

# MINORITY NARRATIVES: THE VOICES OF WOMEN ARCHITECTS FROM THE SCHOOL OF MADRID IN EARLY DEMOCRATIC SPAIN (1975-1982)

## RELATOS EN MINORÍA: LA VOZ DE LAS ARQUITECTAS DE LA ESCUELA DE MADRID EN LA PRIMERA ESPAÑA DEMOCRÁTICA (1975-1982)

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### Abstract

Since the mid-19th century and until the 1964 study programme, students at the Madrid School of Architecture had to undergo various entrance exams for university. Women architects in Francoist Spain represented a mere 5% of the profession, a gender gap only overcome many years after the democratic restoration. Yet most of them did not consider feminism as a matter major concern, since the lack of freedom in Spain held greater importance for women that gender issues, which were relegated to a secondary position in public discussions. Starting in 1985, with the development of the Autonomous Regions in Spain and its accession to the European Economic Community, the country underwent a profound transformation. Former generations of women architects would then play a relevant professional role. This paper aims to expose, through the chronological sequence of their graduation—initially in a testimonial and isolated manner and later forming small networks—how their professional careers developed. This chronological approach, as well as a study of their links from a series of conversations with several women architects

that studied and/or set their practice during the years of the democratic transition allows us to conclude that they were not only pioneers but also role models and mentors to each other. Their status as a determined minority is reflected in the relationships they established, with friendships and student complicity that accompanied them throughout their lives, as confirmed by their professional collaborations, comments, and vivid memories of their belonging to a group or community.

**Keywords:** architecture and gender; Madrid School of Architecture; pioneering women; women architects; Francoist Spain; Spanish transition; professional women networks; intergenerational support; underrepresentation; community.

### Resumen

Hasta la llegada del plan de estudios de 1964, el alumnado de la Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid tenía que pasar por distintas pruebas de ingreso en la carrera, como venía ocurriendo desde mediados del siglo XIX. En la España franquista, las mujeres arquitectas representaban un escaso 5% de una profesión, cuyos porcentajes de género se fueron equilibrando tardíamente, ya en la etapa democrática. Estas arquitectas no se plantearon el feminismo como tema central del debate público, ya que la falta de libertad en España era algo más importante para el colectivo femenino y las cuestiones de género quedaban en un segundo plano. A partir de 1985, cuando se desarrolla el sistema autonómico en España y se firma el tratado de adhesión a la Comunidad Económica Europea, el país sufre una gran transformación. Las primeras generaciones de arquitectas son las que participan como profesionales en dicha transformación democrática. Este artículo pretende exponer a través de la secuencia temporal de su graduación —primero de forma testimonial y aislada, y más adelante formando pequeñas redes— cómo se desarrollaron sus carreras profesionales. Este recorrido cronológico, así como el estudio de sus vínculos a partir de entrevistas con algunas de aquellas mujeres que se formaron o comenzaron a ejercer durante los años de la Transición, permite concluir que fueron, no solo pioneras, sino referentes y mentoras unas de otras. Su condición de esforzada minoría tiene reflejo en la relación que se establecía entre ellas, con unas amistades y complicidades estudiantiles que las han acompañado toda su vida, como confirman sus colaboraciones profesionales, comentarios y nítidos recuerdos de pertenencia de grupo o sentimiento de comunidad.

**Palabras clave:** arquitectura y género; Escuela de Arquitectura de Madrid; pioneras; arquitectas; España franquista; Transición española; redes profesionales de mujeres; apoyo intergeneracional; infrarrepresentación; comunidad.

## 1. THE STUDY PLANS OF THE MADRID SCHOOL, FROM 1914 TO 1957

The Escuela de Arquitectura de Madrid (Madrid School of Architecture or ETSAM) was established in 1847 under a first study plan of 1844. Initially located at the Colegio Imperial, also known as the Instituto San Isidro, it remained active there until 1936. From this time until the present day, it has been in a building by Pascual Bravo, created for this purpose in the University City of Madrid.

The Colegio Imperial was not the first architectural school. As early as 1774, lectures were given at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando) on Alcalá Street. The key distinction was its exclusive focus on teaching, unlike the Real Academia, which was linked to the instruction of painting and sculpture, the three noble arts. In the initial study plan (1844), there was already an admission exam and a preparatory course covering subjects such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry.

