of one owner with 200 square meters caused the whole project to fall through. In my opinion, public guidance is fundamental in these dynamics. Danilo (Gerotto) is a good example. If we think of the French ZACs (*Zones d'Aménagement Concerté*), where the public promoter creates a plan and provides building opportunities to private entities, we can see a model. They propose a plan that meets public needs, including elements necessary for the community, and then leave the execution to private entities.

In our situation, everything is done by private parties. The public sector only creates intervention plans, still using zoning patterns that impact only the economic reality because they determine the building volume and, consequently, the area's value but not the quality or space. The detailed plans from 1942, created by the public sector, incorporating community objectives, would be desirable, with rewards for those who aggregate and penalties for those who do not.

GM: Returning to the architectural scale, it has emerged that the market offers fairly standardized solutions in plan, thus the building's exterior becomes a particularly important expressive element for an architect. How was this internal/external relationship managed?

LS: The first project we were involved into precisely requested the redesign of the skin of a tower (shows G-House on the screen). The task was specifically the building's exterior, a project we wouldn't have accepted if the conditions hadn't been favorable. This theme was a bit limiting for us. Here, we made a pure image change. The relationship with the sea was through blue glass and with the land through metal sheets. This relationship with the territory is fundamental in Galfetti's architecture.

It becomes discouraging when the request is to create the most beautiful project, an aesthetic approach that tends to diminish the value.

In the case of the Sea Beach, it's a building that sought significant connections with its surroundings, divided into two with apartments on the right and left. With the superintendent, the issue of height was delicate, as they indicated to keep it low. We tried to create a link with the existing structures. In this case, through the floors.

In the plan, there was a very clear division. What we aimed for was the concept of stacked villas, giving each one its own space. We worked obsessively on the terraces and the internal-external relationship. We strive for the building to find its territorial and landscape relationships. From the elevator, you can already orient yourself and see the landscape. When you have an interesting landscape, bringing it inside already means you've done something good.

GM: How did you manage to negotiate with the client or developer?

LS: In the negotiation process, our advantage stemmed from my partner's reputation, which is very important in our field. What is the capacity for judgment of your interlocutors? It's difficult to expect that an investor, a financier, a builder, or someone who simply buys an apartment can understand concepts you've been working on for decades. It would be an excessive expectation. This is where reputation plays a crucial role, and Galfetti had that. It was an easy game combined with a privileged dialogue with the superintendent. We had deep interactions with Codello from the superintendent's office, and our client had a lot of trust in us. Here, with all the merits of the builder, my only regret is that we couldn't control the execution details as we would have liked. This often happens when the builder is also the client.

We have a privileged position when we manage the relationship between the client and the builder because if we have the client's trust, we can be more persuasive with the builder. When they coincide, things happen without our knowledge because the builder does things regardless of what we might want.

Generally, what we envision is either more expensive or more complicated, and the builder, seeking minimal effort, is the first to cut corners.

In this case, compared to the G-House, we also designed the apartments. I must say that in terms of furnishings, there were also good results in dialogue with our clean and rational architecture. Another difficult task we undertake is working with regulations and trying to circumvent them. We managed to create huge terraces, a winning element, less conceptual and more material.

We had an urban planning framework in which, through bioclimatic greenhouses, we managed to incorporate terraces that are as large as the apartments. The development of the terrace on three sides equals the development of the apartment. These gigantic terraces, in a context like this, tied to seasonal use, offer enormous advantages, even economically, as these features sell well. This was a key element of success.

GM: Selling is the ultimate goal. What aspects differentiate Jesolo as a place to build?

LS: The development of the city requires money. We can hope for a different society, but in the one we live in, money is fundamental. Jesolo develops because property values are around 10,000 euros per square meter. For example, we did a beautiful project next to the Abbey of Follina, redeveloping an industrial area. At some point I realized we had 1500 euros per square meter for the construction while the property values around were 1000/1100 euros per square meter. How could this project ever work? So it's fortunate that, for reasons that are somewhat inscrutable, Jesolo has become a place of choice. Over the years, due to various elements beyond our control. Why is that place so successful despite being situated between two rivers full of pollution, with a relatively small beach that is gradually disappearing, requiring enormous efforts to be saved?

Another element is that there are no signs of decline, none at all. It even seems that the new *autostrada del mare* will give it a new boost.

Another reason that makes us think beyond the current trend, which shows no signs of decline, is the establishment of three 5-star luxury hotels that do not have a speculative perspective. If you think about the beautiful, cool apartment we built, once it's sold, it's over, I've made my profit. The hotel, on the other hand, expects to have earnings over the years that will cover expenses in the first 8-10 years. It's not a short-term perspective.

In my view, like in *Learning from Las Vegas*, a city can be considered absurd, but it's a dynamic city that lives and attracts. It's a fact, and it's thanks to people like Danilo Gerotto and the mayor Renato Martin who had the idea to incorporate urban planning content, like the Tange project, which is the origin of everything.

