

INTRODUCTION. WOMEN ARCHITECTS INFORMING FROM THE OUTSIDE: DISTANCES AND DIFFERENCES

INTRODUCCIÓN. LAS ARQUITECTAS Y SUS CONTRIBUCIONES DESDE LOS MÁRGENES: DISTANCIAS Y DIFERENCIAS

Author / Autor:

José Parra-Martínez
Universidad de Alicante, Spain
jose.parra@ua.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0142-0608>

To cite this article / Para citar este artículo:

Parra-Martínez, J. (2024). Introduction. Women Architects Informing from the Outside: Distances and Differences. *Feminismo/s*, 44, 11-24. <https://doi.org/10.14198/fem.2024.44.01>

Licence / Licencia:

Este trabajo se comparte bajo la licencia de Atribución-NoComercial-CompartirIgual 4.0 Internacional de Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0): <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.



© 2024 José Parra-Martínez

JOSÉ PARRA-MARTÍNEZ

Resulting from the research project «A Situated View: Women's Architecture in Spain from Peripheral Approaches, 1978-2008»¹, funded by the Valencia Regional Government (AICO/2021/163) and based at the University of Alicante Institute of Gender Studies Research (IUIEG), this special issue is the third monograph that *Feminismo/s* devotes to studying the fields of architecture and urbanism from gender-based perspectives.

The two previous issues of the journal, numbers 17 and 32, both coordinated by María Elia Gutiérrez-Mozo—the principal investigator of the abovementioned project—represented substantial advancements in this subject matter within the Spanish context of the past

1. The objectives of the project and its main research and transfer results are available at <https://navegandoarquitecturasdemujer.ua.es/>

decade. The first, from 2011, prepared and published during the most difficult years of the 2008 global crisis that brought a major upheaval to the architecture profession, summarised the state of the art, becoming a true reference for later analysis. The second, from 2018, appearing at a time of relative economic recovery, which allowed a more ecological approach before subsequent crises—health, post pandemic inflation, war, among others—ended it, was dedicated to «Women, Architecture, and Sustainability: Environmental, Economic, and Social». This issue reflected the incorporation of new sensitivities and concepts, intrinsically linked to gender approaches to architecture and the city, delineating new sociopolitical landscapes and pointing towards new horizons of increasing complexity, interdisciplinary collaboration and cross-cutting challenges. With a temporal span similar to the two preceding issues, this new monograph emerges amidst a new overlay of geopolitical tensions and an unpredictable crisis of political credibility undermining democracies themselves and jeopardizing the freedoms and rights attained.

Looking back almost half a century and focusing on the exciting decades that followed the Spanish transition (1978-82)—certainly a much more optimistic period in the country's recent history, where everything still seemed possible—this monograph aims to delve deeper into the plurality and singularity of women's involvement in the architectural culture of the new democratic era. It explores how women, through apparently ancillary and often disregarded practices and places, played a pivotal role in shifting the architectural paradigm of Spain, with feminism being one of the most significant driving forces for change.

The purpose of this issue, as well as the research project that justifies and conceptually frames it, is to contribute to expanding the knowledge of the architecture and culture produced by women in the first generation of democracy, a time marked by their slow but unstoppable inclusion into a full range of practices and project scales, from landscape and urban planning to interior design, new construction to heritage intervention, as well as publishing, curating, university teaching and research, and public service. Compared to the years of Franco's dictatorship, during which a tiny group of women pioneers paved the way tirelessly and alone, the period from 1978 to 2008 generates enough critical mass to understand the true scope of the

legacy of women architects. The epoch, marked by historical milestones, legislative advances, social achievements, and the development of a new political order in line with the European context enables us to unravel in all its complexity the progressive consolidation of female trajectories in the Spanish architectural scene. We can also relate their emergence to the processes of decentralisation of power systems—corporate, academic, media, and institutional—that prevailed until the early years of the 21st century. Indeed, the research project’s time frame concludes with two fundamental events: firstly, the approval of Law 3/2007, which gave legal recognition to effective equality between women and men, and spurred a very active and hopeful period in the struggle for labour rights and opportunities; and secondly, the economic and financial crisis of 2008, which shattered the mechanisms of architectural practice as it was known until then, a practice almost exclusively focused on building activity. The crisis led to a new professional paradigm and a much more complex, sensitive, and inclusive understanding of the discipline itself, characterised by its diversity and mutability.