Preparation requirement was—except for the academic year 1956-57—compulsory at the Madrid Architecture School until the implementation of the 1964 plan. The need for a vast technical workforce during the years of Spanish developmentalism led to the temporary elimination of this initial requirement<sup>1</sup>. Throughout the various study plans developed during the first half of the 20th century, we will elucidate the experiences of the few female students who enrolled in the ETSAM during those years and trace their professional careers from the second half of the 20th century onwards.

The years 1914, 1932 and 1957 mark the three study plans under which the first women architects graduated from the Madrid School. More than fifty women became architects during this initial period, and the majority continued working or started their professional careers during the decades spanning from 1978 to 2008.

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1. The Architecture School of Madrid, currently the ETSAM, is the oldest in Spanish territory, with the second school founded in Barcelona in 1875 (the current ETSAB building was inaugurated in 1961). The School in Seville was founded in 1958, with classes beginning in 1960. In 1964, the School of Navarra was founded, followed by Valencia in 1966 and Valladolid in 1968. Finally, in 1973, the schools of La Coruña and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria were founded.

## 2. THE VERY FIRST ONES

Research on the first women architects who studied and joined the profession in Madrid is still ongoing<sup>2</sup> (Hurtado, 2024). The admission of women into the School did not occur until 1931, but as early as 1922, at the X International Congress of Architects, Spanish representative Luis María Cabello y Lapiedra discussed the possibility of including women in the profession in the *Arquitectura* magazine:

In the United States there are already several women architects; in France, the case is also repeated. Something has been said about Italy and some of the American Republics in this regard. In Spain, we have women draughtsmen—the Compañía Telefónica of Barcelona has them for the layout of its lines and the drafting of corresponding plans, with excellent results. What are we waiting for? However, the Congress did not provide a concrete solution. It believed that this would happen without the need to officially recognise ‘woman architects’ and decided to pass the matter for study and deliberation by the Central Committee of the International Congresses. (Cabello, 1922, p. 426)

According to the established curriculum, students were required to pass six admission exams. The preparatory stage consisted of two years with technical and artistic modules. Therefore, the two preparatory years plus the four years of the degree course were the minimum necessary to become a licensed architect (García Gener, 2016).

Under this study plan, Matilde Ucelay Maortua (1912-2008) and María Cristina Gonzalo Pintor (1913-2005) enrolled in the school. Ucelay completed her studies in June 1936 (passing two courses in a single year), when ETSAM headquarters were inaugurated. Due to the Spanish Civil War, Gonzalo Pintor graduated in 1940. The third female student, Lali Urcola, left the program without graduating after marrying a fellow student.

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2. Since 2021, «ArquitectAs», a lecture series organised by the Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Madrid (Architects Association, or COAM) contributes to giving a voice to senior women architects and aims to document the encounters and conversations that are still possible. Since its inception, Eva Hurtado has been the curator responsible for its organisation and dissemination.

The graduation of the first Spanish woman architect in 1936 ended a period of 184 years without any female student at the School, counting from the date architectural education was regulated in Spain after the creation of the Real Academia de San Fernando in 1752 (Ocerin-Ibáñez, 2020; Ocerin-Ibáñez & Rodríguez-Oyarbide, 2022).

Matilde Ucelay and Cristina Gonzalo began their studies just before the Second Republic, under the 1914 study plan. Coming from wealthy families in progressive Spain, they were pioneers, and their presence paved the way for women to study architecture, although they remained a significant minority in later graduating classes. Ucelay managed to avoid the Civil War as a student. Yet she could not escape the immediate professional purge process, which she suffered for having belonged to the Governing Board of the Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Madrid (Architects Association of Madrid or COAM) for a few months (Martínez Verón, 2022, p. 217).