When someone says politics doesn't matter, they're wrong because it's all about politics. Entrepreneurs go where they know they have a return on investment, but the direction is set by politics. So, this is an example of a political strategy that has created enormous value.

GM: Is there an influence of this coastal architecture on the rest of the territory?

LS: Overall, I don't feel strongly about the idea of coastal architecture. Galfetti used to say that you create architecture and relate it to what's around you. He worked on-site projects, the *genius loci*—this might sound grandiose, but it's true. He built a house in Paros with a strong relationship to its surroundings; you always have something around, and when you have nothing, you at least have the sky. It's the legacy of modernism, the glass architecture of Schebart, a way to connect your space with the context. If what's around you is the sea, that's great, but it's also great if you have the mountains, the lagoon, etc. From this perspective, I'd let the concept of coastal architecture fade away.

We bring what's outside into the interior to establish a harmonious relationship with the exterior, and in a certain sense, you've enriched the outside as well. Glass is a decisive material, though not everyone understands this. This osmosis works well by the sea and just needs to be controlled in the city.

6. Interview with Francesco Martin, Marina Immobiliare

The following interview was held in person at Marina Immobiliare office in Jesolo on the 29th of February 2024.

GM: Places like Jesolo attract substantial investments from the tourist real estate sector and allow for ambitious projects. The involvement of renowned architects led to some exceptional examples. Are there market data and research supporting this strategy?

FM: The agency primarily gathers information related to the configuration of a new product through its sector experience and direct contact with the client. This allows us to assess the market's average needs to create a sellable product immediately. We are talking about entrepreneurial interests whose ultimate main goal is precisely the sale. The product must meet both the current and future needs of the client, from the first day they enter the house until they are tired of coming to Jesolo and consider reselling or renting out their property. We are the first to be considered because we know what the client wants.

We have the experience to formulate a product based on both our insights and experience and the requests that emerge from interviews with the client. The main data emerge primarily through interviews with clients interested in purchasing during an initial investigation phase where their requests are analysed and, secondly, through the needs of tenants (clients that rent). Although this is a smaller part of the market, they provide feedback on the necessary adjustments for a successful product. This information is developed through preliminary studies conducted internally by our technical offices if we are the ones building, or shared with entrepreneurs requesting consultations for drafting a business plan or a feedback on project drafts produced by their architects or technicians.

GM: Does this form a sort of recipe for creating a product?

FM: The creation of a recipe for a successful product depends on the customer's needs, and our experience makes the initial stages of product development more efficient. The final destination of the product is the initial determinant, and the final functions can be purely tourist, mixed-use, or purely residential. In Jesolo Lido, the market is 20% residential and 80% tourist, while in Jesolo town, it is 90% residential and gradually expanding among those clients who prefer to stay further inland for economic reasons.

In recent decades, it might have been forgotten, but recently it has become clear again that the tourist season is getting shorter. Therefore, Jesolo needs to provide its visitors with year-round services. As

Peter probably mentioned regarding the design of his structures, commercial activities must also contribute to extending the season, making the presence of services essential. These services can belong either to the building itself or to external structures within the city.

GM: Talking with Peter Reichegger (Richard Meier's project developer), a certain standardization of units emerged. In your case, what is the most successful type of apartment?

FM: Currently, the most sellable layout is the three-room apartment or a three-room apartment with an additional bathroom, meaning two bedrooms and two bathrooms. This is the most requested average by clients, both for investment and personal use.

The location is fundamental, and beachfront properties are significantly different from others, especially in terms of budget. In the Jesolo market, clients willing to spend over a million are still rare. While in Milan it has become the norm, here in Jesolo, despite the presence of products reaching those prices, especially new ones, they are still exceptions. Properties over a million are still limited. Many clients, particularly families, prefer to move further from the sea, about five or six hundred meters, to stay in residences, which are horizontally structured condominiums.

We manage Peter's sales office and have developed several solutions behind Piazza Mazzini, like the *Le Maison* case, a village that has been very successful. It has strong Mediterranean characteristics and is known beyond Jesolo in the neighbouring provinces, becoming a recognizable and loved product by families. It's a beautiful *residence* with large green areas, pools, and solariums, favoured by families because it allows them to live within with all services and occasionally move to the sea as needed. This is the preferred product at a certain distance from the sea.

From the main street towards the beach, for obvious reasons related to the existing urban fabric, the development becomes vertical. Here, the factor of common areas and services is compensated by the beach itself, which is much closer, and by commercial spaces nearby. The farther away from the beach, the more the *residence* product is requested. In beach front areas, clients can spend from €15,000/sqm and up for customized products beyond the standard offered by the builder and simply have the desire to be in front for obvious reasons—the sea.

In Meier's case, Peter captured the context of conviviality among owners present in the more inland areas within a beachfront context, which in other situations, being already densified, is impossible to achieve. Only in that area could such a result be reached.

