

THE CHALLENGE OF GALICIA

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My first visit to Galicia with Liane Lefaivre was twenty years ago. I remember distinctly the warm, gray granite color that enveloped outside spaces, facades, pavements, and sky, creating a feeling of serenity and containment. I also have vivid the memory of the impression made on us by several new projects by architects totally unknown outside of Spain, such as the granite using Bar Boo's high rise buildings and the small structures by Campos Michelena revitalizing the fisherman village of Combarro. The projects were few but exciting because they had many unique and genuinely creative attributes generated through effective examination of local needs and potentials of local resources. This feeling was confirmed later when we presented these projects outside of Spain in lectures and writings. The source of the excitement was the fact that the projects were "regional" meaning that they were perfect fit to a well-demarcated unique set of requirements and by being a unique solution they were contributing to the diversity of architectural knowledge.

It was impossible to imagine at that time, the number, size, and style of the houses to be built all over Galicia during the last ten years, a representative sample of which are the twenty-five selected ones in this book. Yet, the fact that these projects exist today does not surprise anyone. Although not completely adequate to define the overall built tissue of Galicia the structures documented here are enough to draw at least one major conclusion: that without doubt Galicia has submitted to globalization. This also is not a very surprising fact. Because Galicia took the predictable way many other regions around the world, in America, Asia, or other countries in Europe, have already taken adopting the suburban sprawl pattern for locating residences and the "new look" post WWII American "House and Garden" prototype for their design. As opposed to their rural ancestors, the suburban sprawl free standing houses shown here dispersed over an ex-rural landscape not far from urban centers to which they depend, are mono-functional units intended to lodge the nuclear families of young professional couples. Thus, as in similar situations around the world, although some intellectual activities occur within their territory, in general they are not places of production. Interestingly, the book at hand contains an illustration of the 1949 Charles and Ray Eames house in Southern California, a pioneering design of a house that, in contrast to the New Look homes and as old farm houses did, combined a work place with a place for living and raising children. Charles and Ray Eames were knowledge workers laboring together producing highly intellectually intensive and competitive creative work, innovative designs while under the same roof, as a married couple, they were bringing up their children. Part of the John Entenza Case Study project, the house was highly "regional" and creative in the sense, that it was a satisfactory solution to a set of mostly new and unique at that time programmatic demands recruiting

new resources, industrially produced construction materials and new means of transportation and communication.

As with New Look urban sprawl houses in California, in Greece, or in Australia, the Galician houses presented here have roomy, generous interior arrangements where there is plenty of space allocated to leisure activities that the new affluence of their inhabitants makes them affordable. As with the plans of these suburban houses, the Galician plans are "open". Their interior spaces overlap, fuse with each other, and give to the outside. Spatial contrasts and views, traditional devices of the picturesque customarily associated with affluence, are emphasized even if view exists no more. All schemes provide accommodations for the car to which their owners submitted part of their freedom in exchange of another.

Clearly, these twenty five examples tell us that Galicia went the predictable way other regions of the world have gone or will go. To some degree this is the result of the ease with which information, and in particular architectural information, is diffused and subsequently imitated. And to a greater extent the similarity of such architectural global developments is the outcome of some iron rule followed by people around the world responding uniformly to their habitat needs as their income goes up. What is the point of this book then if so much is, if not known, so predictable? What is its contribution?

I believe there is great value in this instant archaeology record put together by Toni Garcia and his collaborators. In addition to its historical value offering a portrait of architecture within a slice in time and space, the document provides also a mirror, to quote Garcia, "so that Galicians can know themselves better."

It is a portrait of a reality: the reality of the twenty five examples of Galician houses and their high level of design and construction quality, in comparison to their counterparts around the world. But it is also a picture of a dream, the globally shared cherished dream of suburban arcadia. And finally it is also a documentation of a reality of the unintentional, unforeseen results the dream mapping a fragmented natural landscape and equally disjointed public domain.

Thus, apart from generating pride and satisfaction for the achievements of these designs, the book might help in posing deeper questions about the present and the future: Where do we stand now? How did we arrive here? Where do we go from here?

As things stand there is no reason why the fragmentation of the natural landscape and the disjoining of the public domain will not continue. And there is no reason why the long term impact of

these processes is not going to be good news. One should not expect a dramatic crisis of the scale of the *Prestige* but the ecological and social quality decline which might be gradual might also be irreversible.

However, the book might also stimulate taking another path embarking on explorations about new ways of living and new kinds of design and construction, more sustainable ecologically and socially, and more rooted to a profound inquiry of what the region needs and what it can offer. The region after all supplies excellent precedents of more ecologically friendly ways of living and more supportive to public interaction. Santiago de Compostela has a complex of matchless public spaces, A Coruña a unique treatment of urban fronts which not only manifest the uniqueness of Galician architectural heritage but also supply a rich potential toolbox if recruited that could enable the solution of future hard design problems.

This might make not only Galicia a better place in the long run but it might also contribute to making the world a better place to be.

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