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Almost Frenemies: That Time that Transregional Swedish-Danish Exchanges in Architecture Failed

Angela Gigliotti*

Introduction

In 1960, before funds were even secured to build a Danish Academy in Rome, better known in Danish as Det Danske Institut for Videnskab og Kunst i Rom and in Italian as the Accademia di Danimarca, the Swedish King Gustaf VI Adolf and his daughter, Queen Ingrid, Swedish by birth but Danish by marriage, expressed the desire to have the Swedish and Danish cultural legations – the former designed by the Swedish architect Ivar Tengbom thirty years earlier, and the latter just commissioned to the Danish Kay Fisker – unified under the same roof. As evidence of the strong interest of the two Majesties towards their respective Nordic presence in Rome, it should be mentioned how Queen Ingrid, already since 1959, had established the *Dronning Ingrids Romerske Fond* to be used to host scholars and artists and a series of activities connected to their residences in Rome. While for an assessing about the role of Gustaf VI Adolf limited to the diplomatic and academic activities happening in Rome and a monographic narrative of Tengbom as architect, the reference is mainly to Swedish sources. Only recently

international scholarships has been conducted to introduce transnational exchanges behind Swedish-Italian building construction in Rome and in Stockholm.¹ Circling back to the possibility of solidifying transregional exchanges, networks, and connections between the two neighboring Nordic countries after tumultuous centuries, such an idea must have seemed convincing, and as such was initially warmly welcomed by the Danish and Swedish involved parties. The excitement was evident in numerous correspondences, despite a clear asymmetry: the Swedes already had a building – constructed under agreements established by the Italian Fascist government with several countries as part of the soft diplomacy initiative in the Valle Giulia compound in Rome – while the Danes did not. Was this asymmetry a hindrance? One might argue that, on the one hand, the Swedes faced the prospect of committing to a time-consuming and costly extension of their existing building (a project they eventually undertook, as this article later discusses). On the other hand, the Danes, by embarking in a transregional

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building, were implicitly asked to contend the freedom of an independent 1960s architectural design, with a building which had been subject in the 1930s to aesthetic constraints imposed by the Italian dictatorship. These constraints were encapsulated in the motto: “Italian on the outside, foreign on the inside”² despite the dominant historiography is of a single-authored kind by the undeniably renowned Swedish architect Tengbom, highly regarded in Denmark. This was a condition Denmark had managed to avoid three decades earlier, for reasons yet to be clarified by historians, despite preliminary designs having already been drafted at the time by Carl Brummer.

Hindrance or not, the reification of transregional Swedish-Danish exchange in architecture remained only in the realm of drawings and never came to fruition. On the contrary, the buildings’ proximity caused several crises, particularly during the Danish Academy’s construction, and what remains today is a small garden gate between the two properties used only by directors to avoid a circumnavigation of the buildings when they have to meet. Ironically, such an almost secret gate is named after the famous bridge that connects the two countries: the Øresund (Fig. 1).

This article critically explores the building construction of the Danish Academy as a significant case study, arguing that it was a missed opportunity to materialize Swedish-Danish exchanges and hosting them in a common shared space for the years to come. It builds on mainly Danish archival sources, so far overlooked by historians in the diplomatic architectural field – since scholars usually rely on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ archives. In this article instead it is the author’s compilation of the *Byggesager Dossier* crucial to ground an alternative

historiography: an archival sub-collection at the Danish Academy Archive (DIR) about building operations aimed at shed light on the genesis of the building documented therein.³ Nearly 2000 documents (e.g. correspondences, drawings, accounting, reports) re-assessed to contribute to an overall research project aimed at proposing an alternative historiography of architecture concerning labour, transnational and production histories of the Academy as case of diplomatic architecture built in Rome in the 1960s. As it happens for the Swedish building and Tengbom’s authorship, still until very recently indeed, the dominant historiography about the Danish Academy pertained a singular, male-authorship – under the name of Kay Otto Fisker – and a case study of Danish national modernism built abroad.⁴ Furthermore, the established historiographies tend not to acknowledge the outset of the project as the failure of a Swedish-Danish transregional architecture – to rather glorify the last Fisker’s project as a monument to canonical Danish modernism.

However, already in the 1980s one of the former directors (1979–1983) architect Kjeld De Fine Lich wrote an essay to clarify how “superficial”⁵ was the interpretation of the Academy as both the culmination of the Fisker’s career though the less typical of his works; and, a result of the struggles towards “a simple solution, as in the Fisker’s habit (...) into a rather complex project answering the importance of a complex (diplomatic) commission”.⁶ The director thus wanted to re-assess the Fisker’s project by incorporating evidence of the on-site conditions and transregional exchanges, proposing a series of “unpublished materials to which to refer once and for all”.⁷ De Fine Lich’s essay – published first in Danish in *Architectura* and then



Fig. 1. The “Øresund” in Rome, garden gate connecting the Swedish Institute and the Danish Academy seen from the latter one. Copyright: Author.

re-published in Italian by *Parametro* – ⁸ built upon the drawings that Svend Høgsbro, the last partner at the Kay Fisker Arkitektkontor to be involved in the project, had just donated to DIR at that time; but also, some of the textual sources that forty years later were selected by the author for the *Byggesager Dossier*. De Fine Lich’s contribution has at least two main limitations. On one hand, it is important to acknowledge that the essay reflects its time: a typological study where drawings serve as the primary sources. In contrast, the textual sources documenting Swedish-Danish transregional exchanges,

production dynamics, economic choices, or labor conditions are secondary, referenced only when necessary, and do not play a substantial role in shaping a labor, transnational, or production study of the building as this article aims to achieve. On the other hand, despite aiming to provide an alternative to the canonical narrative about the building, De Fine Lich produced an apology centered on Fisker. In doing so, De Fine Lich did not consider whether the Academy might be the least typical of Fisker’s works, as it involves a multi-layered and nuanced authorship that extends beyond the master’s perspective –

especially given that Fisker passed away before witnessing the topping out. Since then, many decisions have significantly influenced the final architectural outcome. De Fine Lich's contribution thus falls short in questioning Fisker's authorship, let alone acknowledging the significant agency of the many overlooked Danish and Italian actors, goods, and building techniques involved in the construction process.

To address the gaps left by De Fine Lich and the numerous blind spots in the historiography of the Academy, this article aims to explore the transregional Swedish-Danish exchanges involved during the years of construction. It reassesses the archival sub-collection of the *Dossier*, which is now finally available digitally. Rather than concentrating on architectural drawings, the article retraces the interactions between the Danish and Swedish parties as they unfolded at that time. Notably, the exchange was based on a single architectural proposal submitted by Denmark to Sweden, but it resulted extensively documented through textual sources, such as correspondence, telegrams, accounts, and reports. By delving into the struggles, negotiations, frictions, and limits of constructing a Swedish-Danish transregional architecture, the article spans from the analysis of what is argued to be a missed opportunity to those very critical moments that risked collapsing into a diplomatic crisis. It argues that Swedes and Danes interpreted the commission to build national legations abroad in fundamentally different ways. While both nations were presented with a similar opportunity, their divergent approaches – particularly in how they envisioned the symbolic potential of diplomatic architecture – ultimately led to the breakdown of transregional collaboration. The pursuit of a highly emblematic national expression,

especially on the Swedish side, overshadowed the possibility of a shared architectural endeavor.

In terms of methodology, the big data set has been reviewed using a mixed methodology that encompasses established methods (i.e. archival and literature review) and experimentation in the history of architecture, a method bridged from other disciplines (i.e. literary studies and computer-based science), namely *Distant Reading*.⁹ The application of a lexicon-based method to the visual discipline of architecture allowed the research project behind the article for a comprehensive overview and facilitated the assessment of a large volume of data, as the *Dossier*. Despite the conclusions of this article are not based directly on any elaborated theoretical diagrams based on the deployed sources – overall in the research this approach incorporated infographics and theoretical diagrams to identify patterns and connections as I have discussed elsewhere.¹⁰

The article is thus structured in four parts: first, it frames the vision of a Swedish-Danish transregional architecture through royal support in the negotiation; second, it introduces how Sweden for Denmark transitioned from being a precedent in terms of Italian legislation, a collaborator when the proposal was submitted and a frenemy after the project was rejected. Third, it explores three frictions that arose after the failure of a shared architectural vision, stemming from the physical proximity of the two buildings, to better understand the overall tone of the Swedish-Danish exchange during the Danish construction operations. Lastly, it concludes by discussing the proposed catalyst for the architectural failure: the deep opposition regarding the representational roles of Swedish and Danish architecture within diplomatic contexts.