GM: I would like to understand the relationship between Jesolo's clientele and the surrounding territory, and the architectural impact between the coast and the hinterland. Where does the clientele come from?

FM: Eighty percent of the clientele comes from the province, particularly Treviso and Vicenza. Clients want to bring to Jesolo what they already have in the places they come from. The exchange of design ideas is bidirectional: certain solutions come to the seaside, and conversely, some go to the city. For instance, an intervention in Treviso (*Ca' delle Alzaie* by Stefano Boeri Architetti) features residences with characteristics similar to those developed in Jesolo. The key point is the apartment terrace, serving a convivial function that is essential at the seaside, where the living room becomes a cooking-oriented space and the terrace becomes the actual living area. Built along the Sile river towpath, the units are developed within blocks with large terraces, a solution commonly used in Jesolo and vice versa.

Additionally, businesses and investors from the province are very present in Jesolo's real estate sector. For example, Bosco Costruzioni from Padua, Rigo Costruzioni from Treviso (with whom we have collaborated), Gruppo Pedron from Padua, and Gruppo Industrie Edili also from Padua.

Regarding agencies, clients tend to come directly to us without needing specific intermediaries. For instance, the Grosso real estate agency in Treviso relies on us, but the client arrives directly unless they have their trusted intermediary. We do not venture into the hinterland as there is no need, and local agencies have advantages there. We have a firm grasp of the situation here, but not elsewhere. Entrepreneurs turn to us for information exchange. This exchange means we handle sales management, which today includes managing the image of the operation. The digital world has surpassed simple verbal contact, necessitating supportive communication for project identification. To achieve the goal with minimal effort we offer to constructors a preliminary feasibility study for free, in exchange we manage all the sales: from client contact to image management, allowing investors to focus on construction while we handle the sales.

GM: How would you describe the product development process?

Firstly, with a wealth of information gathered over the years, we can identify at any given moment the best-positioned product in the market based on customer needs. Therefore, in the initial development phase of the project, I already present these requirements to later customize the project accordingly. Specifically, the client who comes for that project will express their needs and opinions during the first meetings. We then verify the feasibility study for modifications or adjustments for this client. After confirming the feasibility study, we assist the client with any changes during the construction phase, mediating between them and the company to achieve the final product they desire. This process includes

consultations with local interior designers (*arredatori*) who are informed about market needs to understand what to include in this 'box' so that by the day of the deed, the apartment is practically ready to be occupied.

The goal is for the client to reach the final stage of use. We aim to have the apartments ready for occupancy before the summer, as this is what clients want. Summer is our deadline.

GM: How do you assess market needs? Do you rely on databases? Are the data collected by you?

FM: We rely on internal data based on previous sales, which determine the various market levels. The fundamental data point is demand, which allows us to understand if a product is successful or not. The Jesolo Lido market is very dynamic, providing immediate responses, and within a semester or at most a year, you get a real reflection of the real estate operation and pricing. Another crucial aspect is direct feedback when we propose a product at a certain price. If I don't receive inquiries within a month, something is wrong: am I miscommunicating, is the price incorrect, or is the product off? We rarely get the product wrong; it's usually the communication or the price that might be off. These are our market indicators.

There's no formal data collection; it's more based on personal impressions. We can internally gather data from previous years, but the real benchmark, which is also what clients see, are the real estate portals. (shows on the computer screen the portal Immobiliare.it) Here, we can see competitors' offerings and track the performance of our products. These portals are the main tool.

In practice, we check these portals daily, reviewing new project proposals, comparing them with potential new ones to study based on location. For instance, if you come to me tomorrow and say, 'I have a plot of land in this area near another residence or a kilometer from another residence, what price and product can we market under these conditions? Or with which products?' As I mentioned before, the primary product is the two-bedroom, two-bathroom unit, but closely followed by the three-bedroom, two-bathroom unit. What price can we ask for these products? I can tell you, 'Look, we are selling this condominium here for €300,000.00 so if we are here (shows a nearby point), we could sell the product for €300,000.00.' The comparison comes from the ongoing construction experiences. Fortunately, we don't have just one construction every 10 years; here we have about 10 simultaneously, making it easy to make this comparison based on client feedback.

What might interest you as an architect is also the aesthetic phase of these structures, which can be more or less attractive and vary in costs based on economic availability, also linking to the issue of amenities.

GM: In some cases, it seems that architects are brought in more for aesthetic reasons tied to 'surplus' budget rather than for functional roles. How does the involvement of architects work, especially with prominent names like those seen in Jesolo?

FM: In practical terms today, project management is handled locally. The role of a renowned architect from outside is now mainly for visual impact purposes (shows a render of the *Atoll* project by JM architecture). I hope I'm not undermining your profession as an architect, but they are consulted for design touches or finishes. On a practical level, the local architect has a better grasp of the situation; they know the administration, have contacts, understand the issues, and know how to solve them. Even an external architect needs a local one, as was the case with Meier.