Matilde Ucelay grew up in a family of progressive thinkers and professionals—her mother, Pura Maortua, was a member of the Lyceum Club and founder of the Anfistora theatre group. In 1937, Ucelay married Javier Ruiz-Castillo, who had inherited the family's Biblioteca Nueva publishing house, linked to *Revista de Occidente* magazine. In the fall of 1933, they embarked on a study trip to Paris, Berlin, and Moscow with colleagues (Ruiz-Castillo, 1972, p. 10). She worked at her own office, even during the long initial decade when she needed other colleagues to sign her projects due to her disqualification, and built single-family homes, such as the house for her sister on Long Island in 1970, industrial structures and many other facilities, totalling 120 works, of which 65 were newly built (Vilchez, 2013). Her career continued until 1981, with some works already in democratic Spain, including the commercial premises on Alcalá Street where she lived and worked. She received the Premio Nacional de Arquitectura de España (Spanish National Architecture Prize) in 2004, leading her to participate in the 2006 Venice Biennale.

They are already inside: here are the most courageous, the first to enter the Architecture School of Madrid. Are women qualified to be architects? Imagine a young lady on a building site, with her dress and face covered in plaster, huh? (Anasagasti, 1932)

Like Matilde Ucelay, in Cantabria, Cristina Gonzalo collaborated with the local Architects Association from 1946 and, like her, had a long and prolific solo professional career when women had no civil or legal rights, but knew how to assume the responsibilities involved in architecture (Sánchez de Madariaga, 2008). She continued her studies until obtaining a doctorate in 1937, worked at the Dirección General de Regiones Devastadas (General Directorate of Devastated Regions), and served as the municipal architect of Los Corrales de Buelna, balancing these responsibilities with her work as a meteorologist by entering the Cuerpo Superior del Instituto Nacional de Meteorología (Higher Corps of the National Meteorological Institute) through a competitive exam with the military rank of aviation commander, stationed in Santander.

### 3. THEY ARE ALREADY INSIDE

Five women architects followed, as a new study plan came into effect in the 1932-33 academic year, imbued with the progressive philosophy of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (Free Institution of Education), where most of our pioneers would participate in one way or another. This plan, inspired by a well-established education system in various Western countries, still included an admission exam. The preparatory year began to be called the complementary course and became compulsory, with subjects such as calculus, mechanics, geometry, drawing and copying of elements. The module of design studio was officially established and would be taught in the three intermediate courses.

Students such as Rita Fernández Queimadelos (1911-2008), Juana de Ontañón Sánchez Arbós (1920-2002), Margarita Mendizábal Aracama (1931-2023), M.<sup>a</sup> Eugenia Pérez Clemente (1926-1978), Elena Arregui Cruz-López (1927-2018), and Milagros Rey Hombre (1930-2014) graduated in the 1940s and 1950s under the 1932 study plan. Rita Fernández Queimadelos was no stranger to the models of emancipation and economic independence of the Galician matriarchal culture, which must have influenced her decision: an organization of family life with «many mothers»<sup>3</sup>. Educated in the secular

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3. According to her daughter Rita Iranzo, also an architect, in an interview with the authors on July 7, 2023.

education system in her native Galicia, her move to Santiago de Compostela, accompanied by her maternal grandmother, confirmed her aptitudes. When she came to Madrid in 1930, she settled in the *Residencia de Señoritas* (Young Ladies Residence), directed by María de Maeztu, and completed her degree in 1940.

Juana de Ontañón was educated at the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, where her mother, the pedagogue María Sánchez Arbós, worked as a teacher. Her father, Manuel Ontañón, was also a teacher. She obtained her architecture degree in 1949 and developed a fruitful career along with her husband, the architect Manuel López-Mateos. Their professional collaboration reveals her explicit autonomy, at times taking on a more prominent social role—a recurring theme in many professional couples during these early years. They collaborated with Luis Moya on the *Parainfo* of the *Universidad Laboral de Gijón*; with Bidagor on the *Madrid Development Plan*; with Vázquez de Castro on the *Unidad Vecinal de Absorción* in *Pan Bendito*; and on more than 200 projects at their own office. Notable works from 1978 include the *Escuela de Formación de Profesorado de EGB* (EGB Teacher Training School) in *Ronda de Toledo* and the *Viviendas de la Urbanización Serrat Gimeno* (housing complex) in Madrid.