The royal back up: how it all started

The birth of a Danish cultural diplomatic representation in Italy occurred well ahead the inauguration of its actual premises at the end of via Omero, in Valle Giulia, Rome on October 24th, 1967. The first *Istituto Danese di Scienza e Arte*, had in fact already been inaugurated on October 26th, 1956 at the top floor of *Palazzo Primoli* (1956–1967). The initial leasing contract was signed for a total of 9 years, until March 1st, 1964. In the spring of 1960, the board of the Danish Academy in Rome, part of the Danish Ministry of Education, began to discuss its future following a direct request from the then-director, Per Krarup.

Specifically, the board wanted to re-negotiate with Italy the possibility of building on the site in via Omero, located next to the Swedish Institute in Rome (Fig. 2). A site that, as mentioned above, had already been offered to Denmark at the end of the 1930s and for which the Danish architect Carl Brummer, who had designed in 1932 the Danish pavilion at the Giardini di La Biennale in Venice, had also sketched an architectural proposal in 1938 (Fig. 3). However, that architectural proposal was rejected in connection with the declining of the Italian offer, both for economic and, most likely, political reasons, and due to significant interest from Danish parties in a parallel Italian proposal in Colle Oppio, which involved the possibility of renting a building soon to be vacated by the Egyptian Embassy. Nonetheless, since the lease was not discontinued by Egyptians, Italy ultimately had to withdraw its offer to Denmark.¹¹

Thirty years later, to inform the Italian authorities of the Danish renewed interest towards Valle Giulia's plot, the board of the

Danish Academy pursued two avenues: one towards Sweden and the other towards Italy. Regarding the first avenue, as soon as the idea of a Danish building adjacent to the Swedish one was communicated to Stockholm, King Gustaf VI Adolf of Sweden and his daughter, Queen Ingrid – Swedish by birth but Danish by marriage – expressed their desire to unify the Swedish and Danish cultural legations under one roof. If one were to trace the timeline, it is likely that the Swedish King initiated this idea. During the same months, Sweden was also considering a construction project in Rome to expand its premises designed by Ivar Tengbom in 1939, and the board of the Swedish Institute had already received a proposal for this extension from Tengbom. However, since the Swedish King was “not enthusiastic about the proposal submitted”,¹² the Danish Academy's communication arrived at just the right moment, prompting “naturally”¹³ the emergence of a completely different concept: a Swedish-Danish common transregional architecture for fellows from both nations. Queen Ingrid, as protector of the Danish Academy in Rome, regularly met with Agnete Vøhtz, the acting chief of the Danish board, and actively supported the exploration of this possibility in various ways. During one of these meetings, Krarup reported some “information of a more informal nature [...] by the Swedish Institute's very well-informed secretary Gino Filippetto”¹⁴ who had “conduct a series of negotiations over the last six months about the possibility of an extension or expansion of the Institute with the competent authorities whether Sweden could acquire a strip (about 8 meters wide) of the neighboring plot”.¹⁵ The very same plot in which Denmark was interested. The result of these investigations was indeed positive for Denmark since Filippetto

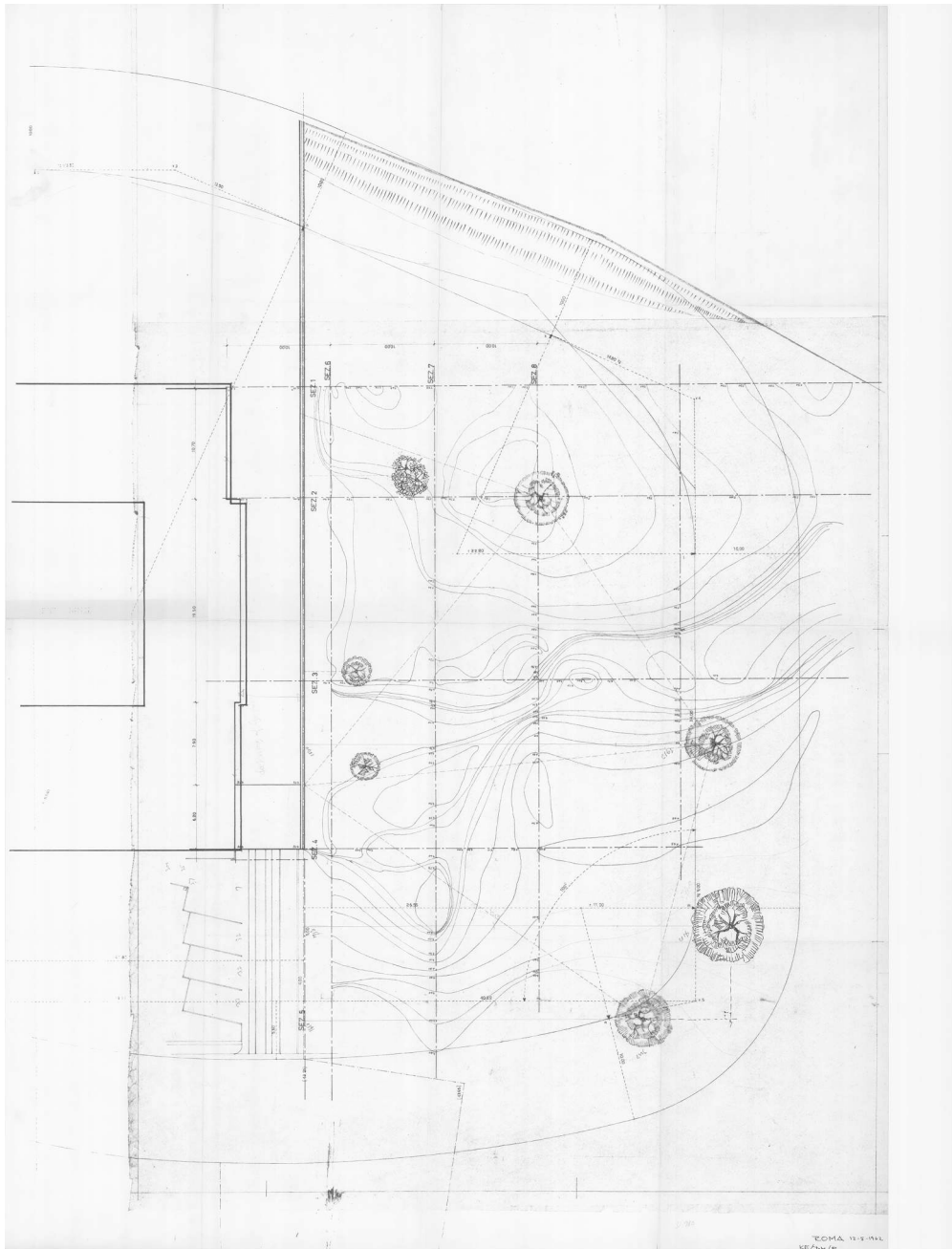


Fig. 2. Landscape Survey of the plot next to the Swedish Institute. May 12th, 1962. Cartella-3001. DIR. Copyright: Det Danske Institut i Rom.