Projects involving well-known architects require substantial capital and attract clients from outside the region, including Eastern Europe: Poland, the Czech Republic, and, to a lesser extent today, Russia. These clients have significant financial resources and choose high-end products with specific styles and appealing designs, especially in beachfront properties. For instance, I've sold to clients from Poland and the Czech Republic. However, the primary clientele is still the affluent or entrepreneurial individuals from the neighbouring provinces. After them, the next in line is not someone from Milan or another region but clients from Eastern Europe. They don't mind traveling to Miami, but they can drive here, and for logistical or family reasons, they choose Jesolo over Miami. Clients from Milan typically don't buy here.

The status created around developments like Meier's allows these projects to become platforms where entrepreneurs and investors can reap the benefits of their professions for their work and future endeavours. It creates a circle that benefits their interests.

GM: Does Jesolo compete with more famous international destinations like Miami and Dubai?

FM: Jesolo doesn't compete with international destinations except in terms of logistics, as it's easier to reach for many (European) clients, especially families. This is the most serviced beach on the upper Adriatic. Today, Croatia represents a potential future competitor; they are making moves. Everything is tied to the services the location can offer its clients. Jesolo boasts a seven-kilometres-long pedestrian island from eight in the evening to six in the morning, providing peace and serenity for families. Distant competitors are in entirely different leagues.

GM: What about close competitors?

FM: There are no close competitors; these are very different markets where Jesolo dominates clearly among the destinations of the upper Adriatic. Here, in the '20s, '30s, and '40s, we built from the front to the back, not realizing yet that over the years, the beach in front of the hotels would deteriorate, inevitably leading to building upwards. Despite the fact that, in my opinion, it creates an incredible skyline that sets us apart, even before the recent interventions with famous architects. This is the only way to realize and thus redevelop the area. Most buildings were constructed in the '70s, '80s, and '60s, which may have been unused for years. Real estate development isn't just about profit but also about redeveloping these areas, where there are buildings that need intervention.

GM: Speaking of conversions, do you remember hotels being converted into condominiums in the '80s, '90s?

FM: I don't have memories of hotels being transformed into condominiums in the '80s and '90s because I wasn't born yet; I was born in '91. However, there have been several changes in land use for hotels, although I can't recall any frightening interventions. The change in land use in our area typically involved structures with reduced capacity compared to today's hotel market. Therefore, the only way to utilize that building volume was to change its land use. Large hotels are rarely converted because it's usually not financially viable, while smaller hotels that no longer met the standards of three, four, or five-star hotels were the ones that underwent these changes in land use because they were no longer competitive. At the moment, I can't think of any specific examples. (Later, via email, he sent me the example of the Tahiti Hotel, transformed into the Tahiti Residence).

GM: Interior-Exterior, what is the architect's role regarding the building envelope and the apartments within?

FM: Regarding what's inside the structures, I can confirm that it's quite standardized now and managed directly by the *geometra* or the technician in charge of the architectural aspects. However, what can make a final impact is the external shell of the building: the envelope, the finishes, and the geometry of these structures play a significant role today in both the architectural landscape and the real estate market. Therefore, the architect is called upon to provide that unique touch that only they possess to differentiate the proposal from the rest of the market.

For example, the building constructed with ANK from San Donà di Piave (he shows it on the computer screen). In this case, we handled the sales part. This building is objectively the black sheep of Via Bafile, which has completely opened the eyes of the clientele in a positive way. Just look at a photo in the evening, there you go. A strong impact of black, wooden terraces, a contrast between the wood and the dark railings that has a significant impact in the evening, really cool. The black allows for differentiation,

and the building has been very successful among our clientele, standing out within our urban fabric. This is a product that clients like and has been very successful.

The ENK associated studio are the real architects who take care of the details, even the interiors were designed together based on our indications. They also handled the bureaucratic design part of the intervention. Then it all depends on the possibility of square meterage that can be achieved. We always try to achieve the maximum volume allowed by regulations. Another hurdle comes mainly from the *So-printendenza*, which can arrive and, based on their mood, can change the project, which from day to night can determine the fate of a project.

GM: Have you read the article about Meier's excessive use of white; does the ENK project seem to oppose this trend?

FM: Yes, I did. In the last 10 years, many structures have been brought back, which are white cubes, simple structures that have received a positive response in the market and have borne fruit. ENK precisely because it's not white has allowed for differentiation. Today, differentiation makes the difference.

Speaking of white boxes, this product is called *Palais*, developed in partnership with Peter (Reichegger), it's a residence 600m from the sea with an 80-meter-long swimming pool interrupted by sunbathing areas and white buildings. It's a project that immediately gained recognition and is now a project that if you ask someone from Vicenza if they know it, they can tell you where it is. A project that today has not only sales but also resale operations. Sometimes I just have to pick up the phone, I don't even have time to publish it because they recognize it and know which one it is. A successful operation that, through word of mouth, has gained success among people from Vicenza and the Treviso area; people know where they should invest. It's like if in Venice, you recommended a good place to open a *bacaro*, that's the logic of a good investment.

