TEMPORAL REMOVABLE AND SUSTAINABLE DISAPPEARED ARCHITECTURES. THE SEA BATHS OF THE SPANISH LEVANTE

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ABSTRACT
The latter third of the 19th Century was the golden age of balneotherapy on the Iberian Peninsula. Sea or wave baths along the Spanish coastline, which have now disappeared and are unknown in the current architectural panorama, are captured on a plethora of postcards and advertising posters that used photography, which was fully developed throughout Spain, as a means of promoting the culture of bathing.

Through photography we are now able to see what these absent structures looked like, and to understand the esthetic values of the day, the types of baths that existed, the materiality of the architecture and its structures, and even their temporality.

Keywords: Sea baths; temporal architectures; Pier; Alicante; Postiguet beach.

INTRODUCTION
Fear of the sea as an unsafe and unknown space, and revulsion at the putrid oozing of the sea shore or the accumulation of waste that washed up on the beaches with the waves, were two predominant sensations practically up until the end of the 18th Century.

At this point, the Romantic Movement began offering an apologia for travel and staying in environments far away from the bourgeois city. This new appraisal of the estimation of coastal spaces generated favorable considerations of this new landscape. Literature [1] and photography created demand for this new bathing custom and the architecture that framed it. According to Lacort [2], people understood that travel, seeing new landscapes, breathing in the clean air of the countryside or the mountains, and even fun and entertainment were good for the health.

Literature praised the mildness and uniformity of ocean temperatures, the differences in atmospheric pressure, the breezes and winds as purifying elements conducive to oxygenation, and abundant sunshine. Later on, it contributed to the development of heliotherapy or sunbathing in relation to health problems such as rickets.

Photography, in turn, bore witness to the existence of a new landscape by transforming it into postcards; it selected picturesque framings with just the right light, whilst making it commercial by turning it onto a consumer product [3]. During this period photography was fully developed throughout Spain [4] and was one of the most widely-used media for promoting the practice of bathing. The appearance of the
postcard in the mid 19th Century provided an excellent means of communicating and promoting the culture of bathing [5].

The latter third of the 19th Century was the golden age of balneotherapy on the Iberian Peninsula. All national baths were vying for ultimate prestige, printing up advertising posters and constantly taking out advertisements in the press of the time [6].

What people were looking for in these establishments, as well as improving health, was a place where they could forget their problems and get away from their routine of daily living. There were cafés, theaters and casinos in these bathing resorts, something that was common in thermal bathing resorts and sea baths.

Interest in the phenomenon of the spa bath, according to Carmen Gil de Arriba, was due to its relationship with different processes of transformation and change: from processes related strictly with the scientific conception of medicine to those linked to the beginnings of modern leisure practices and the historical concept of spending the summer elsewhere [7].

Juan Antonio Rodríguez Sánchez describes how the rise of the bourgeoisie made a decisive contribution to Spanish bathing resorts of the 19th Century filling with the “well-off” informed [8] (Figure 01).

Figure 1. Alhambra’s sea bath entry. Municipal Archives of Alicante. Postcards collection.

Ultimately, it was a way of separating work and leisure spaces and, therefore, of class differentiation. The bourgeoisie sought places far from industrial cities, bringing them into contact with nature and the remedies it provided, imitating the customs of the aristocracy and clergy in the ancien régime. As a consequence, areas of public domain coastline were appropriated, which had previously been places for fishing or smuggling.
1. BATHING RITUALS

The sea baths had a traditional ritual, which generally began from a specific date, 16th July, at the Feast of the Virgin Carmen.

The healing properties of this ritual came in nine doses (nine baths, nine being the number of power, mystery and wisdom) which were recommended once or twice each season.

Later, for economic reasons, the date was brought forward to 24th June, in aquatic dedication to San Juan Bautista. In Alicante the ritual started earlier, specifically the Thursday of Corpus, when the bells of St. Nicholas rang and the people chanted \textit{poseu els banys... poseu els banys... (To the baths... to the baths...)} [9].

At the beginning of the century Dr. Corral y Maire proposed a series of practical rules for the baths:

\[\ldots\text{sanitize the body applying mud, wait at least three hours after your last meal before bathing, start bathing with a quick and total immersion covering your head entirely to avoid any blockages, avoid using hats and caps, do not spend more than 15 minutes in the bath, after which dry your body and dress quickly, your feet should be warmed in the footbath if they become cold.}\]

\[\text{Under medical prescription: sea bathing should be prescribed and carried out just like a prescription from a pharmacy.}\]

\[\text{The sea baths are suitable for anemia, scrofula, atopic phase tuberculosis, rheumatism (chronic), etc., because the length of time spent in the baths helps to soothe (clean and sanitize for 15 minutes: apply skin lotion for 2-6 minutes and leave to soothe for 15 to 20 minutes). These timings and frequencies are to be followed from 16 July to 15 August (from one Feast of the Virgin to another)}\] [10].