There are fundamentally two major axes that articulate this new monograph. Firstly, the period spanning from the democratic restoration in 1978 to the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, when social and cultural distress ultimately subverted the value system, hegemonies, and traditional ways of conceptualizing architecture in Spain. This era was defined by women’s efforts to access the practice and gain recognition within the profession. These were years of progress, more hesitant in the early decades, but steadily consolidating by the turn of the century. The gradual incorporation of women architects into all professional, academic, institutional, administrative, and media spheres of architecture allows reflection on the extent to which the ways women have emerged in one of the most paradigmatic and impermeable disciplines of modernity have contributed to decentering its own hierarchies.

The second axis of this issue is the very notion of the periphery from which women have resisted isolation, dissented from prevailing discourses and modernist ideals, introduced new priorities into the public debate, and offered alternatives to the patriarchal epistemology of Spain’s architectural agenda. Consequently, it is possible to speak of a broad understanding of the ‘outside’. From one perspective, it means remoteness, inhabiting subordinate territories peripheral to the centres of production of architectural culture.

Therefore, it is crucial to examine those non-canonical geographies, fringe areas, or outer bounds of the architecture system in which, precisely because of their distance from the main educational, editorial, or decision-making hubs—Madrid, and to a lesser extent, Barcelona—women have been allowed to enter and occupy certain positions at the cost of their visibility and recognition. In this regard, this monograph builds on the effort of the research project supporting it to identify the numerous biases against women in the architecture profession that have led to the disregard of their contributions. From another perspective, ‘outside’ also means outlying topics, less-considered knowledge, and supposedly minor activities such as landscaping, restoration, or interior design. Additionally, ‘outside’ refers to those inside-outside porosities through which women architects have managed to establish effective alliances among their practices and with other disciplines, build affective collaborations, develop new creative formats, and open up more sympathetic and caring ways of working with others (Álvarez Lombardero, 2022).

The call for papers welcomed submissions on case studies and comparative analyses addressing not so much *what* women architects produced during this period, but rather *where* and *how* their achievements were realised. In comparison with prevailing studies that have focused on historical and historiographical reviews, this monograph was conceived to investigate the circumstances and material conditions that women have had to overcome. It aimed to produce a ‘situated knowledge’—to put it in Donna Haraway’s (1988) words—which, due to the inequalities it highlights, is essential for understanding the contributions of women architects in all their complexity and, most importantly, for comparing them with those of their male counterparts. By inverting the traditional figure-ground relationship and bringing to the forefront the difficulties of accessing certain commissions, the asymmetries, if not outright labour abuses, the demands of balancing professional and family life, and many other obstacles, the context allows for a reconsideration of the abstract criteria that have traditionally (in)validated their work. This framework of analysis, in turn, would reveal the full resilience of women’s work, as only by focusing on their acts of resistance and sisterhood can the cultural, technical, and political value of their architectural production be truly understood.

Of particular interest was the exposure of how women have confronted prejudices arising specifically from distance and difference, and thus the disdain and/or indifference towards their work. In other words, authors were encouraged to investigate the irruptive/disruptive agency of women and their resilient experiences as new voices arising from the outside. Likewise, the purpose was to debate the role of women in weakening the exclusive and discriminatory centralities supporting the architectural paradigm prior to the impact of the fourth wave of feminism (Lange & Pérez-Moreno, 2020).

In short, contributors were invited to consider the periphery not only as a critical exteriority, but as the true place for encounters, relationships, and connections; and, therefore, to explore the opportunity offered by the historical margins to rethink contemporary architecture, as an urgent and relative question, inexorably linked to the challenges and commitments of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

This call for papers has taken the form of ten articles presenting a diverse conceptual and geographical panorama, together with an interview requested *ad hoc*. These ten articles can be understood according to the following order and thematic blocks.