GM: Earlier you mentioned the issue of amenities. Could you elaborate on that?

FM: Amenities are a concept that has been brought by projects like Meier and, of course, by Peter within the interventions made, and they have pros and cons as I deal with the demands of clients. Amenities work well for structures with a very important status and significant financial resources, where these additional features are more acceptable in the face of high condominium expenses. On the other hand, for other clients approaching Jesolo, after investing €300,000 and having three to four thousand euros in condominium expenses annually, it greatly hinders their search for real estate; having to pay condominium fees is a burden or a deterrent. In some cases, they are reduced to a minimum in certain types of structures like *Palais*, by eliminating sand or high-maintenance trees. However, in high-end structures

where it's affordable and perceived as essential, management costs are not a problem and make sense. In some types of structures, amenities are worth nothing, while in others (like Meier's) they are essential. In the design phase, the designer himself, if he proposes a gym or sauna area, I absolutely refuse. From the design stage, amenities are either included or accepted based on the target clientele. The pool is fundamental in real estate development in areas far from the sea in third and fourth-tier projects or for luxury in the first two tiers.

GM: Do you see the era of renowned architects in Jesolo coming to an end? What effects has it had?

FM: Buildings designed by renowned architects have had positive repercussions, especially in terms of the competition on constructions carried out subsequently. Today, rather than being a continuous presence, this approach occurs sporadically and is somewhat self-serving. Nowadays, the renowned architect isn't recognized by the client during the selection phase but rather in the promotion phase of the structure, and today, it's no longer strictly necessary within our small but significant municipality to have a renowned architect to attract clients. They become highly useful for significant investments, where both renowned and less renowned architects have advantages because they create these structures that serve as guidelines and inspiration for subsequent ones. However, Jesolo isn't a stage like Dubai, where someone builds the tallest and coolest tower; here, we're still in a humble place compared to other international locations, and these episodes are experiences unto themselves. If we talk about a budget choice, it's better not to do it (to call a famous architect), especially because we then encounter significant administrative issues, where the municipal technical offices completely dismantle the project. Therefore, architects also get frustrated because they can't develop what they want.

7. Interview with Giulia Antonello, Studio Antonello associati.

The following interview was held via video call on the 5th of September 2024.

GM: How did your collaboration with the Meier studio begin?

GA: The collaboration with the Meier studio is continuing even in these years. It all began with the Jesolo Pool Houses, located behind the Beach Houses. Today we speak of the Jesolo Lido Design District, a neighborhood project designed in harmony with the ideas of the Meier studio, initially with the architect himself and then with his collaborators.

GM: Come si interfaccia la collaborazione rispetto alla normativa edilizia locale?

GA: It all starts from the idea that the building volume must give something back to the community; therefore, it involves setting up urban planning. In this specific case, an urban plan was created to develop a series of utilities, access points, sea access, parking lots, and green areas, such as those next to the Beach Houses, which allow access to the Sabbie d'Oro facility and, on the other side, to the east, separated from the Falkensteiner hotel an access to the sea. The issue of access reappears in subsequent projects, as the Meier studio, through a comb-like system, aimed to ensure that everyone could see the sea, even from the via Levantina the inland street behind the buildings, creating permeability between the sea and the inland areas.

GM: Is this a requirement of the architect or an imposition by the municipality? How are they utilized during the design phase?

GA: The municipality is open to proposals; in this case, it was more of a perspective from the architect, who proposed this solution to the municipality, which later proved successful.

What I observed while working with Peter Reichegger, comparing him to other local contexts, is that he has always given great importance to the setting in which the buildings are placed. He often recalls an episode from his first meeting with Meier, when the latter immediately asked who the landscape architect was. From there began the involvement of several professionals who were unusual at the time, responding to this need. There is great attention to these themes, even regarding materials (for example, the Itria stone for sea access points) for these elements of public accessibility.

When planning begins, an urban plan is developed within which technical implementation standards allow extending the building code or defining, in agreement with the administration, aspects that can enhance the building. Partly to make it different, partly to incorporate important architectural elements,

as seen in buildings in other parts of the world: transparent light wells in the middle of the building or double-height halls. These are appreciated elements and the result of dialogue with the administration. The architects tries to visualize these elements. In this case, there are parallel cuts to the sea repeated in the elevator blocks. These spaces are open and do not contribute to the building volume; they are excluded based on the administration's requirement to create open spaces where air can circulate. This represents a significant engineering challenge, as seen with the glass elevators, which involve high construction complexity. It is a complicated experience that enriches our professional background.