2. SOCIAL SPAS. ARCHITECTURE AND LEISURE

The creation of seaside baths along the Spanish coastline for enjoyment among the affluent began to generate a new tourist landscape. The bourgeoisie class mainly frequented spas and authors like Galdós, Pardo Bazán or Valera portrayed this practice very accurately. However, entrance statistics, and other patient records, show that military personnel, guards, and the poor also attended these therapeutic establishments. This is proven by Letters from the Provincial Commission paying thanks to Diana, a spa owner, who for years treated refugees in her establishment for free [11].

The lower classes were relegated to the less pleasant and accessible points of the beaches because of their inability to afford the entrance fees of the spa, however, according to Alvarez Oblanca, a very large number of poorer people came to these spas and stayed in the homes of those in neighbouring towns who rented out their homes for the bathing season.
... which meant, for the first time, these classes could enjoy leisure and free time, in what we now call a holiday [12].

What was sought in these establishments, as well as improving health, was a place to forget about life’s problems and get away from the routine of daily life. There were cafes, theaters and casinos within the complex of baths, which were in both the thermal spas and seaside baths. Thus, what had emerged as an activity for therapeutic purposes became a form of leisure, becoming:

...the first [...] of these establishments where relaxation was combined with hotel and catering amenities [13].

The bourgeoisie found bathing resorts to be a way of showing off their prosperous economic and social situation, and these resorts became the perfect showcase, just like the first piers built on Brighton beach in the Victorian age. Therefore, it is not surprising that the functions required of such facilities were in the same condition in far-flung regions and were clearly identifiable.

All the places and themes could be represented on the front of postcards [14], facilitating knowledge of the landscapes, fashions, tastes and popular customs of a specific time [15]. This new document would become an element of study for historians, artists, researchers, travelers and even sociologists. The postcard ceased to be merely a medium for correspondence and came to be seen as a document insofar as it contained information reflected on a legible and intelligible medium; an artistic document, with illustrations and etchings that capture landscapes, cities, monuments; a historical document, which faithfully reflected scenes, uses and customs [16].

The photography of the age collected on postcards, and the descriptions of the chroniclers allow us to get closer now to the disappeared architecture of the bathing resorts and baths of yesterday. Both documents, together with the limited archive graphic documentation, enable us to understand this type of construction.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RAILWAY

The development of this form of leisure is largely due to the rise of transportation. Improved communications allowed travel to coastal areas of Spain.

Monarchal visits positively influenced travel to these places and a great number of people visited. For princes are the glass, the school, the book, where subjects’ eyes do learn, do read, do look. (William Shakespeare)

In 1852 King D. Francis of Assisi and Bourbon, husband of Queen Isabel II visited to inaugurate the Santander-Alar Railway and in 1861 the Queen herself frequented the baths on the Sardinero beach. Queen Isabel II visited Alicante and officially inaugurated the railway from Madrid to Alicante on 25th May 1858 and also visited Murcia in 1862 to inaugurate the route between Murcia and Madrid, which in 1884 would extend to Águilas. Similarly, Alfonso XIII visited Alicante on 14th April 1911 and on 20th March 1923 visited the port of Cartagena and then later visiting Los Alcázares: all destinations along the spa coastline.

The Railway and Sea Baths were two modern concepts and, to some extent, interdependent. The railroad was the image of progress, speed, accuracy and mobility: a
new way of travelling to unknown destinations. Sea bathing was synonymous with health, hygiene, sports, leisure and social relationships. Both aspects captivated the image of a modern man; the railway provided a quick and direct route to a new destination: the coast.

In 1893 the Madrid-Alicante tourist train el tren botijo (the excursion train) opened. This was a low cost train, which took 14 hours and included a twelve-day stay at a reasonable price. It ran until 1917, with some 30,000 travelers per year, which began Spain’s coastal tourism. From Alicante, this train cost a very competitive 20 pesetas for second class and 12 pesetas for third class for a return journey.

The offers were extended from the day of departure to the day of return, which meant one could stay between ten or twelve days during the months of July and September.

4. REGULATIONS FOR BATHING

On 22nd July 1838, a document signed by Mayor Miguel Pascual Roca Bonanza was introduced calling for proper order and decency during the bathing season and three warnings were to be observed [17].

The century passed but there were still strict morals in force and in 1859 Mayor Lorenzo Berducq extended rules and prohibitions by means of another decree. Bathing at night was allowed but only in Postiguet with appropriate separation between women and men. He also prohibited bathing at any time without being appropriately and decently dressed in blouses, trousers or other clothes.