The issue opens with an article by Inés Novella and Inés Sánchez de Madariaga entitled «First Graduated Women Architects and Urbanists in Eastern Mediterranean Europe, 1900-2000. The Cases of Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey». It offers a view from outside the Spanish context and therefore a counterpoint to the national case studies that follow. The historical, political and cultural narration of the achievements of the first women graduates in architecture in these countries on the European periphery shows how the progress in terms of democratic gains and women's rights has had a decisive impact on architecture and urban planning in these countries. The article reveals the contributions of women architects when they have been able to exercise their profession and the areas in which they have left their mark, especially in collective housing and developing heritage projects. It also reveals the barriers, and, in response, the alliances forged between the first generations of women who studied architecture in Cyprus, Greece and Turkey. The parallels with other contexts in southern Europe, such as Spain, are noteworthy, as women architects found in public institutions a more propitious working environment from which to contribute to the society of their

time, especially through the planning and development of public facilities, residential programmes and regulatory frameworks that have enabled them to ameliorate spatial standards and build quality.

After this account set on the eastern edge of the northern Mediterranean, the monograph can be understood as a succession of three blocks. A first block is made up of two articles dealing with peripheral disciplinary fields and topics. Firstly, the research conducted by Daniela Arias and Zaida Muxí, «Women & Landscape. Pathways Through a Holistic Practice and the Catalonia Case Study», reconstructs a genealogy of the women who designed the landscape in Catalonia, their understanding of public space, of nature, the city and, in essence, the very life of its inhabitants as interdependent subjects. Their approach to landscape architecture from a gender and feminist perspective puts the environment at the centre of some of the most important contemporary proposals. The authors argue for the study of women's contributions to the discipline of landscape from a holistic approach, that is, from an approach to their work and thought that links their own experience of the environment with cultural, social and political aspects, and, especially, with their activism in favour of more democratising and caring practices in architecture and design. For Arias and Muxí, recognising that women architects offer a different vision of landscape design is essential for equality in the profession and, thus, recovering and valuing the idiosyncrasy of their landscape projects and their very memory is key to an inclusive and significant historiography.

The focus of the closing article of this first section is on caring. «Architectures and Spaces for Care: Recent Contributions to Spanish Postmodern Architectural Culture led by Women Architects», by María Isabel Alba Dorado, explains how feminisms have brought about some of the main paradigm shifts in the Spanish architectural scene in recent decades. Indeed, since the end of the 20th century, we can observe the emergence of a series of professional practices led by women architects, but also informed by other peripheral positions such as art or social action, emanating from the experiences and needs of women themselves and other non-normative subjects to foreground everyday life and care. Indeed, despite their undeniable economic and urban relevance, as Nancy Fraser (2016) complained in her essential study on the care crisis, the patriarchy has historically disregarded

the importance of these tasks which, because they are mostly carried out by women, have remained invisible and undervalued. The detection, therefore, from architecture and urbanism, of the forms of resistance, in addition to the techniques and socio-material ecologies that care mobilises, has been largely an achievement of women who have clearly been central to new proposals for communal living (Gutiérrez-Mozo et al., 2021).

A second block, the mid-section of the monograph, brings together three articles from and therefore situated in the place at the very heart of Spain's geography, politics, media, architectural culture and academia: Madrid. These articles explore several peripheral locations of this core, the outskirts, which, in their interconnections, have operated from both within the centre and without its centralities at the same time.

Josena Hervás and Eva Hurtado, in «Minority Narratives: The Voices of Women Architects from the School of Madrid in Early Democratic Spain (1975-1982)», look inside this key institution of the nation's architectural education to find the first generations of women architects who actively participated in its democratic transformation. Hervás and Hurtado show, through a sequential study of the various academic years, programmes and graduation classes of this period, the nature of the training and professional development of these women architects, both at the School, where they were still a minority, and in the workforce, and how they managed to deploy their agency, initially in isolation and later by forming small support networks. The interview as a research tool has made it possible to collect the testimonies of these women and revealed that they were not only forerunners, but also references and mentors for each other. Facing and overcoming difficulties from their numerical inferiority and gender gaps fostered relationships of friendship, complicity and sisterhood. Forged during their studies, they endured throughout their lives, which, as they state, can be traced in their professional collaborations and in clear memories of belonging to a true community.