Another theme in the Beach Houses project is swimming pools: great importance is given to private spaces on the ground, with large pools and open areas. There was the opportunity not to consider the interior space divided by folding windows as it represents a unifying space between inside and outside. This was a point of discussion between the administration and the architect's intuition, which avoided counting this volume.

GM: What about penthouses? Are there specific aspects that need to be considered?

GA: At the time, a volume-based regulation was in force, so it was obvious that terraces would not count towards the volume; it was obvious to do so, it wasn't a specific request. Regarding the penthouses, the terraces resulted from a setback required by the heritage authority: eight standard floors and two setbacks to reduce the building's impact on the skyline.

GM: How did the transition occur from the initial proposal, the tower, to the completed condominium?

GA: Peter is the one who best recalls the transition from tower to building, but I don't remember the details. It was a negotiation with the heritage authority, which left no formal traces.

GM: For a time, the building regulations prioritized surface area rather than volume as the primary guideline for determining the buildable area. According to the local administrator in charge at the time, this provided greater freedom for designers. Is that correct?

GA: In Jesolo, starting from the first regulations used for the Beach Houses in 2020, a building code based on the surface area was gradually adopted. However, some rules and definitions, while functional at a national level, could be misleading locally, causing problems. In May of this year, a variant to the intervention plan and the building code was adopted, bringing the focus back to volume.

But the advantage is relative: if you are working on a simple house project, it can be irrelevant. All projects prior to 2020 used volume regulations, like the Podium project from 2017/2018, which was also based on NTA, even though it was not designed by us.

GM: What is the workflow like when collaborating with an office such as Meier's?

GA: Meier works with a local architect, as often happens with other Italian architects. This is because, in our experience, it is always better to work alongside a local architect familiar with the local regulations. First, the entrepreneur makes contact with these architects and asks them to send a series of information: applications, maximum heights, and basic rules to develop a concept. Often, more than one concept is produced to allow the entrepreneur to evaluate the best and most suitable options, considering aspects such as views and exposure, which are clarified along the way. Once the concept is confirmed, we move into the details: we send all the local regulations useful for advancing the project, translating the main aspects into English. A first draft layout, an initial schematic design, is then produced based on our preliminary indications, which is reviewed by us and the client. Once the project progresses, we move towards the final design to obtain the building permit. In the meantime, initial feedback is gathered from the municipality, the heritage authority, and, in this case, the port authority. Subsequently, the executive phase begins. Sometimes, the executive design has been handled by the Meier studio itself, other times by us. This is because the Meier studio pays enormous attention to details, with extremely precise drawings, which can be difficult to interpret locally. This has led to episodes of misunderstanding by local workers, accustomed to standard solutions, requiring a translation of the designs to enable construction.

Meier wants to supervise everything, with continuous exchanges and regular site visits to ensure everyone knows what to do. Of course, some compromises are inevitable, but the level of control remains very high.

GM: It is often stated that there is a division where architects are tasked with designing the building's exterior, while real estate agencies and constructors control the interior layouts, which often follow standard configurations. What is your opinion on this matter?

GA: I recall an anecdote: at the beginning, when Meier was presenting the prototype apartment, the measurements were overly generous. Over time, thanks to a lasting collaboration, we managed to define a precise program based on the client's initial brief. This program specifies the essential spaces: kitchen, living room, one single bedroom, one double bedroom, a storage room, and two bathrooms, all within a certain number of square meters. It's true that the architect's touch is recognizable, as certain details are unique to their apartments, but in the end, the typical configurations reflect market demands. For instance, a corridor leading to the various rooms and the living room, or a direct entrance into the living room connecting to the other rooms behind. I've also noticed that, more or less, these configurations meet market needs.

GM: Are architects ever consulted for the interiors, or is that responsibility typically left to the final clients or local interior designers?

GA: Only for some penthouses did clients wish to speak directly with the architect to customize their apartments. In most cases, however, Meier himself tries to put himself in the shoes of the future client, designing spaces optimized to utilize light and functionality. Changes are more frequent if the purchase is made during the preliminary phase; at a later stage, it becomes more difficult. However, I have noticed that buyers rarely make significant alterations to the apartments. Once purchased, they are often furnished by trusted designers, suggested by the property, who adapt to the existing spaces,

GM: Did Meier's project influence other developments in the town?

GA: Certainly, the project has positively influenced the seafront panorama, raising its quality for both local architects and investors. Peter was among the first to understand the value of bringing a star architect to a more static area. He believes in leaving something to the territory. Naturally, other investors also show care for what they leave behind on the territory. We have had the pleasure of working with other individuals who aim for quality in their projects, an approach that is anything but common. Local architects have also begun proposing quality projects when the budget allows. Often, some proposals are scaled back due to economic constraints, but the heritage authority remains attentive to details, enabling resources to be focused on key elements.

GM: How does the budget impact the quality of a project? Is there a threshold within which it is still possible to achieve good architecture?