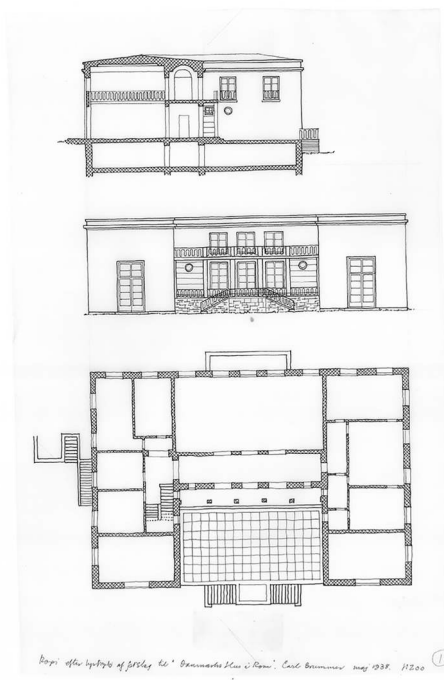
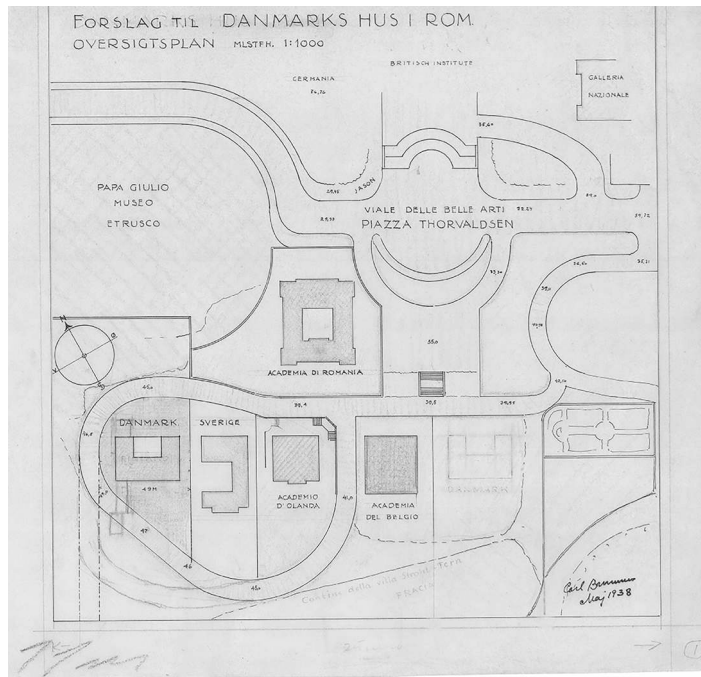


Fig. 3. First proposal by Carl Brummer for the Danish Academy in via Omero, Rome. May, 1938. Cartella-13011. DIR. Copyright: Det Danske Institut i Rom.

reported that Italians rejected this possibility since “the remaining part of the land would then be too small for any other interested party”.¹⁶ Once the Danish board was informally notified about the site availability, the Danish vice-director Jørgen Birkedal Hartmann wrote to the Rome Municipality that

the steering committee (of the Danish Academy) in Copenhagen chaired by the Danish Royals expressed the greatest sympathy for the eventual realization of their hopes concerning its own cultural seat within the foreign academies, right alongside its Swedish sister (and under the same conditions).¹⁷

Hartmann argued such possible Swedish-Danish “ideal proximity”¹⁸ not only as the basis for a close cooperation, but also the coronation of a dream “by the Danish cultural world to be able to tighten in this way the scientific and spiritual ties that for centuries have united the two countries”.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Krarup pragmatically described this coronation in an informative note to the Danish ambassador in Rome, Holger Bech, stating: “A student residence could potentially be constructed on the border between the Swedish and Danish Institutes, serving both purposes, with up to 20 rooms. This dormitory could be modeled after the dormitories in Århus, emphasizing functionality without luxury”.²⁰ This was not a random reference but rather one of the most renowned projects by Kay Fisker, C.F. Møller, C. Th. Sørensen – and many other, so far neglected, architectural actors: Aarhus University.

What followed was a series of exchanges between the Italian authorities, the Embassy, and the Danish Academy in Rome, during which royal support was leveraged to facilitate discussions, although there was no formal engagement from the royals at that point.

The points to be confirmed by Italy were primarily: (1) that the proposed building for the Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro, designed by the Italian architect Luigi Moretti, was rejected by the Municipality because its function did not align with Valle Giulia's designation as a compound for foreign academic institutions; (2) that Italy was willing to offer Denmark the site for its construction once again; and (3) the boundaries of the allocated site. To get all the answers and speed up all the agreements in Italy, the involvement of Queen Ingrid was crucial, and thus more than once she was involved being “very eager to personally provide her positive support for the matter's execution”²¹ as on the occasion of a royal travel to Rome the same year of 1960, when Krarup took “the liberty of requesting that the Ambassador in advance consider(ed) which persons or entities could be of importance for the advancement of the matter [...] in order to bring the Queen into contact with them”.²²

The Swedish Way, in multiple ways

However, to understand the slow progress of the matter, it is important to revisit Hartmann's wording, *under the same conditions*, as these conditions formed the *Swedish Way* to be adopted towards Denmark from an Italian perspective: first and foremost a legal matter. From the beginning

the Italian State had promised the availability of the land in Valle Giulia in the proximity of the Swedish Institute on corresponding terms to those granted to Sweden and included in an Italian-Swedish exchange of Notes dated December 21, 1937.²³

Such Notes then transformed into an Italian law – the Regio Decreto Legge

February 24th, 1938 n.340 – Anno XVI signed by: Benito Mussolini as the Italian Fascist Dictator and thus the highest political figure of the time; Galeazzo Ciano as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Paolo Thaon di Revel as the President of the Senate that a month earlier had signed the Fascist racial laws; Giuseppe Bottai as the Ministry of Education and Felice Guarneri as the Ministry for Trade and Currency – guaranteed the construction of the Swedish Institute. The *Swedish Way* in this context is conceptualized as the legal basis that Italy implemented not only for Denmark but for the many foreign countries interested in building their own diplomatic premises in Rome during the 1960s and that were negotiating with Italy their own bilateral agreements. In less than ten years, in fact, Italy allowed four foreign countries to build diplomatic premises in its capital: Egypt in 1961; Japan in 1962; Denmark in 1967 and Great Britain in 1968. Such agreements were formally reproduced from those signed under the *Ventennio*, the Italian fascist dictatorship (1922–1943), for the construction not only of Sweden in 1939 but of a significant number of foreign premises in the city (e.g. the Netherlands 1933, Romania 1933, Austria 1937, Belgium 1939, et al.).

The numerous requests made simultaneously may explain why the Italian authorities quickly clarified in 1960 that the site was available; however, beyond that, the progress was very slow, and the legal steps to officially formalize the process took much longer. While the identification of the plot occurred on July 4th, 1961, it was only on December 12th, 1963, that the plot was indicated to become “de facto and de jure” Danish territory.²⁴ In between these two dates, a Danish-Italian agreement was presented to the Senate as Disegno di Legge no. 2119 on

July 23th, 1962, making explicit how such formal procedures were already deployed in regards to Sweden before WWII.²⁵ This agreement was then formalized in terms of the concession of land in Valle Giulia from the Italian to the Danish Government, as the law no. 1605, recorded in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* no. 304 on November 29th, 1962. Furthermore, to strengthen even more the *Swedish Way* even in matter pertaining building permit: “the Italian law on the transfer of land introduced a provision that the (Danish) Institute must be in line with the Swedish Institute”.²⁶

The cumbersome Italian bureaucracy was exhausting for the Danish side throughout the entire process. Remarkably, just a few months before the building’s inauguration in 1967, issues related to the boundaries of the granted property remained unresolved. This meant that some of the Danish building volumes extended beyond the legal boundaries and required exceptional concessions from the Municipality to be ratified as part of the Danish plot.

In similar cases, the Swedish precedent served as a reference to gauge the level of concern regarding Danish transgressions of Italian building regulations. On one hand, it was “incomprehensible for the Danes that construction could be so close to completion without the plot being properly demarcated”.²⁷ On the other hand, it was noted that “part [...] extends beyond the land donated by the Italian State. This is not reassuring, although the same applies to the Swedish Institute, with no reaction from the Italian authorities”.²⁸

Kay Fisker is on board, literally

Once the possibility of building on the plot in Valle Giulia was confirmed both formally and

informally, the board of the Danish Academy tasked Krarup with writing directly to the selected Danish architect, Kay Fisker, to officially commission him for the project. De Fine Licht has already discussed the decision-making process and the individual who proposed Fisker's name to the board in his essay. Although such details are not directly pertinent to this article, it is essential to clarify that a direct commission for Denmark at that time may have been perceived as unusual, given the absence of an open competition for the project. This occurred in 1960, during the height of Denmark's so-called Golden Years (1945–75) of architectural procurement, when the Danish state was the largest client, arbiter, and facilitator for the many welfare architects shaping the spaces of the Welfare State. There is no evidence to indicate whether the board of the Swedish Institute was involved or even notified about this choice, nor can we determine whether this would have affected the outcome of a Swedish-Danish transregional architecture. However, it is undeniable that Fisker was a safe – if somewhat conservative – choice: an internationally renowned Danish architect at the end of a long career.