Ontañón is the only woman signatory to the «*Alhambra Manifesto*» (1953), alongside twenty-three men. Her strong interest in sports, particularly rugby, is evident in her founding of the *Arquirugby* magazine and her honorary presidency of the Rugby section of the *Club Deportivo de Arquitectura de Madrid* (Madrid Architecture Sports Club) in the 1970s. In the realm of rugby, she crosses paths with Milagros Rey, who also played rugby during her years as an architecture student in Madrid. In Juana's office worked the younger architect Margarita de Luxán (born in Santander in 1945), who recalled Ontañón as a role model and mentor. They jointly built the *Pérez Lobo* residential building in 1969.

The fifth woman graduated from the School of Architecture of Madrid got her diploma in 1956. She was Margarita Mendizábal, a student of Anibal Alvarez in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Design Studio, who submitted a project published in the *Revista Nacional de Arquitectura* (Mendizábal, 1955). She collaborated with Juana Ontañón on projects for the *Cooperativa El Madroño*, worked

on the interior design of the Club de Amigos de la UNESCO (UNESCO Friends Club) in Madrid, and undertook other projects in the capital as well as in Gerona, Valencia and Vizcaya, extending into the 1980s. She participated in the competition with Fernando Higuera and Antonio Miró for the Opera Theatre in AZCA, which was never built (Higuera et al., 1970). Housing projects, schools, and industrial buildings appear to be the types of commissions she had access to, like in Matilde Ucelay's case. As part of her teaching and research activity at the Technical University of Madrid, she published *El Tratado de una ventana* and *Manual de accesibilidad* in 1988 and 1998, respectively. She also joined the so-called Comisión de Hombres Buenos (Good Men Commission) which had to be convened during the strike of the 1980-81 academic year.

Since then, every year, at least a woman has graduated from the ETSAM, with M.<sup>a</sup> Eugenia Pérez Clemente in 1957, who moved to Washington, Elena Arregui Cruz-López, in 1958, and M.<sup>a</sup> Milagros Rey Hombre in 1959. The latter two developed their careers in Galicia and were awarded the Castela Medal in 2003 and 2005, respectively.

Elena Arregui worked in Madrid until 1972. She authored a dozen projects certified by the COAM, including social housing complexes in Vallecas. She attended the First Women's Congress on Urban Planning held in Bonn, where she travelled to represent the Ministry of Housing. Arregui later moved to Santiago de Compostela, where she dedicated herself to teaching mathematics and became the president of the Santiago branch of Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Galicia. She collaborated with the architects Ricardo Magdalena, Mitjans, and her husband Arturo Mas Aznar. Together, they built, among other projects, the San Ignacio de Loyola housing group in Santiago de Compostela in the 1970s (Carreiro, 2011; Vilchez, 2013).

Milagros Rey's father was Santiago Rey Pedreira, a renowned rationalist architect in Galicia, but they did not work together. Milagros moved to Madrid in 1952 and completed her degree with the best academic record and an outstanding achievement award, despite her father's initial reluctance. During an end-of-studies trip to Brazil, she established contact with Lucio Costa (Fernández-Gago, 2016). She set practice in A Coruña, where did simultaneous work at her own office and as municipal architect for



seven years, being the head of the technical section of the City Council and responsible for the fire brigade. From the City Council, she managed land for important social housing operations, such as the Polígono de Elviña, the Barrio de las Flores and the city's refinery, as well as the intervention in the Cuatro Caminos Fountain, among others. She became professor of History of Construction at the Escuela de Arquitectura de A Coruña and served as the head of department for ten years<sup>4</sup>. Milagros Rey designed relevant buildings such as the Torre Dorada skyscraper, the Local Social del Pescador in Finisterre, described by Rey as «a work entirely built by women» (Opus Dei, 2012, para.10), the renovation of the Chapel of the Compañía de María and the Hotel Santa Cristina in Oleiros, among other commissions. She did not marry and always maintained her own office (Gutiérrez, 2014).

#### 4. THE WOMEN ARCHITECTS OF THE 1957 STUDY PLAN

After the long duration of the 1932 study plan, with the exception of 1956-1957 academic year, the 1957 plan maintains, in a lighter form, the admission exams and introduces new specialties. The preparatory course was eliminated, but a structure similar to that of 1932 was kept, with new subjects and a necessary preliminary course. This was the first plan that introduced five specialties: urban planning, economics and construction techniques, structures, conditioning and facilities, and monument restoration.