GA: From what I have observed, depending on the location and project objectives, a business plan is developed to identify the target, making estimates on the launch price. With the support of consultants and real estate agencies, the projects are tailored to this target. It's true that this is a luxury sector, where some are willing to pay more.

There was a case when, while working on a new Meier building, we spent a long time only testing a glass sample to achieve the desired effect and align it with the project's concept. But how much does the client actually understand these details? For those outside the industry, it's difficult to grasp.

In my opinion, when you work in a territory for a long time, as Peter has successfully done, you feel the desire to leave something behind. This project is undoubtedly one of Richard Meier's most important in Europe. Pure speculation makes no sense; when someone creates something valuable, it should also provide a return to the community.

GM: Has the era of renowned architects in Jesolo come to an end, or is it merely transforming? How do you envision the future of Jesolo's architecture in the coming years?

GA: From our perspective, only with a continuous drive for improvement can new people be attracted. The Meier studio has given a real boost to the city, transforming its image and attracting a different level of tourism, replacing the Colonie and the usual buildings. The future depends on political decisions and higher directives.

GM: Lastly, how does Jesolo influence the inland territory? Can Jesolo be considered an experimental ground for the development of the inland areas?

GA: We primarily work in Jesolo, a historic choice, as proximity to construction sites is essential. On-site problem management is far more effective than organizing meetings and such. We don't have much experience inland, but we often see solutions typical of seaside architecture being brought into urban contexts without proper adaptation, such as glass railings. These are useful for enjoying sea views and providing unlimited panoramas in beachfront apartments but are unnecessary in cities, especially in historic centers, where privacy would be more appropriate.

8. Interview with Edoardo Marin, Dema Costruzioni

The following interview was held via phone call on the 21st of January 2025.

GM: How is Jesolo positioned in the market? Is it an exceptional place?

EM: One exceptional thing about Jesolo is its location; you are close to Venice and Central Europe, from which you can also arrive by car. Now that tourism is changing and many people are coming from the East, from Slovenia, being close to Venice gives a nice boost. From an architectural point of view, there is the possibility of experimenting, but Jesolo has a commercial type of clientele, so you have to create things that hold up. The Podium, for example, in my opinion, is a bit forced, while Richard Meier is redeveloping the area and is more justified.

GM: Regarding Richard Meier, his experience is part of a trend that has brought other renowned names to Jesolo. How do you evaluate this experience? What have been the outcomes? Do you think it is over?

EM: I hope that there will be more and more figures like this in Jesolo, in the sense that to attract quality clients, you need quality architecture. But as I was saying before, it has to be something commercial and therefore a well-thought-out project designed with someone who knows the territory well. For example, towers, at the territorial level, have always been a gamble, and so far, they have all failed. All the construction companies that built towers have gone bankrupt, both as operations and in terms of the projects themselves: Torre Aquileia, the towers in Piazza Drago, and Merville in Pineta. So, they failed despite being appealing projects. Now there is another one at stake, and we'll see how it ends—perhaps the only one I would bet on now is Meier's.

GM: Regarding the term 'commercial' that you used, how is this term interpreted in architectural terms?

EM: You know that here, especially in Jesolo Lido, prices have increased exponentially in recent years—partly due to the cost of materials and partly due to the cost of land. All the residents of Jesolo Lido are moving to other areas, like Jesolo Paese or behind Piazza Milano. So, Jesolo Lido is now entirely second homes. Therefore, we need to understand what the demand is—whether for quality apartments or rental properties—and thus determine the market for which we are building, if the demand exists.

Let's say that, for better or worse, apartments in Jesolo, in our opinion, since they are summer tourist apartments, must have large outdoor spaces. Then, other aspects are just a matter of trends—glass railings were a trend that is now fading, and white-colored buildings were also a trend that is now changing. For example, we built a building in Piazza Aurora in dark brown tones, called Sound Village.

GM: What about materials and finishes?

EM: More than the finishes, the type of apartment is crucial—the number of bedrooms and bathrooms and the exposure, which is always something clients ask about. Regarding finishes, once you provide a high-level A4-rated home, then, aesthetically, everything is very subjective.

GM: How do you handle projects?

EM: We handle some projects internally, but mainly we work with architectural firms or real estate agents to create a team. Agencies know well what clients want, so we must create projects based on client needs while trying to keep costs down to achieve something that works commercially. It is essential to study and develop the project with someone who knows the territory and market needs, whether it's an agency or an architect—the important thing is that they know the area. Because in Jesolo, not everything sells—people say everything sells in Jesolo, but the market changes entirely just by moving 100 meters.

GM: So, is the quality proportional to the location of the project because a certain location allows for certain budgets, or are there different mechanisms at play?

EM: Location is fundamental. The Shore, for example, which is seafront, cannot have the same finishes as an apartment built in the third or fourth row.

GM: Returning to Meier, is he an explicit reference in your work, or is it a coincidence related to the maritime context?