Moreover, spas owners were to ensure strict separation of the sexes’ changing rooms, and not to allow mixing in the baths even by married couples. Because of the heat, minors were not allowed in these areas. Horses were allowed to enter the water during the day in the area between the entrance to Postiguet beach up to the first drinking fountain.

However, as in other cases, the owners went against the rules and, in 1861, another municipal bath admitted daytime bathing at Playa del Postiguet beach up to the Chapel of Socorro and in Babel from the Palm stonework in front. Married couples were allowed to bathe together but at a separate part away from the ladies-only area.

5. PROCEDURE TO OPEN A SPA

1st- Apply to the council, with documented plans (maps, sketches or drawings of the spa to be built). From the documentation found in the municipal archives you can see that for individual family only spas a sketch of it was needed. However, social and group spas were required to present specific plans which showed how they would carry out the plans.

2nd- The Municipality transferred plans to the appropriate Marina Assistant.

3rd- The Marina Assistant gave the go-ahead, in accordance with Article 41 of the Coastal Act of 1880, and then sent back to the council.
4th - Having considered the Marina Assistant’s report, the Mayor granted permission under powers through the Act of 3rd August 1866, Article 19, and provided information to the public.

5th - Notice to proceed was given to the Local Government and the applicant.

6. THE BATHS AT EL POSTIGUET BEACH IN ALICANTE. HISTORICAL NOTE

In the 19th Century, a sea bathing establishment or resort was a wooden construction, generally two stories high, located by the sea shore. On the lower ground there were boxes where you could bath in sea water. The Municipal Archives of Alicante, Murcia, and other coastal towns, as well as the Murcia Costal Demarcation, house documents from the 19th and 20th centuries that testify to the extended use of the terms sea baths or resorts to refer to the forerunners of today’s thalassotherapy centers, the sea baths of the 21st Century.

The first document about the installation of sea bathing resorts on the coast of Alicante and Murcia dates back to 1834, dealing specifically with the wooden sea baths owned by Miguel Pascual de Bonanza [18], located by the pier opposite the then market, now Casa Carbonell.

Alicante pioneered the establishment of sea baths, before cities such as Asturias, Santander and San Sebastián.

In Asturias, they did not appear until 1874 [19]; in Santander until 1868, when the sons of Mayor Juan Pombo built the first bathing house in El Sardinero, although in 1864 there was a project for the beach at El Camello. There are also no documents of earlier sea bathing resorts from other cities along the coastline where bathing establishments were common, such as La Coruña, Vigo, Palamós, Arenys de mar, Valencia, Murcia, Almeria and Malaga.

In 1858, since the port area was being renovated, the location of the baths was moved to the El Postiguet beach, with one of the first sea bathing resorts belonging to Juan Simó. Further resorts then sprung up, taking the total to twelve, with similar characteristics, called La Alianza, Diana, Las Delicias, Neptuno, La Florida, La Estrella, El Madrileño, El Águila, Playa del Postiguet, El Almirante, Ferrándis and Guillermo, all originally intended to be temporary (the temporary sea baths were dismounted at the end of the swimming season, to re-install the following year. They were therefore ephemeral constructions). Subsequently, La Esperanza, previously known as the Baños de Juan Simó, along with La Alianza and Diana became permanent, and a further nine temporary sea bathing resorts were erected during bathing season. The ‘aerial’ photograph of the beach at El Postiguet beach taken from Alicante castle during the summer season provides evidence of this temporary situation when compared to the photograph taken in winter, when such establishments can no longer be seen (Figure 2).
Today we can still access descriptions, photographs, postcards and the occasional unpublished map. The chronicler Figueras Pacheco, talking about Alicante, offers a description of these bathing establishments:

The right of the boulevard, walking west to east, is limited by a broad sidewalk that separates it from the beach and acts as a seawall. All along this line, in the form of narrow reinforced bridges mounted on iron or wooden columns, which safeguard the first part from seaweed and sand from the beach, we find the entrance to the bathing establishments which, mounted on wooden struts or iron columns, enter the sea, at quite a distance, to allow for the insignificant wave movement of the waters. Our bathing establishments offer a uniquely airy construction, with the sea as their subsoil, where long and elegant salons stretch out, made up of two rows of comfortable huts, surrounded by galleries on the outside, in the manner of balconies over the waves. A short staircase of eight or ten steps leads from inside each box down to the water, allowing bathers to lower themselves into the sea with the least disturbance. The comfort and elegance of these bathing establishments depend on their category; there are some that are truly worth visiting, for the beauty of their construction and the distractions with which the proprietors seek to make the bathers' stay more pleasant [20].

