

Summary Report of the Study Tour in Norway

Trondheim and Ålesund—Humanistic Landscapes and Reflections

1 Humanistic Landscapes of Trondheim

1.1 Overview

Trondheim's humanistic landscapes center on Nidaros Cathedral and extend along the red wooden-structured streets of its old town, blending medieval religious heritage with Nordic practical wisdom into a cohesive system.

1.2 Style Analysis

1.2.1 Nidaros Cathedral

Built from light gray granite—chosen for its resistance to Norway's cold, snowy climate—the cathedral fuses 11th-century Romanesque (thick, sturdy walls) and 13–16th-century Gothic (pointed arches, ribbed vaults) styles. Three spires (the tallest reaching 102 meters) on the west facade enhance a sense of "spiritual ascent." Decorative details include biblical carvings on the spires, 19th-century red-blue stained glass that casts a "divine glow" inside, and a 17th-century silver altar depicting King Olav II's martyrdom—linking religious authority to royal power.

1.2.2 Old Town Wooden Structures

Most are 2–3-story buildings with "Trondheim Red" exteriors (a mix of iron oxide and linseed oil for corrosion resistance) and dark gray slate roofs (designed to withstand heavy snow). Following Nordic "function-first" principles, they have simple white wooden doors and windows, with small balconies featuring only basic geometric carvings. Wood was prioritized for its insulation and short construction time, critical for rebuilding after a 17th-century fire.

1.3 Humanistic Significance

As Norway's Christian birthplace, the cathedral hosts the annual "Nidaros Pilgrimage Festival," keeping medieval faith traditions alive. The old town's wooden buildings witness Northern Europe's shift from the Viking Age to industrialization, their red facades becoming a "memory symbol" of Trondheim amid modernization.

2 Humanistic Landscapes of Ålesund

2.1 Overview

Ålesund's landscapes revolve around its Art Nouveau architectural complex, linked to Aksla Viewpoint and Fjord Fishing Museum—a three-part system that captures the city's "rebirth from ashes" and deep connection to fjords.

2.2 Style Analysis

2.2.1 Art Nouveau Complex

Rebuilt after the 1904 fire, buildings feature white stucco walls (to reflect Nordic sunlight). Ålesund City Hall has "wave + poppy" carvings (poppies are local wildflowers, waves echo fjords), slender arches, brass vine window motifs, and twisted iron railings resembling seaweed. Hotel Brosundet—converted from a 19th-century warehouse—retains dark brown industrial masonry but adds Art Nouveau wooden windows (carved with blueberry branches and salmon, referencing local produce). Interiors, such as the city hall's "fishermen at sea" murals and fish-scale floor tiles, reinforce nature-human harmony.

2.2.2 Aksla Viewpoint & Fjord Fishing Museum

The viewpoint unites Art Nouveau buildings with fjord landscapes, framing the city as an organic part of nature. The museum preserves maritime heritage through 19th-century fishing boat models and tools, complementing the natural motifs of Art Nouveau.

2.3 Humanistic Significance

Art Nouveau buildings symbolize Ålesund's resilience: white walls stand for "fresh starts," while natural decor represents coexistence with fjords. The viewpoint reflects Nordic "human-nature equality"—a contrast to traditional Chinese landscape design that emphasizes "human conquest of nature." The museum prevents the loss of maritime culture amid industrialization.

3 Sino-Norwegian Architecture Comparison

Differences between Chinese and Norwegian architecture stem from distinct natural environments, cultural traditions, and social needs rather than style superiority.

3.1 Core Materials

In terms of core materials, Norwegian buildings (in Trondheim and Ålesund) rely on stone, wood, and masonry: stone (like the granite of Nidaros Cathedral) resists cold

and weathering, wood (used in Trondheim's old town) provides insulation, and masonry (in Ålesund's reconstructed buildings) balances durability with industrial charm—all prioritizing cold and snow resistance. Traditional Chinese architecture, by contrast, uses wood, bricks, tiles, and rammed earth: wood enables flexible mortise-and-tenon joinery for beams and columns, while bricks, tiles, and rammed earth are easy to source from agricultural resources, focusing on adaptability to temperate monsoons and earthquake resistance.

3.2 Structural Logic

In structural logic, Norwegian architecture emphasizes verticality and exposed structures—Gothic spires in Trondheim and Art Nouveau ironwork in Ålesund evoke spiritual or natural transcendence, with structural elements like ribbed vaults left visible to highlight functional aesthetics. Traditional Chinese architecture, however, centers on horizontal expansion and hidden structures: the Forbidden City's central axis and Jiangnan courtyards reflect ritual order and "harmony between humans and nature," with key structures like dougong (bracket sets) concealed under roofs, and gentle curved exteriors softening lines to emphasize elegance.

3.3 Decor Themes

For decorative themes, Norwegian designs focus on religious symbols and natural motifs—biblical carvings in cathedrals convey religious authority, while waves or seaweed in Ålesund express harmony with nature, using decor to "materialize ideas." Traditional Chinese decorations feature auspicious patterns (dragons, phoenixes in the Forbidden City) and ethical inscriptions (e.g., "Farming and Studying to Sustain the Family" in Jiangnan residences), using decor to "transmit culture and values."

3.4 Function

In functional orientation, Norwegian architecture puts function before form: religious buildings like Nidaros Cathedral are designed for collective pilgrimage, while residences prioritize individual warmth with compact layouts and insulating materials. Traditional Chinese architecture, by contrast, uses form to serve social ethics: ritual buildings like the Forbidden City use "outer court-inner court" layouts to reflect imperial hierarchy, and quadrangle residences foster family unity—with architecture mirroring social order.

4 Study Tour Significance

4.1 Cognitive Shift

I learned "humanistic landscapes" are integrated systems (e.g., Trondheim's cathedral paired with pilgrimage trails) rather than isolated landmarks, with their value rooted in historical and cultural narratives.

4.2 Practical Lesson

Norwegian design's focus on "regional adaptation"—such as Trondheim's red paint (both anti-rot and identity-defining) and Ålesund's natural motifs (honoring fjord culture)—contrasts with homogenized architecture in some Chinese cities. Future design must align with local climate, resources, and culture.

4.3 Cultural Respect

Architectural differences (e.g., Norway's verticality vs. China's horizontality) reflect distinct contexts, with no "better" style. This perspective fosters cross-cultural dialogue in a globalized world.

4.4 Personal Growth

I moved from passive observation to critical thinking—for example, linking Nidaros Cathedral's design to religious beliefs, or Ålesund's reconstruction to urban spirit. This skill will guide my future academic and professional work.

5 Conclusion

In short, Trondheim and Ålesund's landscapes deepened my understanding of Nordic architecture, refined my design approach, and built an inclusive worldview, laying a solid foundation for future endeavors.