Next, the article by María Elia Gutiérrez-Mozo and Sofía Parker, «Women Architects and Their Works in the Autonomous Region of Madrid, 1978-2008», explores, in the authors' own words, «the periphery of the very centre of the architectural system in Spain» in this time frame. Their ambitious approach, as they also explain, is threefold: a quantitative analysis that

provides a sample of more than a hundred case studies, whose collection and diagramming alone would justify the research; an examination of the presence of women architects in the specialised media; and, finally, a qualitative attempt to map the various characteristics of these publication instances to the architects' interests. The methodology, which mirrors and reinforces that of the research project «A Situated View» itself, is also threefold: a trawl of bibliographical sources; an invitation to women architects to send a list of their projects, offering the possibility of discovering unpublished works; and lastly fieldwork. One of the main project hypotheses, corroborated in this study led by its principal investigator, is that any research in architecture with a gender perspective must question the media itself, as architecture journals barely make even the slightest mention of any work of merit created by women architects. As Gutiérrez-Mozo and Parker underline, even in the centre itself, their output has been banished to the outskirts, from the very capital to its surrounding territory and from the pages of the most prestigious media to professional invisibility.

This raises questions about how much women have been concerned and preoccupied with the construction and projection of a public persona in such a totally masculinised profession. In this line of discussion, this and other case studies in this collection enable us to reflect on the way in which women architects have paid less heed to their own memory, that is, the relative attention paid, compared to other concerns, to the documents, images and stories that serve to underpin their reputation and survival of their legacy. For this reason, this research is essential because it problematises the media as the source, object and destination of the studies; and because these media expose what those interests, of all kinds, have mediated, that is, they have decided the shaping of the national architectural scene and its more or less critical externalities.

The article that closes this block, presented by Ángel Cordero, Paula Ruiz Usero and Marta Muñoz from the Polytechnic University of Madrid, is entitled «Domestic, Not Private: Feminine Proposals for Carabanchel PAU Expansion, Madrid, Spain». It proposes a gendered study of the community spaces of a selection of significant collective housing projects in Carabanchel, located in the south of the capital. Their analysis of several projects from the early 21st century investigates the role of women architects and the

importance of their work in their design. The article analyses the ‘in between’ spaces that, in these housing developments, have generated degrees of privacy, security and neighbourhood interaction halfway between the public and the domestic. The purpose of their research has been to try to understand how these transitional spaces encourage the exchange of caregiving beyond the private sphere, as well as the public representation of domestic life, which, as the authors state, yields encouraging results for the discipline, as it suggests that ‘feminine’ sensibilities can correct common mistaken assumptions in the design of public space.

After this second block, which shows the centre’s ongoing level of influence in today’s architectural discourses, the third and last section of the monograph is made up of case studies from peripheral regions: the Autonomous Region of Valencia, Murcia, the Basque Country and the Canary Islands.

The first of these, the Autonomous Region of Valencia and, specifically, one of its three provinces, Alicante, is the starting point for the «A Situated View» project. In their article «Unnoticed Women Architects in the Spanish (South)Eastern Mediterranean Region», Ana Gilsanz and Manuel Blanco report on the first results of this project in the territories around Valencia and Murcia. As with Gutiérrez-Mozo and Parker, the research also adopts the methodology of the over-arching project, also involving the authors, and combines a bibliographical study, a call to women architects and fieldwork based on visits to their works and conversations with their authors, many of whom, once again are unrepresented in the architecture magazines, prizes and architecture exhibitions that recognised and publicised the work of their male colleagues. Women’s architectural production in the «Levant» forms a mosaic of typologies and scales where the predominant uses are housing and buildings with an average surface area of between 1,000 m² and 10,000 m². However, the research data also dismantles preconceived ideas and proves that, despite the hostility traditionally inherent in the environment and patriarchal attitudes on the construction site, women architects built projects comparable in number and surface area to those of male architects, and even on a much larger magnitude, as revealed by the infrastructure projects of the Valencian architect Lourdes García Sogo.