On October 5th, 1960, Krarup drafted the request for the task, accompanied by a detailed list of wishes for a Swedish-Danish transregional architecture to be built on the yet-to-be-confirmed Danish-assigned plot. While Krarup was a strong advocate for the combined solution, he was also aware that the path ahead would be long and challenging:

A number of scholarship rooms, equipped with sinks and resembling well-appointed student dormitory accommodations, need to be included. The exact number depends on whether the proposed plan for a dedicated dormitory building – comprising

approximately 20 rooms shared by the Danish and Swedish Institutes and connected by an elevator – is realized. If the plan proceeds, only around 8 to 10 scholarship apartments will be located in the [Danish] building itself, with about half of them designated as double rooms.²⁹

To develop the project, Fisker needed the actual drawings of the existing Swedish building, but it was equally important that Tengbom was willing to share them. To prevent any potential misunderstandings, Krarup devised a suitable pretext to facilitate communication between Fisker and Tengbom:

since the [Swedish] Institute possesses only one copy of these drawings, they are naturally reserved for use in Rome. However, by directly contacting the architect, Prof. Ivar Tengbom in Stockholm, you will likely be able to obtain a set of drawings to initiate the project.³⁰

Lastly, Krarup communicated a possible (tight) deadline:

to draw up a sketch project [...] and give a rough estimate of the costs associated with a construction. For the sake of negotiations and since the Queen is in Rome around the middle of November, we would like the matter to be furthered as much as possible.³¹

Fisker accepted the task and the two months that followed were mainly occupied with getting all the needed resources from Tengbom, meaning that a lot of letters were exchanged between the two of them on the topic, and preparing some proposals for the Danish Academy's board. By November 1960, Fisker was unable to travel to Rome due to sick leave. Instead, his partner, Robert Duelund Mortensen, went to present two proposals and conduct an initial survey

of the site. Krarup's reaction was telling: "it's unfortunate that you were unable to come to Rome [...] as you would have witnessed the spontaneous excitement your blueprint has sparked in everyone [...] especially today at the Queen's event".³² The Spring of 1961 was populated by several variations to the initial proposals and the evolution of the project was closely observed by Queen Ingrid, so attentively that, sometimes, for Krarup, postponing meetings was the only way to discuss the project in detail with Fisker: "the Queen has expressed her desire to review the plans, but I would prefer to discuss them with you before presenting them elsewhere. I have successfully postponed my meeting until the royal family returns after Easter".³³ At other times, royal intervention was essential, as when Queen Ingrid directly wrote: "it was quite enjoyable reviewing the drawings, and the more I reflect on them, the more highly I regard them".³⁴

At the end of summer, during the board meetings on August 4th and 29th, the relationship with the Swedish authorities was once again discussed. The approach, as the minutes of the meetings indicate, remained diplomatic, emphasizing fairness and transparency to avoid any potential backlash: "it was agreed that, as soon as construction is secured, formal contact should be established with the Swedish authorities regarding the construction plans on Danish land".³⁵

By September, the time was ripe to present two architectural proposals to the Swedish authorities: the so-called prismatic design (Figs. 4 and 5) and the rectangular one (Figs. 6 and 7). Fisker estimated the costs for the Swedish portion of the volume at 200.000 kr³⁶ and 44.200 kr³⁷ for the garage in the basement.³⁸ On September 15th, Fisker wrote to Tengbom:

During a negotiation aboard the royal yacht DANNEBROG, with the Danish King [Frederik IX] and Queen [Ingrid], and the Swedish King Gustaf Adolf, [Swedish] Court Marshal Erik Wetter, and [Swedish] Professor Krister Hanell – who has since gone to Rome to temporarily replace the current director – the company approved a project I proposed. This project involves constructing two connecting corridors between the Danish and Swedish Institutes, which will extend to the Swedish building. This is necessary to meet the requirement that the building must be maintained at least 6 meters from neighboring boundaries and that the annexes be fully integrated.³⁹

From Fisker's words, one can infer how advanced the Swedish-Danish transregional architecture was, both in design and at the decision-making level, thanks once again to royal support – so much so that the Danish architect was invited aboard the royal yacht. However, in a telegram from Wetter to Fisker (Fig. 8a,b) whose scope was requesting the drawings for consultation, the tone was more cautiously enthusiastic. Although it was confirmed how "very positively interested"⁴⁰ the Swedish Institute's board was in the proposal, it was also stated that – before taking any final decision – the board needed a technical consult, thus it "requested Tengbom to [...] provide an opinion, along with a detailed assessment, regarding the potential Swedish rooms and basement spaces. Additionally, Tengbom should offer his perspective on the architectural impact of the combined building on the (actual) Swedish Institute".⁴¹ However, even this telegram did not dampen Danish enthusiasm. In the Danish Academy's board meeting on September 18th, Krarup provided an update on the progress of land acquisition and the potential Swedish-Danish transregional

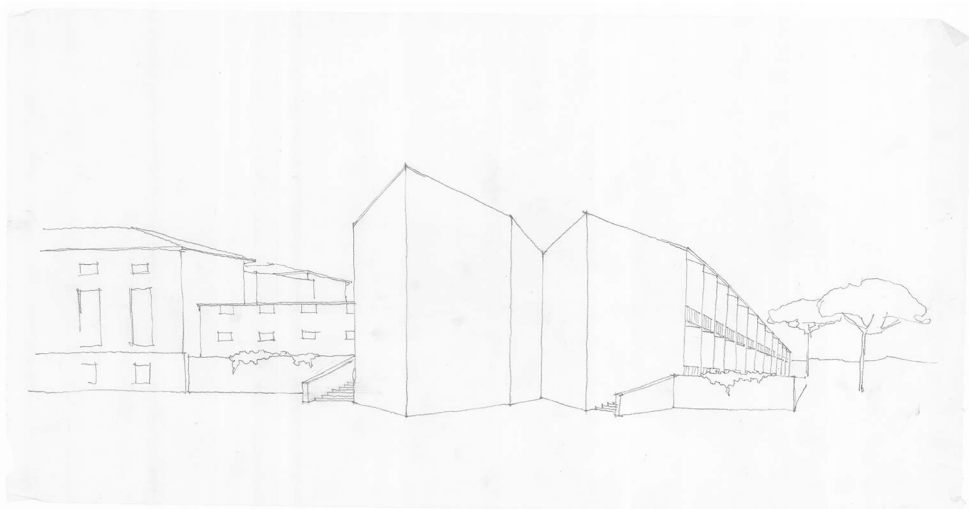


Fig. 4. Elevation of the Prismatic Proposal by Kay Fisker Arkitektkontor for the Danish Academy in via Omero, Rome. September 1961. Cartella-4014. DIR. Copyright: Det Danske Institut i Rom.

