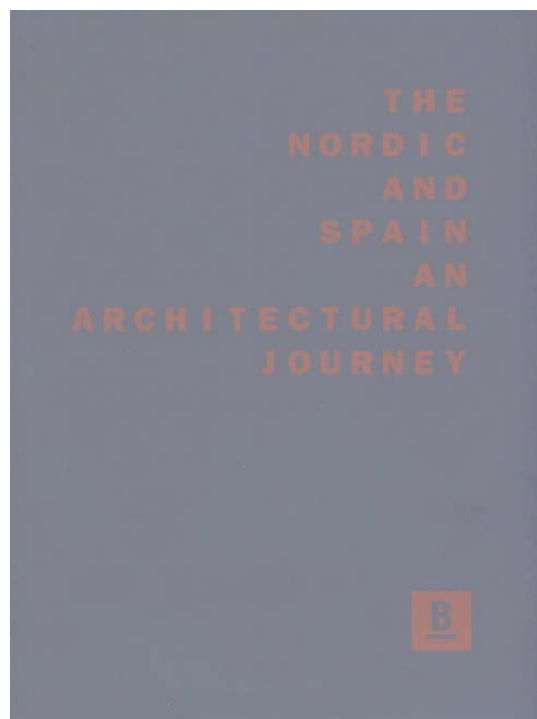




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- QUEREZUA y SRA
- RODRIGUEZ y SRA
- SANCHEZ DE LEON y SRA
- SOLDEVILLA y SRA.

**the
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and
spain**

**an
architectural
journey**

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Preface

Journeys and dialogues ...

Thomas Bo Jensen

When speaking about architecture – in fact, almost any piece of architecture in the world – the concept of 'journey' cannot be separated from it. Behind any building that has survived a few generations, even the most situated ones, lies a series of journeys. Such journeys could be understood as exchanges of knowledge with other cultures, as travelling craftsmen, or architects and builders who travelled to other places in search for inspiration. In Denmark, around the birth of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in the 18th century, these journeys were called *dannelsesrejser*. A *dannelsesrejse* was a sort of educational journey without specific learning goals, other than that of seeking inspiration in other cultural regions and traditions. Besides "education", *dannelse* also means "formation", which signifies that, little by little, these journeys form a person's character and creative vocabulary. Or, if in the context of many travellers, it forms an entire building culture. This may be seen, for example, in the classicism of Copenhagen, which was shaped by the many architects and builders of the 18th and 19th century who journeyed to the Mediterranean countries in search of the roots of classicism, sponsored by Danish kings.

Not much interest went in the other direction until the second half of the 20th century, when Spanish architects began to look north. At first, this occurred via architectural journals and books arriving to Spain, then through journeys by Spanish architects to

Finland, Sweden and Denmark. According to professor Félix Solaguren-Beascoa, a leading specialist in the works of Arne Jacobsen, it was first and foremost the social and democratic values embedded in Nordic architecture that encouraged the Spanish architects to travel north. But also, it was the way Nordic architects approached light and space, materiality and detailing. In other words, what interested Spanish architects was not the style or the fashion, but the underlying architectural values that could be brought back to Spain.

The journeys have long since turned into fruitful dialogues across cultural and climatic differences. As we learn from this engrossing book, the dialogue is now more vivid than ever. Behind the book lies the research project *Escandinavia. An Architectural Dialogue between Denmark and Spain*, conducted at Aarhus School of Architecture 2019-2022. The title points in many interesting directions, since the question becomes: what is 'an architectural dialogue'? Obviously, it can be a conversation about architecture between people from different cultures, or between different architectural traditions, as implied in the title. At another level, however, it can be a dialogue between buildings, between buildings and their surroundings, or buildings and people, as already suggested by Camillo Sitte in the late 19th century.

If we dwell a bit more on the notion of 'architectural dialogue', we might also consider the possibility of an even deeper dialogue. In the essay *The Life of Plants – a Metaphysics of Mixture*, the Italian botanist and philosopher Emanuele Coccia, reveals a captivating thought: without aesthetics, we would not be alive! It is the decline of aesthetic sensibility among human beings, which threatens our planet. The reason why we can breathe is due to aesthetic communication, he claims. The plants, who produce the oxygen we breathe, communicate via smells, colours and taste. The insects, birds and animals are all part of this cross-fertilizing orbit that builds on aesthetic communication. Thus, Coccia claims, the ecological crisis is first and foremost an aesthetic crisis.

If we transfer this viewpoint to our architectural dialogue, it becomes clear that architectural dialogue is all about aesthetic communication – between buildings, between buildings and their surroundings; between materials, between buildings and people; between buildings and plants, buildings and water, air, sun, and earth. What Spanish architects now bring back to the Nordic is exactly the sense of aesthetic communication. The works we can enjoy by reading this book, or even better, through journeys to Spain, give hope for architecture as a 'living' art form: architecture for people, architecture as a tribute to its place and its surroundings, and architecture as a kind of natural form of growth that respects the raw beauty and resistance of natural materials. Such values, which often play a limited role in today's mainstream architecture, will eventually ensure resilience.

So, just like Spanish architects sought inspiration in Scandinavia some generations ago, and still do, it is about time to switch the direction of the looking glass. Let's enjoy together the architectural dialogue in all its flourishing range, let's dream for a while of an architecture of real co-existence. Let's be inspired by Harquitectes' claim, when they visited Aarhus School of Architecture in November 2021, that "we are trying to move towards reconnecting"; or as was stated by TEd'A arquitectes in their *Escandinavia Talk* in September 2021: "we never start from the beginning, there has always been someone or something before us". The works presented in this book all build on place, history and nature. And they build on the journeys and dialogues of former generations, now translated into the demands of the 21st century.

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