EM: Certainly, Meier has a style that is perfect for that location. Large windows and views are perfect for that location, but if you try to bring them elsewhere, it may not work anymore. Already in his first intervention, the Pool Houses—buildings with a pool in the center—the fact of having these large windows was a commercial problem.

GM: Looking at your Palms project, the inspiration from the layout of The Pool Houses is clear. How did you take inspiration?

EM: We took inspiration—you always have to take inspiration from the strongest. Some concepts worked less in our context, so we tried to tailor the project to our situation while certainly taking inspiration from Meier.

GM: To what extent is the project customized based on client preferences?

EM: As part of our internal policy, we usually offer the possibility of making customizations in terms of finishes and internal systems. Of course, if the apartment is still under construction, it is easier to make modifications, and we try to create an interior design plan. We are lucky to sell properties before delivery. Naturally, with seafront apartments, we leave some finishing work undone so that buyers can personalize their apartments.

GM: What are the most requested elements for the exterior?

EM: The most requested external elements are large terraces facing south, and lately, gardens—for those who have dogs or small children. As for architectural elements, there are no particular requests—people generally ask for a modern style, but few have a trained eye for details.

GM: Reichegger himself pointed out that clients do not always fully understand the quality of a project. What do you think about this?

EM: Many times, even if I focus a lot on solving certain architectural details, in the end, the client doesn't notice those aspects but rather notices others that you would never expect. In the case of Richard Meier, it becomes more of a status symbol than a necessity. Owning an apartment by Richard Meier is more about showing off than simply having a seafront apartment.

GM: What is the difference between Meier's work and other ambitious projects?

EM: Meier's project was a better-planned commercial operation because the Aquileia project is in a square that has now become too chaotic, in an area with crime. Of course, the newspapers report everything, but it makes a difference. The Merville project is in a too-isolated area, although, in my opinion, architecturally, it is the most beautiful. Instead, Meier's project was planned better—Reichegger knew how to rely on people who knew the area well. For example, everything started with Studio Antonello, who followed the project from the beginning, giving the right advice and setting the right boundaries because they knew the market.

GM: How do you see the current real estate situation in Jesolo?

EM: From a construction perspective, my colleagues in the hinterland are struggling with the residential sector because prices have increased due to the war in Ukraine—costs have risen by 10%. Now they are talking about further price hikes due to increases in gas and oil prices, and since kilns for cement, bricks, and steel run on gas, prices will rise. The residential market is suffering, and young couples are struggling. Second homes are holding up, although we have seen a slight decline in sales over the past year, so we expect a slowdown in the coming years.

GM: But it's always better to be in Jesolo than in the hinterland... Is there a lot of competition from hinterland companies in Jesolo?

EM: There is a lot of competition from companies outside Jesolo—very few of us are left in Jesolo, while external companies that are struggling elsewhere are coming to Jesolo.

GM: Do you notice any particular differences in the type of construction compared to these competitors?

EM: The issue, rather than subjective tastes, is that certain things that work in Jesolo Paese, San Donà, or Treviso do not work for second homes. For example, in San Donà, we are building apartments with 50-square-meter living rooms, three bedrooms, three or four bathrooms, and garages. In Jesolo, smaller spaces are enough, but with a large terrace, where people don't even use the indoor dining table but instead the outdoor one. Here, the project makes the difference—the summer home must be cooler and a bit different.

GM: Is there an influence of Jesolo on the choices made for buildings in the hinterland?

EM: It could be that Jesolo's style influences this. I see glass terraces being built even in the hinterland, but each place needs its own project. It makes sense to have a glass railing in a seafront home, but what's the point in a city where you overlook a parking lot? Sometimes, even if they make no sense, they still look 'cool.' I don't know if there's contamination—I'd say no rather than yes. Even outsiders try to copy successful projects in Jesolo, but by applying them in the wrong contexts, they make mistakes. There's no real contamination. We have worked with architects from outside, and by giving them some guidance, they have created something different from the existing that still worked.

GM: So, do you prefer to rely on local architects rather than external ones?

EM: In my opinion, it is important to work with those who know the territory. Large architecture firms can carry out bigger projects, while we, given our structure, can manage more small-scale projects rather than single large ones. From a construction perspective, firms like these demand highly detailed project management, which makes things even harder on-site. For example, in the case of Mascheroni in Piazza Brescia, there are special structures with curved concrete walls and recessed windows, which are difficult to execute and require very tight tolerances. In that situation, they had a margin tied to the cost of the land, the final clients, and the operation itself.

GM: What tools do you use for inspiration in your projects? Do you use the internet? Are you familiar with the SkyscraperCity forum?

Appendix

EM: I don't know SkyscraperCity. Every project you do tries to stay up to date, and you always take inspiration from the best things you see around. Then, you try to make them your own and adapt them in the most suitable way for your context. We only publish images of things that have already been built.

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