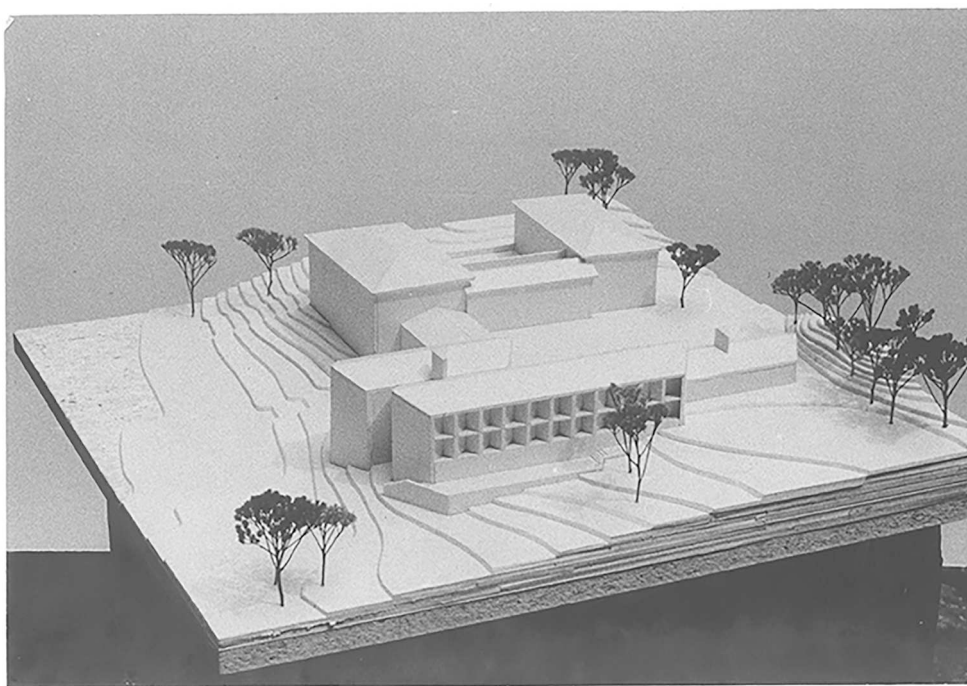


Fig. 5. Maquette of the Prismatic Proposal by Kay Fisker Arkitektkontor for the Danish Academy in via Omero, Rome. September 1961. Cartella 9; 0_Pagina_03. DIR. Copyright: Det Danske Institut i Rom.

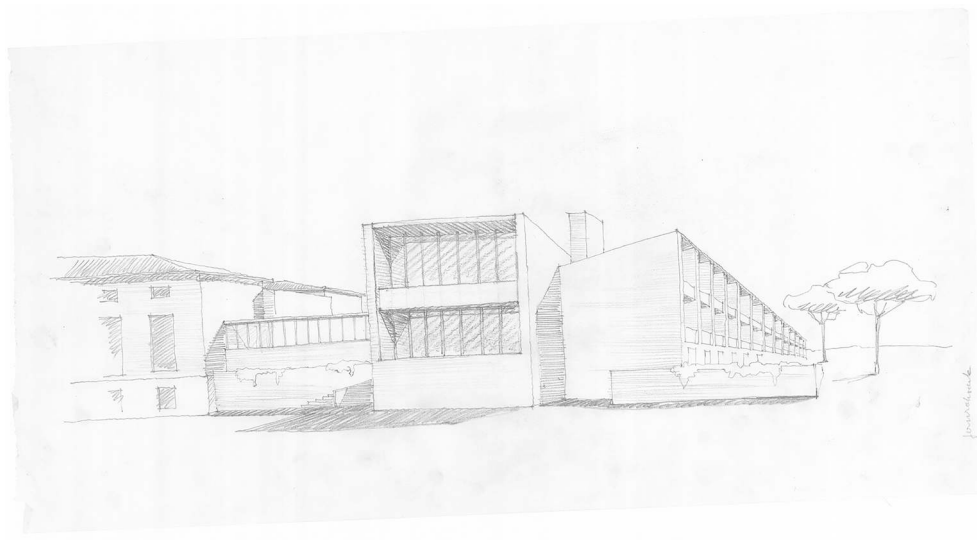


Fig. 6. Elevation of the Rectangular Proposal by Kay Fisker Arkitektkontor for the Danish Academy in via Omero, Rome. September 1961. Cartella-4013. DIR. Copyright: Det Danske Institut i Rom.

architecture, stating that the Swedish extension would amount to 177 m² based on the drawings and the estimates being evaluated by the Swedish Institute's board. Furthermore, the goal of completing the construction on time to avoid extending the lease of Palazzo Primoli remained a strong priority, as reflected in Vøhtz's words: "the transfer from the Italian state is underway, and the institute's board has promptly begun drafting plans for the new institute building, which must be completed before the lease at Via Zanardelli expires".⁴²

The Danish side of the transregional exchange was fully prepared, with Krarup inquiring through Hannell to the Swedish Institute's engineering company about the water and electrical systems to assess the technical feasibility of a Swedish-Danish common project. The conclusions were then shared with Fisker: "there will be no difficulties in routing electrical lines and central heating pipes from the Swedish Institute to the new

Swedish rooms (in the extension), but the water system cannot support the expansion".⁴³

The Swedes' procrastination and Ivar Tengbom's veto

Without being too wrong, one might say the Danes didn't see Tengbom coming. The first sign that things were not proceeding as expected was that the answer was slower than anticipated. A week after Wetter's telegram from Sweden there was still a complete radio-silence, and so Krarup requested to Otto Obling, the secretary of the Danish Academy's board, "to speed up the forwarding of the case to the board of the Swedish Institute in Stockholm".⁴⁴ In response to this request, the Swedish Institute's board asked for at least a month and a half to reach a final decision and to indicate the delegation for an eventual negotiation, but still expressed "great gratitude and [...] the many positive



Fig. 7. Maquette of the Rectangular Proposal by Kay Fisker Arkitektkontor for the Danish Academy in via Omero, Rome. September 1961. Cartella 9; 0_Pagina_06. DIR. Copyright: Det Danske Institut i Rom.

interest in a solution of both Institutes in accordance with the presented proposal”.⁴⁵ In a highly diplomatic tone, the Swedes emphasized that Tengbom not only needed to coordinate with Fisker but also with the Royal Building Board, which was responsible for the Institute in Rome, somehow anticipating Tengbom’s key role in the architectural forming of the Swedish-Danish transregional exchange.

This was precisely the main problem. At the end of October, Tengbom reported to Fisker a series of criticalities that the Swedish architect had reported to his King and to the Swedish Institute’s board. There were concerns: first, about some unspecified Italian authorities who expressed “great opposition”⁴⁶ to the expansion of the plot boundary. Second, about the water issue described

as “very complicated”.⁴⁷ Third, about the assessment of Fisker’s proposal, requested by the Swedish King, in which he “compiled a detailed overview of the lower level of the entire complex, including relevant sections [...] identified some potential issues, which I subsequently reported to the King”.⁴⁸ The primary concerns centered on the difference in elevation between the two plots, which caused the newly added Swedish rooms to align with the current basement, despite facing a shared courtyard at the rear. Additionally, two windows in the main library would be blocked, disrupting the symmetry of the space. More critically for Tengbom, this alteration would affect the prominence of a very symbolic artwork within the new configuration.

(a)

TELEGRAM A67D STOCKHOLM 101/97W 16/9 1040 =

PROFESSOR KAY O. FISKER
 KONGSENSNYTORV 1 KØPENHAMNK =

Sag 670/1
 Modtaget 16 SEP 1961
 Besvaret 16 SEP 1961

Telegrafstation
 Hovedtelegrafkontoret
 København
 Dato: 16 SEP 1961

SVENSKA ROMINSTITUTETS ARBETSUTSKOTT SAMMANTRÄTT IGAR MED
 PROFESSOR TENGBOM ADJUNGERAD STOP UTSKOTTET MYCKET POSITIVT
 INTRESSERAT FÖR DET AV EDER UPPGJORDA FÖRSLAGET OCH ANMODAT
 TENGBOM ATT I SAMRÅD MED BYGGNADSSTYRELSEN INKOMMA MED YTTRANDE
 OCH DETALJGRANSKNING RÖRANDE EVENTUELLA SVENSKA RUMMEN OCH
 KÄLLARUTRYMMEN DÄRUNDER ÄVEN SOM HANS ÅSIKT

(b)

TELEGRAM A67U FISKER PAGE 2/47 =

Telegrafstation
 Hovedtelegrafkontoret
 København
 Dato: 16 SEP 1961

OM SAMMANBYGGNADENS INVERKAN PÅ SVENSKA INSTITUTET UR
 ARKITEKTONISK SYNPUNKT STOP UTSKOTTET BEDER EDER VÄNLIGEN SÄNDA
 SNARAST RITNINGARNA TIL TENGBOM KUNGSTRÆDGARDSGATAN 10
 STOCKHOLM FÖR STUDIUM VARIGENOM UTSKOTTET COMMA SEDAN FÖRSLAG
 I KOMMIT FRÅN DANSKA INSTITUTET COMMA KAN SNARAST FATTA
 DEFINITIVT BESLUT = WETTER V. ORDFÖRANDE SKATTMÄSTARE KUNGL
 SLOTTET STOCKHOLM C +
 COL P-A67U 10 WETTER C +

Fig. 8. (a) Telegram from Erik Wetter to Kay Fisker. September 16th, 1961. B40_F4 recto. DIR. Copyright: Det Danske Institut i Rom. (b) Telegram from Erik Wetter to Kay Fisker. September 16th, 1961. B40_F4 verso. DIR. Copyright: Det Danske Institut i Rom.