This description from Figueras Pacheco transports us back to the age of these sea bathing resorts, when bathing was a hygienic ritual with medicinal value, but one which would gradually become an increasingly less decorous practice, more closely linked to tourist activity than medicinal purposes.
The first historical photographs of the sea baths at \textit{El Postiguet} date back to the early 20th Century and provide a faithful depiction of the previous description. It was at this time that the pioneering printing company Hauser y Menet was printing over half a million postcards a month, particularly of cities considered to be tourist destinations. Tourism was the main driving force behind the postcard industry, based chiefly on photomechanical printing by means of the procedure known as \textit{phototyping} or \textit{photocolography}. The peculiar feature of this technique was the reproduction of photographs with great sharpness of definition and chromatic range, which was applied to the reproduction of vistas of cities and monuments [21]. Hence, we find copies of this phototype in Alicante, on reproductions of the Postiguet sea baths (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Alicante sea baths. Hauser and Menet. Gabriel Miró Publish Library. Postcards collection.](image)

7. PHYSIOGNOMY OF THE WAVE BATH

Photography of bathing establishments reflected their wooden construction projected out over the sea, with lounges for the bourgeoisie on the upper floor and individuals bathing boxes on the lower floor with steps down into the sea (Figure 4).

In the words of Berger [22] the first photographs can be considered a prodigy. In a much more direct way than any other visual image, they presented the appearance of what was absent; they conserved the aspect of things and allowed that aspect to be transported. Transferred to this case study, photography of the architecture of sea bathing establishments shows to the outside world the aesthetic values of the time [23]. Thanks to photography, we are able to perfectly describe the typology of these baths and their combined elements, obeying very simple designs, with a certain tendency towards
symmetry, usually finished in wood painted in bright colors, providing a typical picture of these facilities:

1. The entrance, in the manner of a bridge set on pillars, which protected the first part from seaweed and sand, between the beach and the bathing establishment itself. This bridge went a fair way out into the sea because of the scarce importance of the movement of the water (Figure 5).

2. The platform, which was usually rectangular, with a central lounge area that received light from the front and through skylights. The outside was surrounded by galleries and corridors, in the manner of balconies (Fig. 6).

3. Inside the bathing establishment there were large lounges and rows of bathing boxes, each containing between eight and ten steps leading down into the sea water.

Figure 4. The folk working-class was observed by Middle class people situated on the top of Alicante's sea baths. Municipal Archives of Alicante. Postcards collection.

They were built on wooden pilings or iron columns. The wooden pilings or stanchions were a fundamental part of the structure of the installation, raising the walkway and the main platform above sea level.

...on wooden pilings that are driven down into the sand until they butt up against the rock, set at a distance of 2.30 meters on the side of the huts, and 1.70 meters on the side of the waiting rooms, where they needed to be more resistant owing to the greater numbers of people, forming saltires that give the construction the required solidity [24].

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The main element was the bathing box, with a staircase that allowed bathers to lower themselves down into the sea, protecting them from being seen by others, since the space between the platform and the water was closed in with rush matting.

In general, there was no clear distinction between interior and exterior spaces (with the exception of the bathing boxes), since these constructions built over water linked their spaces through fretwork rails, open shelters and stairways, elements that did not provide a completely effective barrier.

This was all part of the purpose of showcasing; this projected architecture was not to be lived in; rather they were areas of transition, in the fullest sense of the word; they were the link between firm land and the sea, between the air and light that invaded them, and the water that bathed them.

But photography not only offers us a romantic vision of these constructions; it also conveys to us an entire process of systematized execution. The system of construction can be divided into permanent and removable structures. This removable character and the simplicity of assembly were achieved precisely through the precarious concession conceded by the authorities in the maritime-land zone.

Ultimately, as we have seen here, the chronicles describe the sequence of spaces lived in through the journey of this architecture. The few plans that exist provide merely their location, scale and layout of spaces. But only photography provides the tool for preserving a now disappeared architecture, with only the Sea Bathing Resort of San Antonio on the Mar Menor Coast in the Region of Valencia left to bear witness.
REFERENCES

[1] Ventura de Bustos y Angulo. Baños de río, caseros y de mar; previniendo en los casos comunes los excesos sin consulta, nuevo medio para criar niños hermosos, sanos y robustos, 1816.

Monlau, P.F. Higiene de los baños de mar, ó instrucciones para su uso puramente higiénico, así como para el terapéutico ó curativo en las muchas enfermedades contra las cuales tiene probada eficacia y manual práctico del bañista, 1869.


[17] Municipal Archives of Alicante. Correspondence 1838 Leg. 26 number 58 about the implementation of the order for this bathing season.