The increasing presence of women was consolidated, even though slowly but significantly, surpassing fifty female architects. Yet it was not until the 1964 study plan that the academic conditions would multiply the number of women students in Madrid (Sánchez de Madariaga, 2008).

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4. «In 1968, a colleague and I attended a conference in Prague, and they asked us how many women architects there were in Spain. We told them five; they thought we were referring to 5%, and even then, it seemed very few to them. So, we did not clarify that we were only five in total». Milagros Rey's observation, published by Gutiérrez (2014, p. 8) when the architect passed away. According to the ETSAM registry books: from 1940 —it being the first female application for the issuance of a degree in architecture—, until 1964, only 10 women had applied for it. From 1940 to 1967, 19 female applicants were registered.

Teresa Capdevilla Bermejo graduated in 1964, set practice in Pamplona alongside her husband and was daughter and mother of architects; M.<sup>a</sup> Encarnación Casas Ramos graduated in 1965; Carmen Mostaza Martínez and María Aroca Hernández-Ros in 1966; Emilia Checa Morán, Helena Iglesias Rodríguez, M.<sup>a</sup> Pilar Ferichola Martín and Pilar Ferrándiz Josa in 1967. The latter became professor at the Technical University of Madrid in 1986, eventually becoming vice-chancellor.

The passion for architecture awakened in Helena Iglesias during her high school years when she had the opportunity to visit Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza and the frescoes of Arezzo in Italy. A brilliant student, in 1983, she became the first woman to become full professor in Architecture in Spain<sup>5</sup>. As an educator and a traveler, she published several academic articles in the *Arquitectura* magazine edited by the COAM between 1994 and 1999. The same department of the ETSAM, now called Ideación Gráfica (Graphic Expression), was joined by her colleague and friend Emilia Checa, along with Julio Villarroel, Javier Ortega, and Ignacio de Las Casas.

Emilia Checa balanced teaching with a highly prolific and versatile professional career. Like many other women of these generations, Checa came to Madrid to prepare for admission to school and spent her university years at the former Residencia de Señoritas on Fortuny Street. She graduated as an architect, started a drawing academy, travelled to Italy with fellow students, and married one of them, with whom she began the work at the studio. However, her independence and leadership capacity soon led her to establish her own company based in Madrid. The dual aspects of her work, that she defines as heritage rehabilitation and management architecture—with documentation and cataloguing—are represented in projects such as the Corralas de Miguel Servet (1980-1985) and Instituto Homeopático and Hospital de San José restoration (until 2007), both built in Madrid<sup>6</sup> (Figure 1).

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5. Eva Hurtado's interview with Professor Helena Iglesias, September 20 and 22, 2023.

6. «If rehabilitation is combined with management, everything must go together. If you only do rehabilitation in an empty building, there is no problem, but in occupied buildings or in urban interventions, the management process cannot be separated from the creation process». Comment by Emilia Checa in a conversation with Paula Bozalongo at COAM on December 13, 2021.

Figure 1. Emilia Checa's rehabilitation and restoration of the Homeopathic Institute and Hospital of San José, 2007



Source: Courtesy of the architect

Architects like López Jaén, Miquel, Mangada or Bardají trusted her from the Madrid public institutions, adopting a pioneering approach focused on community participation characteristic of Checa's guidance (Checa, 2021). It was under the mayorship of Tierno Galván in the early 1980s when the *Oficinas Comarcales de Rehabilitación de Edificios* (OCRE, Regional Offices for the Rehabilitation of Buildings), were organised in Madrid. Emilia Checa worked there with Teresa Arenillas, establishing the foundations of a committed and conscious approach to heritage and equity where, for the first time, a participation agenda was ritualised. Their membership in the *Club de Debates Urbanos* embodies this commitment, which Checa defines as one of her affiliations. A colleague of M.<sup>a</sup> Antonia González-Valcárcel, they both participated in the Cadiz Rehabilitation Conference, among other shared activities.

## 5. THE WOMEN ARCHITECTS OF 1968

Under the slogan «Under the cobblestones, there is a beach», echoing the May 1968 uprisings in France, a student movement of demands and protests spread, leaving its mark in many other countries. At the Architecture School of Madrid, the 1964 study plan was already in effect and the number of students had increased significantly. However, the women architects graduating in 1968 and up to the early 1970s belonged to very cohesive and minority groups that stem from the 1957 study plan.