Tengbom's conclusion returned to the King who "expressed gratitude for the report. He mentioned that, along with four others deeply invested in the institute, had studied it thoroughly and were notably impressed".⁴⁹ Tengbom then, in a lighthearted manner, teased Fisker while downplaying the significance of the Swedish-Danish transregional exchange:

The King seems to wish for me to inform you of this, though I trust you will not find it too concerning. At times, I've wondered if you might even be relieved to distance yourself from the persistent Swedes and their expansion. However, I refrain from making any predictions about the outcome.⁵⁰

Although the final decision rested with the Swedish Institute's board and, ultimately, the Swedish King, Fisker – and shortly after, Krarup – interpreted Tengbom's conclusion not as an invitation for further negotiation, but rather as the final word. The most shocking aspect for the Danish parties was the lack of alternatives and the absence of an opportunity to respond. On one side, Fisker, by his own admission, needed time to process such news and awaited Krarup's report about the "Queen's and the Swedish King's views".⁵¹ On the other, Krarup reached out to the Swedish parties informally to understand some of the behind the scenes. Once it was clear that no Italian authorities had opposed to the extension, it was worth understanding the position of the Swedish Institute, more crucially its first chief, Axel Boëthius

a very close friend of the King, [and] in reality, the driving force behind everything, even though he is no longer formally on the board [...] [was] a staunch opponent, which came as a great surprise since already last November [1960], [Krarup]

went with [Ejnar] Dyggve to show him the plans.⁵²

Krarup's informal investigation revealed that the concerns went beyond those expressed by Tengbom. The primary issue was "first and foremost (formal) since the Danish section of the site was significantly higher than the Swedish side, meaning the entire lower floor, with its office windows, would resemble a raised basement".⁵³ Once the situation became clear, Krarup wrote to both Fisker and Vøhtz in a letter filled with frustration and bitterness:

my clear feeling is that the Swedes will not [participate in the building operation] [...] I am further convinced of this by history: the once close Swedish – Danish cooperation in Rome during the 1920s and early 1930s was, quite unilaterally, terminated by the Swedish side and has often been omitted from Swedish historical accounts. If these negotiations end negatively, which I believe is likely unless the Queen can work miracles, it will be a personal defeat for me, as I have strongly advocated for these plans. [...] That this is a disappointment, I will not deny. I intend to speak quite openly with the Queen on this matter.⁵⁴

Krarup's conclusion was clear, urging Fisker to "begin as soon as possible a project for a purely Danish building, intended solely for our purposes".⁵⁵ He emphasized that the Danes would not plead for the joint building, stating: "I would much prefer strong cooperation across the divide than weak collaboration within a jointly constructed building".⁵⁶

With no ill feeling, the Danes must go on

As promised, Krarup handled the situation with composure and, two days later, he had an hour-long conversation with Queen

Ingrid who went to Palazzo Primoli specifically to discuss the situation before her father, the Swedish King, departed Rome. Krarup reported how

she was unaware of what Tengbom meant by 'negotiations with the [Italian] authorities' [and] strongly hinted that the concerns raised by the Swedish side, including the issue of the level difference – new also to her as it was not reflected in the drawings shown aboard the *Dannebrog* [by Fisker] – could likely be resolved. However, the decisive factor was Tengbom's opposition. And since the King was hesitant to go against Tengbom's wishes, the plan must be abandoned.⁵⁷

Krarup accepted the Queen's personal request not to "cry over this",⁵⁸ and acknowledged the Swedish King's concerns "about how the Danes would react now that he was forced to abandon his own idea of a Swedish-Danish architecture".⁵⁹ In response, Krarup assured the royals that the Danes would "undoubtedly take it without any ill feelings" and that a "good cooperation between the two institutes would continue, perhaps even better, when each had its own building".⁶⁰

With the withdrawal of royal support, the Swedish-Danish architectural project was abandoned and any transregional exchange frozen. Although the Danish Academy's board formally had to await official communication from its Swedish counterpart, "in reality, the matter must be considered settled".⁶¹ As a result, no further proposals were made by the Danish side, since it was more and more clear that "the real reason was that Tengbom's building could not be altered".⁶² Fisker's main reaction centered on a clarification he felt compelled to convey to the royals, as Tengbom's comments personally impugned his professional integrity.

Actually, it can also be argued that Fisker's reliance on an architectural tacit knowledge of how to interpret drawings may not have been familiar at all to his audience aboard the *Dannebrog*: "Tengbom's criticism on many points is based on misunderstandings. It is simply not true that the difference in terrain was not disclosed at the meeting on the royal yacht. The drawing presented was the same one sent later".⁶³ However, there was not time to discuss further. With the impending expiration of the Palazzo Primoli lease, any continued negotiations would have been a waste of time, as urged by Krarup to Fisker in a letter a few days later:

the Queen, with whom I have spoken several times since her visit, and who had also discussed our conversation with her father, believed – like Professor Hanell and myself, both of whom deeply invested in the joint building – that despite our strong interest in your proposal, it would be quite unrealistic to embark on prolonged negotiations over issues that are ultimately secondary to the reluctance of the leading Swedes to alter the (actual) Swedish Institute.⁶⁴

Waiting for a Swedish report, expected at the earliest in December, and entering negotiations might have meant that there would be no progress on the project until summer 1962. This is likely why, at the Danish Academy's board meeting on November 16th, it was agreed to inform the corresponding Swedish board of an immediate withdrawal of the offer for a joint solution. As the minutes state, "the proposal for building cooperation with the Swedes has been shelved".⁶⁵

At the end of the month, the Swedish Institute's board responded to the withdrawal of the shared Swedish-Danish proposal, sealing the failure of a joint architectural project.

Yet, they still expressed hope for a future Swedish-Danish transregional exchange “in a manner that may prove appropriate, particularly in the acquisition of new literature for the respective institutes’ libraries”.⁶⁶ The envisioned exchange, however, seemed more theoretical than practical.

Since Tengbom’s first veto, Fisker was urged by Krarup, the board, and even Queen Ingrid to design a standalone Danish Academy, especially because, while struggling with the Swedes, a donor was finally found: the Carlsberg Foundation, the *Carlsbergfondet*, which, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the philanthropic fund, offered enough funds to cover the entire cost of the building’s construction, including the time spent designing what ultimately became a failed project.⁶⁷ So, Fisker had to set aside any grievances and start from scratch. And that’s precisely what he did. Almost. Tengbom still deserved an answer, which arrived a week earlier than the Swedish Institute’s board response. Fisker wrote

I got the impression that you wish for your building not to be altered, which I understand and, of course, respect. [...] I don’t believe the new [Danish] project will be worse than the original [...] My only regret is that we wasted so much time on the first [Swedish-Danish] project. [...] In your letter, you mention that you have the impression I would prefer to avoid a combined solution. I’m not sure where this assumption comes from, but it’s not entirely accurate. I would have liked to see a collaboration on a shared building, but now we move forward on a different basis.⁶⁸

Proximity as a problem: basement, ventilation and moisture

One aspect that Tengbom could not avoid was the physical proximity – and the inevitable

formal comparison – between the Swedish Institute and the forthcoming Danish Academy. In his response to Fisker on January 8th, 1962, Tengbom mentioned that he had been tasked with designing a smaller extension to the Swedish Institute, expressing both his and the Swedish King’s hope for “future good cooperation between both Academies”,⁶⁹ including – without saying explicitly – in matters of parallel design and construction.