Furthermore, the fieldwork on which this and other research in this collection is based demonstrates not only that women architects and their

contributions are significantly more than those reported in the same journals that arbitrated the legitimacy of themes and the reputation of male architects of their generation, but also that this occurred both because of the general lack of interest and commitment to them or, simply, the lack of time of many women to make themselves known. It is therefore not possible to rely on gendered studies of architecture based solely on sifting through existing bibliographical sources, even less so if they aim to blow apart the canon, since such sources implicitly carry mechanisms of homosocial reproduction (Kanter, 1993). By their very nature, they do not allow us to investigate the logic of the systems (publications, competitions, prizes, etc.) that ensure architecture's symbolic capital and gatekeep access to the microcosm of its cultural field.

The Basque Country and the field of social housing is represented by Olatz Ocerin and Itziar Rodríguez-Oyarbide, who wrote the paper «Women Architects and Social Housing in the Basque Country (1978-2008). An Approach from a Feminist Perspective». Their article examines the presence of women architects in the design and construction of social housing in the Basque Country between 1978 and 2008 from a feminist perspective. This article is based on the case of Margarita Mendizábal, who graduated in 1956, to illustrate the difficulties in woman's professional practice in the heteropatriarchal and classist context of the dictatorship and how these conditions prevailed until the first female architects graduated from the School of Architecture of the University of the Basque Country joined the region's architectural scene. They made notable progress in the field, despite their small numbers, especially when, after the transfer of powers to the Basque Government, the region initiated its own policies for promoting subsidised public housing. Social and political changes, as reported by Inés Novella and Inés Sánchez de Madariaga's contribution to this collection, are again inseparable from advances in equality, as evidenced by the evolution of one of the reference regions in the introduction of a gender perspective in its habitability and collective housing design regulations and in its land-use planning guidelines.

Finally, within this third section, the ultra-peripheral region of Canary Islands, combined with youth as another common outsider of the profession, are the focus of attention in the research of David Delgado and Lucía

Pérez-Moreno. As the title suggests, their paper «Architecture Competitions as an Opportunity for Young Women Architects. The Case of the Competition for Rural Subsidised Housing and the Canarian Magüi González, 1981-85», looks back at the years of the Spanish transition and the construction of the new State of Autonomous Regions as the moment when architecture competitions with open and anonymous participation gradually began to be held, attracting a more diverse range of participants. This phenomenon coincided with the progressive incorporation of women architects into the profession, representing a true opportunity, especially when anonymity allowed women to compete on more equal terms with their male counterparts. Yet this equality was not fully realised, as the material conditions and additional time required for any competition were not always available to all, particularly when women's jobs and design work had to be balanced with their caregiving responsibilities. However, Delgado and Pérez-Moreno's study of this competition for designing rural public housing demonstrates that women architects in Spain's peripheral regions achieved greater success, with the Canary Islands particularly standing out, and with the architect Magüi González, being the sole recipient of a competitive commission before the age of thirty.

The article that concludes this monographic issue discusses, from interwoven and comprehensive approaches, the competition as a space for generational renewal and innovation in architectural thought, as well as a place of opportunities and connection, through disciplinary debate between the peripheries and the centre. The insightful research by Asunción Díaz and José Luis Oliver, entitled «Inclusion of Women Architects into the Cultural Field of Spanish Competitions: Struggling for Professional Recognition from the Periphery (1978-2008)», provides a broader sociological and historiographical framework for the analysis of a significant number of architectural competitions in Spain organised between the democratic transition and the end of the financial and economic crisis of 2008, showing the progressive inclusion of women in this traditionally masculine cultural field. The paper gives an account of how, after the end of the Franco regime and with the growing vitality of the Autonomous Regions, open and anonymous competitions held throughout the country facilitated the rise, on their own merit, of women architects, first as recognised participants and then as jury members.

However, as the authors explain, taking up one of the main arguments shared by other articles in this issue, despite the valuable contribution of these women to architecture, their recognition has been greeted with disinterest and reticence in a patriarchal professional and media structure not always given to granting legitimacy to secondary practices, territories and subjects. As a result, many Spanish women architects who regularly participated in these competitions managed to acquire agency and recognition through silent logic, far removed from flashy celebrity, an issue that has left a deep imprint on their ways of approaching the practice of their profession and of participating in the cultural field of the competition in particular, producing truly relevant results for the rest of society.