Among the women architects who graduated in 1968, we find the names of María Pérez Sheriff, Adriana Bisquert Santiago, Concepción Fernández-Montesinos García, María Luisa Sotos Ucar, Gloria Alcázar Albajar, María Pilar Amorós Pérez, Emma Ojea Carballeira, Ángeles Coig-O'Donnell Durán, María Elvira Adiego Adiego and Raquel Martínez de Ubago y Fernández Calleja.

We observe how most of them pursued multiple professional roles simultaneously, but it is worth noting that María Pérez Sheriff's specialization in the design and planning of hospitals, following her urban planning studies in the United States through a Fulbright scholarship. She worked for the Dirección General de Salud (Directorate-General for Health) and for the Instituto Nacional de Previsión (National Pension Institute); travelled across Europe and lectured at the WHO, which led to her role as a delegate of the Consejo Superior de los Colegios de Arquitectos de España (Higher Council of Architects Associations in Spain, or CSCAE), where she contributed to the introduction of new health trends in Spain. Her last project was the University Clinical Hospital of Santiago de Compostela, opened in 1999, alongside Gerardo Calviño. Prior to this achievement, they had collaborated on the Maternity and Children's Hospital in Santiago de Compostela and the Instituto de Ciencias de la Salud (Institute of Health Sciences) in Talavera de la Reina (1976-2001), among other projects<sup>7</sup>. She was a professor in Urban Planning Practices with Francisco Fernández Longoria in the Larrodera Chair, and the author of specific publications such as the *Guía de programación y diseño de centros de salud*, published in 1989.

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7. DOCOMOMO Catalogue information provided by J. A. Herce Inés in March 2023.

Gloria Alcázar got her degree in Madrid and continued her studies in Rome, at the Istituto Centrale del Restauro. Becoming a widow with a son, at the age of 27, she worked as a salaried architect at the Ministerio de la Vivienda (Ministry of Housing) and in the Area of Rehabilitation Projects at the City Council of Madrid. Despite her many roles, she always wanted to pursue independent professional practice, which she could do intermittently. She built single-family houses, including the one catalogued in the Piovera neighbourhood in 1987<sup>8</sup>.

Alcázar's work on the restoration of historic centres and her contribution to the Plan General de Madrid (Urban Development Plan), employing a methodology based on a planimetric surveys and detailed study of the city, takes on a pioneering character that remains valid to this day. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is her article *La protección de los cascos históricos como herramienta de diseño urbano* (Alcázar, 1990). She participated as a jury member in important competitions for the restoration of monuments, such as the Cuesta de la Flor in San Lorenzo de El Escorial (1984), alongside Amparo Berlinches. As part of her duties in official divisions in the late 1980s, she collaborated with other colleagues in the rehabilitation projects of the current Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, Medio Rural y Marino (Ministry of the Environment, Rural and Marine Affairs)<sup>9</sup>, as well as in the Juan Bravo Theatre in Segovia. Starting in 2000, she contributed to the comprehensive rehabilitation of Guillem Sagrera building and to the restoration and expansion of the Orihuela Lonja for its adaptation to a Conservatory of Music. She conducted the Stability Report of the Lonja de Palma de Mallorca (2008). Her multifaceted nature led her to become a member of the Governing Board of the COAM with Fernando Chueca and Eleuterio Población and to participate in the 2000-2008 period of the *Arquitectura COAM* magazine closely with Amparo Berlinches and Juan García Millán.

The Galician woman architect Emma Ojea collaborated professionally with the architect Walter Lewin. They specialised in educational architecture and created projects for schools and university residences for the Ministry of Education. They use the spatial module of the classroom as a configurative

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8. Building L3.160. <https://guia-arquitectura-madrid.coam.org/#inm.L3.160>

9. Building F1.194. <https://guia-arquitectura-madrid.coam.org/#inm.F1.194>

element for organic geometries of Nordic influences, which they extend to the urbanisation of the surroundings. They were also involved in the restoration of the Lope de Vega Museum and the Real Academia Española. Additionally, they designed the building of the National Congress of Paraguay<sup>10</sup>.