In this section of the article, it is worth examining three instances that underscore the challenges of transitioning from theoretical goodwill to practical collaboration on the parallel building sites. In each case, proximity became a source of persistent tension, stemming from the unresolved grievances surrounding the failure to realize a shared Swedish-Danish architectural project. The first instance involved a physical space that required negotiation and coordination – the last remnant of a Swedish-Danish architectural effort, the shared garage. The second and third instances, however, were triggered by perceived breaches of privacy: one at the level of sound, and the other at the level of professional expertise about moisture.

Regarding the first instance, the shared garage was seen as what was left of translating Swedish-Danish collaboration into architecture. Although it would have resulted in a secondary space that, beyond a common gate, would go unnoticed from the outside, it could have been a smart solution for cost-saving at the construction site. At the end of August 1962, Tengbom wrote to Fisker in a very friendly tone, asking him to modify the Danish project so that the Swedish-Danish garage could allow a joint driveway.⁷⁰ Fisker began negotiating with Tengbom, but two months later, his accommodating attitude



tella-13Bis040. DIR. Copyright: Det Danske Institut i Rom.

He confided to Krarup that:

garage area.⁷¹

(Fig. 9). To justify himself he wrote

ground (precisely sharing a wall with the

between the studios.⁷²

leave them unused, periodically renewing

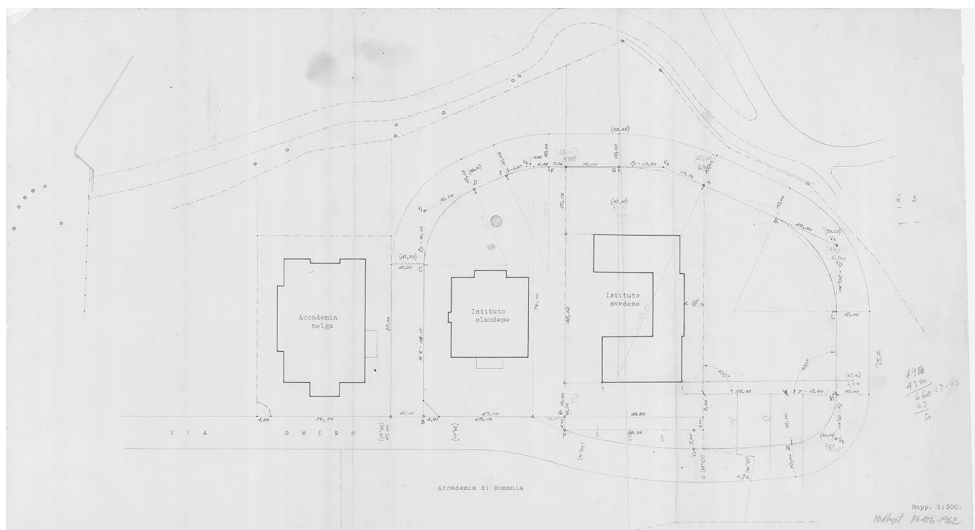


Fig. 10. The Italian proposal of an extension of Via Omero cutting all the national plots in Valle Giulia June 19th, 1962. Cartella-3009. DIR. Copyright: Det Danske Institut i Rom.

usage concessions to each nation. However, at that time, this decision by Italy was not yet known, and the board's minutes reflect the uncertainty of the situation:

There is a risk that that the municipality will tender part of the land for one or other purpose. Although it is not an acute problem, it can become unfortunate for the institute if part of the land is to be used. This can be prevented by the (Danish) Academy simply occupying the land, as the Swedes had done with a plot of land in the (south) backyard.⁷³

The second issue caused by the proximity was a complained-about noise from the Swedish fellows hosted in the Institute, generated by the three Danish ventilators located on the roof of Danish Academy. An issue emerged directly at the building site in May 1967.⁷⁴ The ventilators were installed as part of the – already troubled and problematic – installation of a Danish air conditioning

system, the *køleloft*, a top-down patent by the Danish company G.W. imposed by the Danish Academy's board to the Italian project manager, *direttori lavori*, Luciano Rubino. Unfortunately, in the archival collection there are no drawings related to the ventilation, so it is worth consulting one of G.W.'s many advertisements to learn more about it. What is at stake in understanding the Swedish complaints, exacerbated by the proximity, is well explained in some of the advertisement description. The ventilation center was in fact supposed to be located on the roof. Furthermore, as one of the advertisement claimed, the system's reliability was grounded in "a specially patented, silent and thoroughly tested system".⁷⁵ Silent, à propos, not noisy. Yet, the noise was too disruptive for the Swedish residents, whose windows faced the Danish machines, and it further strained the delicate Swedish-Danish relationship. The solution implemented by Krarup

was to simply turn off the ventilation systems “contrary to the hygiene standards of the Italian building regulations and the health office”⁷⁶ – a solution that infuriated Rubino who, in his official capacity, was legally responsible for ensuring compliance with Italian laws. According to Rubino, the ventilators could have been positioned where the heating system was indicated in the advertiser’s scheme: in the basement. This was primarily a matter of priorities and costs – how much the Danes should be concerned about the Swedish complaints, at least for the sake of maintaining peaceful relations, and who would bear the cost of an alternative solution. It was only after the Danish Academy’s inauguration that Svend Høgsbro – who had taken over following the passing of his partner Duelund Mortensen in 1967, just as Duelund Mortensen had stepped in for Fisker shortly before the topping-out ceremony in 1965 – suggested that G.W. “should bear all or part of the expenses”⁷⁷ related to noise issues, the new ceiling channels, and the associated asbestos insulation.

The third and final issue concerned the presence of moisture at the site. As early as spring 1960, Krarup had inquired about this matter with Filipetto, who responded that humidity had “never bothered the Swedish Institute”⁷⁸, even at that time, to prevent any potential issues, the Danish architect Mogens Koch, a board member, had traveled to Rome to inspect the terrain. However, three years later, it was the Swedish architect Börje Blomé, who was involved in the Swedish Institute’s building operation and who “was very unhappy with Tengbom’s drawings for the extension”,⁷⁹ who visited Krarup to inquire about the “level difference between the Danish and Swedish grounds”.⁸⁰ More importantly, Blomé emphasized the necessity of securing the Danish

Academy’s building against moisture based on his experience with the Swedish Institute. Blomé pointed out that it would be advisable to have “double walls with air space between, the *intercapedine*”⁸¹ particularly on the southern slope – a common, regulated solution in Rome. Lacking the professional expertise to address moisture issues himself, Krarup arranged a meeting with Rubino. Two years later, on July 25, 1965, Blomé received much greater exposure when the national Danish TV network, DR, interviewed him for a prime-time documentary titled “High Over the City of the Dolce Vita” (*Højt over byens søde liv*).⁸² The show, which provided a sneak peek of the Danish Academy’s building site from the roof of the neighboring Swedish Institute, featured Blomé delivering a harsh critique of the ongoing Danish construction – specifically regarding the management, the quality of the concrete work, and the moisture issues. In essence, Blomé conveyed to the Danish audience that the Danish parties in Rome were refusing to listen to and learn from their Swedish counterparts. About the concrete, Blomé commented:

They put gravel and sand directly into the mixer, and only God himself knows what kind of concrete mixture ends up at the Danish Academy building in Rome. This is criticism, and I want it to be perceived as such [...] There are two more conditions [...] that makes building in Rome a bit more complicated than in Copenhagen. One is the sun, and the other is the moisture. And of these, moisture is the most troublesome.⁸³

About the moisture, Blomé circled back to the Swedish Institute:

when it was built in 1939, they forgot, or neglected, to build what are called ventilation trenches, which are air gaps placed

at ground level around the building. This prevents the soil from coming into contact with the foundation walls, allowing for ventilation. After five years, in 1942–43, they were forced to build ventilation trenches [...] due to extremely severe moisture damage on the walls and ceiling in the basement areas.⁸⁴

It goes without saying that such content was destabilizing for all those involved in the construction, for mainly three reasons: (1) it was considered “friendly fire” since it was commissioned by a Danish network; (2) the opinions were one-sided, and there was no opportunity to respond to the Swedish criticism (and blame) with a Danish perspective; (3) lastly, timing was poor, precisely one month after the passing of Fisker and few weeks after the Danish topping-out ceremony. Probably for all these reasons, it generated an outrage, and its existence was completely forgotten, so much so that it is only by reading the minutes and correspondence in which it was addressed as an “insult [...] without the Foundation demanding further public clarification at DR or at least a nod of apology for the falsehoods transmitted”⁸⁵, a “deplorable broadcast”,⁸⁶ and a “rudeness towards the [Carlsberg] Foundation”⁸⁷ that it is possible to trace and view its content at the DR Archive.⁸⁸

As a result of his intervention as an expert on the Danish broadcast, Blomé was harshly criticized, likened to a *Cassandra*, and faced accusations that nearly sparked a diplomatic incident. It was deemed unacceptable that the Swedish Institute had allowed their building to be used for a sneak peek into the Danish construction site without consent. In response, he condemned the Danish Academy for its moisture issues, stating, “I hope that the technical issues can be resolved satisfactorily. But I believe it will be very

difficult. I also think you should prepare for possible complications”.⁸⁹ Since then, moisture in the basement of the Danish Academy has been an ongoing maintenance concern.