In the radiography of the centre-periphery tensions highlighted by the articles in this issue, despite the original aspirations of the call for papers, there are glaring absences of numerous Spanish regions, such as Aragon, Andalusia or the northern regions bathed by the Cantabrian Sea. Although researchers from these areas have participated, the regions themselves remain uncovered. It is to be hoped and desired that this initiative will encourage the exploration and vindication of these missing areas.

Moreover, there are peripheries, such as Galicia, where the contributions of women architects are impossible to ignore, as well as other professional fields where women have boldly applied themselves. For this reason, the monograph opens with an interview by Silvia Blanco with the architect María Luisa García Gil, who graduated in 1975 from the Madrid School of Architecture and has been based, since 1976, first in the municipality of Boiro in A Coruña and, later, in Santiago de Compostela. In her conversation with Silvia Blanco, «Memories from the Galician Periphery», García Gil describes aspects of her training and professional beginnings, her involvement in the Galician Architects Association and other associations of Galician businesswomen and professionals, as well as other women architects, such as Elena Arregui, who were her points of reference. She also looks back on the evolution of her work from collective housing to concern for local building traditions or heritage restoration, evidencing women's sensitivity towards the built environment and its meanings, a willingness to intervene to ensure the survival of a collective memory. The incentive for the interview also lies in giving a real voice, in the first person, to so many issues and problems

discussed in other articles from more abstract approaches or approached from the necessary distance demanded by the research.

Altogether, the contributions in the monograph show that women's input to contemporary architectural design and culture reflects their own necessarily different understandings (Pérez-Moreno, 2021), which has taken the form of more «diverse, inclusive, and egalitarian projects» (Gutiérrez-Mozo et al., 2020, p. 105). Despite their interest and quality, and despite years of quietly but tenaciously aligning themselves with the same values that are now being proclaimed as sustainable development goals—social, economic and environmental—because of their double condition of female authorship and peripheral location, most of these achievements have been forgotten by androcentric historiography and media interests that have nurtured disdain rather than dialogue. This lack of willingness to come together, much less to make amends, and, above all, the reluctance to let go of hegemonies and prejudices that hinder a common discourse are still, despite the progress made, glaring in the current panorama. Understanding the physical, conceptual and experiential distance from the centres from which canons emerge and the differences as opportunities and resources, and not as obstacles, is still a pending task in Spanish architecture.

It remains to be hoped that this collection will encourage new research focused on what has been hidden from our gaze because, if this monograph proves anything, it is that we only see what we want to see.

REFERENCES

- Álvarez Lombardero, N. (2022). Otras prácticas españolas. Aproximaciones de arquitectas a enfoques feministas. *ZARCH. Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Architecture and Urbanism*, 18, 186-197. https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_zarch/zarch.2022186159
- Fraser, N. (2016). Contradictions of Capital and Care. *The New Left Review*, 100, 99-117.
- Gutiérrez-Mozo, M.^a-E., Parra-Martínez, J., & Gilsanz-Díaz, A. (2020). Gestión de infraestructuras con perspectiva de género. Caso: El Campus de la Universidad de Alicante. *Ciudad y Territorio Estudios Territoriales*, 52(203), 103-120. <https://doi.org/10.37230/CyTET.2020.203.09>

- Gutiérrez-Mozo, M.^a-E., Parra-Martínez, J., & Gilsanz-Díaz, A. (2021). Extending the Architecture of Collective Housing: Towards Common Worlds of Care. *Buildings*, 11(4), art. 166, 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings11040166>
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599.
- Kanter, R. M. (1993). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. Basic Books.
- Lange, T., & Pérez-Moreno, L. C. (2020). Architectural Historiography and Fourth Wave Feminism. *Architectural Histories*, 8(1), paper 26, 1-10. <http://doi.org/10.5334/ah.563>
- Pérez-Moreno, L. C. (2021). Prácticas feministas en la arquitectura española reciente. Igualitarismos y diferencia sexual. *Arte, Individuo y Sociedad*, 33(3), 651-668. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/aris.67168>