Elvira Adiego recalls that in the Escuela de Madrid, everyone knew each other, and they were very visible to both students and professors, for the better or worse. Alongside Raquel Martínez de Ubago, they were the first women architects to work in Zaragoza, where they later relocated. Regarding the latter, who was the daughter and sister of architects, an architect and painter in the early 1970s, we have information about her involvement in the parish of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, in partnership with Manuel Ramos Martos (Martínez, 2000, p. 6).

Adiego was a member of the collective Equipo Z/7, a group of young architects that met around José Romero and Saturnino Cisneros and disbanded around 1973. In 1971, she began working as a municipal architect for the city council, referring to a good relationship with the Dirección General del Ministerio de la Vivienda (Ministry of Housing) under Emilio Larrodера, who was originally from Zaragoza. She was responsible for the Servicio de Planes Integrales y Estudios Urbanos (Division of Integral Plans and Urban Studies) of the city, when the historic ensemble file was initiated, and the first catalogues of buildings of interest were created. Adiego advocated for the defence of the historic district as a reflection of the city, particularly emphasising rehabilitation to preserve and care for experiential spaces. This commitment aligns with the enthusiasm for citizen participation during the transition period. Many of her arguments have been captured in various publications (Adiego, 2009). In 1988, she carried out the project for the construction of 53 dwellings in Jerónimo Cáncer Street in Zaragoza, and in 2007, she curated the Mateo Soteras Biennial at the Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Aragón. The graphical expression of the architects included Raquel Martínez's exhibits of her minimalist collages.

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10. Ojea and Lewin are represented in the COAM Library database with eleven entries and two buildings in the Architecture Guide. They bequeathed their archive to the Servicio Histórico del COAM in 2004. Available at: <https://www.coam.org/media/Default%20Files/fundacion/servicio-historico/documentacion/docs/2020/DONACION%20Ojea-Lewin%20-%20web.pdf>

Among the architects who graduated in 1969, we find Teresa Domínguez, a municipal architect in Illescas. She conducted maintenance works for the Guardia Civil buildings and travelled alone by car to oversee projects throughout Spain. Also graduating in the last year of the decade was Concepción Maestro Díaz, the first member of the Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Castilla-La Mancha, where she held various positions on the governing board. She was highly active until her passing, supervising a great deal of projects that were completed by other colleagues.

## 6. THE PRELUDE TO THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

This overview of a little-known group of women architects concludes with those who graduated in the early 1970s, closing the promotions of the 1957 study plan. Some of those who obtained their degree in 1970 include Teresa Bonilla Lozano, Cecilia Bielsa Príncipe, Margarita de Luxán García de Diego, M.<sup>a</sup> Antonia González-Valcárcel Sánchez-Puelles and Teresa Arenillas Parra. They form a network of professionals who recall shared experiences, travels, and other academic and professional events. In their early years of professional development, they remain a significant minority in a male-dominated profession, but their attitudes and achievements attest to an equality they fought to uphold, despite the gender gaps that the Spanish cultural moment did not allow to ignore.

Cecilia Bielsa and M.<sup>a</sup> Antonia González-Valcárcel had an intense and extensive professional career, in partnership with Zacarias González, husband of the former, and Francisco Landínez, husband of the latter. However, their emphasis on the part of the work they carried out individually reaffirms their independence and determination to differentiate from them. In 1995, Cecilia Bielsa transformed the Quintana Garage in Ferraz Street to adapt it into a building for university use. Alongside her partner, they also undertook the restoration of the Casa del Conde de Bugallal, an original work by Antonio Palacios, renovated by Bernardo Giner de los Ríos, which they transformed into a luxury hotel in 2001.

