

**Future
Architecture
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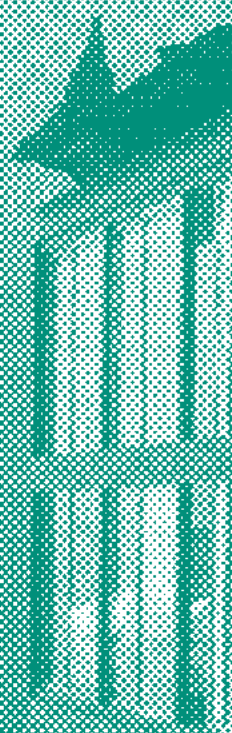
A field guide
to the future
of architecture

Edited by &beyond

Walk & Hórreo

**Remote farm buildings
as new economic drivers**

By Ignacio Gias





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“A stable economy needs constantly to rethink itself, applying strong doses of self-criticism.”

A project aiming to show how disused buildings remaining from outdated farming practices – here the grain stores of Northern Spain – could form the basis for a new network of cultural tourism.

It's no secret that the turnover and economic dimensions of the art market are a strong index of the prosperity of a society. One could say that the more developed a society is and the more prosperous an economy it has, then the greater its art market too. France is a clear example of this. Let's raise two theories as to why the most stable economies have stronger cultural industries: one theory is that when people have an economic surplus and are in a position to save money, they can afford to become art consumers. This encourages the development of a class of cultural producers – artists – whose work then has a stable and accessible market niche. Another theory, towards which I lean, sees culture and creativity as a fountain providing water and sustenance to all the other sectors of the economy and making them prosper. A stable economy needs constantly to rethink itself, applying strong doses of self-criticism. It needs the space for reflection, creativity and criticism offered by culture.

Europe is aiming to become an engine of ideas, a space of creativity where the value of mechanical production processes is decreasing while the workload of the knowledge economy increases. The European middle classes are increasingly able to reinvent themselves according to market trends. I myself believe that the creative economy is the only path to freedom and personal development for us as citizens, a tool that provides us with the flexibility needed to help us face the great changes in society and economy, such as globalisation, financial crisis and migration.

Ignacio Gias

Ignacio Gias was born in Madrid in 1985 and graduated in architecture at the CEU San Pablo University, Madrid in 2010. He founded his own architecture practice, Nacho Gias Studio, in 2014, which works at the intersection of architecture, communication and new technology.

Previous page: Repaired and glazed *hórreo*. © Nacho Gias Studio

Walk & Hórreo



Above: *Hórreo* in Valongo, Galicia, Spain.
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Below: *Hórreo* in Quinta da Bouça, Viseu, Portugal.
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Since the creative economy can constantly reinvent itself, it can adapt to and carry on through each new situation. An illustration of this is my project, *Walk & Hórreo*, which I've been developing in response to the exodus of young people from the countryside to big cities, in Spain and the consequences of this trend on rural areas and heritage. Guided by my convictions, I wanted to look at how creative economic ideas could be used to provide new tools for growth in such wasted, underpopulated rural areas. I've

been developing a pilot for the project with the Factoría Cultural in Matadero, Madrid.

Located in the farming regions of Northern Spain, *hórreos* are small wooden structures designed for food preservation that are raised off the ground on stone pillars to prevent animals from accessing them. The first *hórreos* appeared in medieval times and the oldest

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one still preserved today dates from 1768. Changes in agricultural production and the rural exodus of the local population over the last century have rendered this typology of building useless and as a result most have been destroyed. As *hórreos* are often located in fairly extreme environments they are exposed to hard climatic conditions. The impact of the weather breaks down their structural elements until they collapse. In regions like Cantabria, Northern Spain, or in Sweden and Portugal, they have almost completely disappeared. Those remaining (almost 40,000) are mostly found in Asturias and Galicia, where it is estimated that every day two or three more are disappearing.

Northern Spain has traditionally been an agricultural territory where families used to take care of their own fields. The *hórreo* was the answer to a very specific requirement – that of needing to keep corn cobs and



other crops dry and safe from rodents before they were threshed. During the twentieth century, agricultural production went through a total revolution. Massive companies now own huge fields designed for the industrial production of food. The preservation of the

Sequence of opening timber shutters on a renovated *hórreo*. Render © Nacho Gias Studio

Walk & Hórreo



Repaired and glazed *hórreo*.
Render © Nacho Gias Studio

harvest is no longer done in *hórreos* with these large companies using vast storage buildings instead. Hence the abandonment of the *hórreos* to the rain, freezing winter temperatures and strong winds that reduce these heritage structures to heaps of rubble in the mountains.

This project aims to create an infrastructure to help make *hórreo* preservation profitable. The tapping of the consistent existing flows of tourists to the famous pilgrim walking route, the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, is a key element in this strategy. Through the creation of an app, backpackers would be able to locate *hórreos* and spend the night in one of them for a token price. This would contribute to a further objective of this initiative, beyond just heritage preservation, that of giving the opportunity to small farmers to reinvent their profession and economic base by using new technology to take advantage of their unique locations. In a society where young people are leaving the countryside to improve their lives in big cities, and where working practices and social structures in rural communities have remained fixed in the past, Northern

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Spain needs new ideas to reinvent itself. This project, beyond its immediate aim, is intended to become a model for economic reactivation and the preservation of both the cultural and natural environment. But this *Walk & Hórreo* proposal, beyond just being a useful strategy linking economic, cultural and environmental aims, is also intended to touch on a sense of mystery, magic and wonder inherent in some of these extraordinary structures.



This project is a step towards an image of what a European future could be like, a future in which both nature and culture play a key role in becoming prosperity creators. ■

Repaired and glazed *hórreo* interior. Render © Nacho Gias Studio