Conclusion: what it takes to build for the nation abroad

When Fisker had to inform Krarup once again about Tengbom’s reluctance to design a shared garage, he provided a vivid description of the Swedish Institute: a building “to be seen from a distance behind the upward-sloping, open lawn, which Tengbom will not even agree to plant with any shrubbery”.⁹⁰ In the same letter, addressing the difference in elevation between the new Swedish garage and the Danish Academy, he proposed a pragmatic solution: “a staircase [that] breaks into three parts will seem quite monumental and in some respects more beautiful, or at least no less beautiful than the previous solution”.⁹¹

The monumentality of architecture and its representational role in diplomatic contexts serve as the underlying opposition that catalyzed the architectural failure described in this article. The challenges, frictions, and negotiations surrounding the formation of a Swedish-Danish transregional exchange can be interpreted as symptoms of this conflict. On one hand, Tengbom pursued a form that could not be altered, while Fisker employed form as a strategy to address immediate contextualization issues, valuing monumentality only once it has been achieved. These differing perspectives, as anticipated in the introduction, reflect fundamentally contrasting views on how architecture should respond to diplomatic tasks. In both buildings, architecture undeniably functions as a medium for conveying and staging messages of national identity and power. Ultimately, the Swedish-

Danish transregional exchange faltered because the messages, timing, and context had changed. While the location remained Rome, the experience of building in the 1930s under a dictatorship was vastly different from constructing in the 1960s under a democracy, despite the legal frameworks being consistent. In both cases, architecture played a significant role as a vehicle for diplomacy, transcending its official cultural purpose. From conception to integration into the built environment, it operationalized fundamental diplomatic principles, influencing the decisions and behaviors of Italian, Swedish, and Danish governments and peoples through dialogue and negotiation.

Based on the evidence presented in this article, it can be argued that Fisker placed significant emphasis on the destructiveness of Tengbom's rejection, particularly because it was made without any accompanying design proposal or any attempt at negotiation. This omission may have been perceived as disrespectful to the intrinsic value of Fisker's own work. Fisker contended that Tengbom's actions resulted in a missed opportunity for professional collaboration between their respective practices, and what this article has introduced as a missed opportunity pertaining to the proposal of a new architectural solution to the challenge of building for the nation abroad – one that could have embodied the Swedish-Danish transregional exchange and identities within a unified architectural project.

Consequently, Tengbom's individualistic and highly authorial stance – manifested in his desire to preserve his own oeuvre untouched – led to what this article argues was a significant lost opportunity to introduce an innovative typology at a regional scale, rather than merely perpetuating the national

focus of other buildings in Valle Giulia. Thus, the main consequences of this shared architectural failure were the outcomes themselves: two institutes that became material representations of the permanent missions of Sweden and Denmark within the borders of Italy, directly participating in diplomatic negotiations as integral parts of the physical representation of their sending states.

As a final remark, it is important to revisit the figure of Rubino, who was first introduced to Krarup at the end of 1960 by Fisker as a “young Italian architect who is married to a Danish lady, and who I have thought could be a mediator in relation to authorities and other bodies, as some planning and construction work makes it necessary”.⁹² Rubino joined for the first time an official meeting when Duelund Mortensen came to Rome to introduce the first Swedish-Danish sketches in April 1961.⁹³

Despite becoming one of the most overlooked figures in relation to his contributions to the Danish Academy,⁹⁴ he emerged as a pivotal actor in the Swedish-Danish transregional exchange in the years that followed, collaborating on building projects with both Danish (1960–69) and Swedish (1964) parties. The board of the Swedish Institute appointed Rubino to the same role that the Danish board had previously assigned him, naming him project manager, or *direttore lavori*, for the extension of the Swedish Institute. Thus, while the Swedish-Danish architectural collaboration ultimately failed, both building boards relied on the same Italian manager for local expertise and know-how. A comparative study of the two transnational modes of architectural production – specifically how Swedish and Italian building techniques, materials, and labor were negotiated in contrast to their Danish counterparts –

would be an intriguing avenue for further exploration in future research.

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82. *Højt over byens søde liv. Skandinavernes kulturelle aktivitet i Rom i dag*. Director: Georg Nielsen. Sound: John Madsen. Organisation: Vagn Grosen, July 25, 1965 h 20:00 – 20:32. DR.
83. Börje Blomé. July 25, 1965. *Højt over byens søde liv*. DR.
84. Ibid.
85. Luciano Rubino. Recipient: Carlsbergfondet, October 19, 1966. Box 1 – Byggesag 1966–67 – Folder Green. DIR.
86. Bestyrelsen byggeudvalg. “Referat 14. møde i byggeudvalget”, August 17, 1965. Box 1 – Byggesag 1966–67 – Folder Brown. DIR.
87. Ibid.
88. The show is today publicly accessible – thanks to the author’s research – within Det Kgl. Biblioteks Digital Collection at: <https://hdl.handle.net/109.3.1/uuid:4c6fd3-9d25-4ef7-baa3-778ace87a99b> (accessed September 2024).
89. Börje Blomé. July 25, 1965. *Højt over byens søde liv*. DR.
90. Kay Fisker. Recipient: Per Krarup, October 17, 1962. B40-F6 (*RL). DIR.
91. Ibid.
92. Kay Fisker. Recipient: Per Krarup, December 14, 1960. B40-F2 (*RL). DIR.
93. Notater fra samtaler og møder ved Robert Duelund Mortensen i Rom, April 14, 1961. B40-F3 (*RL). DIR.
94. Angela Gigliotti, “Built to Vanish: When Landscape Made Architecture and Authorship Disappear”, *Studies in History and Theory of Architecture*, No. 12, 2024, pp. 173–192.

Summary

In 1960, before funds were even secured to build a Danish Academy in Rome, the Swedish King Gustaf VI Adolf and his daughter, Queen Ingrid, Swedish by birth but Danish by marriage, expressed the desire to have the Swedish and Danish cultural legations under the same roof. Despite the idea of solidifying transregional exchanges, networks, and connections between the two neighboring Nordic countries after

tumultuous centuries was promising, it never came to fruition. On the contrary, the buildings’ proximity, has caused several crises, particularly during the Danish Academy’s construction, thirty years after the Swedish one. This article critically explores the building construction of the Danish Academy as a significant case study, addressing it as a missed opportunity to materialize Swedish-Danish exchanges. Rather than determining for whom the construction constituted a missed opportunity – whether from a Swedish or Danish partisan perspective – it seeks to examine it through a transcultural lens, grounded in diplomatic architecture and informed by previously overlooked Danish archival sources, while maintaining a *super partes* positionality. It builds on the author’s compilation of the *Byggesager Dossier*, an archival sub-collection at the Danish Academy Archive about building operations, aimed at shedding light on the genesis of the building documented therein. By delving into the struggles, negotiations, frictions, and limitations of constructing a Swedish-Danish transregional architecture, the article demonstrates how the discontinuation of the transregional collaboration for the construction can be traced back to a deep opposition regarding the representational role of architecture in a diplomatic context.

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