M.<sup>a</sup> Antonia González-Valcárcel specialised in both restoration and urban planning. She began her professional career in Panama, where she relocated to draw up the Master Plan for Old Panama, an urban archaeology system

that she later conveyed in her restoration classes for the OAS (Organization of American States) in Quito and Spain. Subsequently, in their shared office, they worked on urban plans and restoration projects, such as those for Caravaca de la Cruz, the churches of Colmenar de Oreja (Europa Nostra Award), Belmonte de Tajo, San Esteban in Fuenlabrada, or San Fermín de los Navarros in Madrid. In 1982, she participated in the European Year of Rehabilitation with exhibitions, lectures, and various articles. As she likes to emphasise, she worked on the restoration of the museums: Cerralbo (from 1980 to 1992), Nacional de Artes Decorativas and Cervantes House-Museum in Alcalá de Henares, as well as the Ermita de la Virgen del Puerto in Madrid (González-Valcárcel, 2022) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. M.<sup>a</sup> Antonia González-Valcárcel visiting a work site with her colleagues, ca. 1975



Source: Courtesy of the architect



Margarita de Luxán has developed a career deeply rooted in collective work, leading initiatives across various fields. She got her doctorate in 1986 with a dissertation on architecture in science fiction literature. She has been professor of Graphic Expression at the ETSAM since 1999. Her commitment to bioclimatic construction has paved an unquestionable path today, positioning her in both the realms of research and professional practice. Close to her team, she has won numerous awards for projects and works in national and international competitions (Paris 1980, Tokyo 2005, etc.) and has been involved in significant research projects. She served as a general speaker for Spain at the United Nations in 1992, 1996, 2014 and 2016; as an expert in Sustainable Architecture and Urban Planning for the Ministerio de Obras Públicas and the Ministerio de Fomento (Ministries of Public Works); head of Environmental Integration Studies for the Andalusian Empresa de Suelo Público (Public Land Company) in 2001 and for the Mediterranean Games in 2005 (de Luxán, 2022) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Bioclimatic window designed by Margarita de Luxán and architect's portrait in 2014



Source: Courtesy of the architect

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Teresa Arenillas belongs to the 121<sup>st</sup> graduating class<sup>11</sup>. She served as head of the Oficina Comarcal de Rehabilitación de Edificios (OCRE) of San Lorenzo de El Escorial (1985-95) and was a member of the Consejo para la Sostenibilidad, Innovación y Calidad de la Edificación del Ministerio de la Vivienda (Council for Sustainability, Innovation and Quality in Building of the Ministry of Housing), as an expert advisor (2007-10). She organised and published the encounters between modernity and postmodernity, inviting Jacques Derrida as one of the guests. Additionally, she participated in four UIA congresses (Arenillas, 2023). In her extensive professional biography, she stands out for significant works on general, territorial and regional planning, as well as projects such as the environmental and landscape adaptation of the Madres del Rao and its surroundings, in Granada (2006), and the restoration of the old mill and light factory of Salto de Casillas, in Córdoba (2009), for its conversion into a museum of energy from the late 19th to the early 20th century. She was a member of the Governing Board of the COAM (2001-02) (Figure 4).

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11. Regarding the 121<sup>st</sup> graduating class, according to a 1968 yearbook: out of a total of 230 students, nineteen of them were women (8.26%). M.<sup>a</sup> Teresa Arenillas Parra, M.<sup>a</sup> del Mar Benito Pallares, M.<sup>a</sup> Isabel Cámara Guezala, M.<sup>a</sup> Amada Celaya Errazu, M.<sup>a</sup> del Pilar Contreras Merino, M.<sup>a</sup> Mercedes Fernández Urrialde, Amalia García Díaz, M.<sup>a</sup> de las Nieves García Iñesta, M.<sup>a</sup> Mercedes García Roldán, M.<sup>a</sup> Antonia González Valcárcel, Estrella Gutiérrez López, M.<sup>a</sup> Agustina Herrero Molina, Margarita Luxán García de Diego, M.<sup>a</sup> Rosa Méndez Martínez, Elena Menéndez Jaquotot, M.<sup>a</sup> José Rodríguez-Tarduchy Díez, M.<sup>a</sup> Ángeles Ruiz-Escrivá de Romaní, M.<sup>a</sup> Pilar Sancho Marco, and M.<sup>a</sup> Dolores Vivanco González.

Figure 4. «Mothers of Rao» project by Teresa Arenillas, 2006



Source: Courtesy of the architect

## 7. THE FEMALE STUDENTS OF THE 1957 STUDY PLAN LAST GRADUATING CLASS

### 7.1. The subject of Project Design

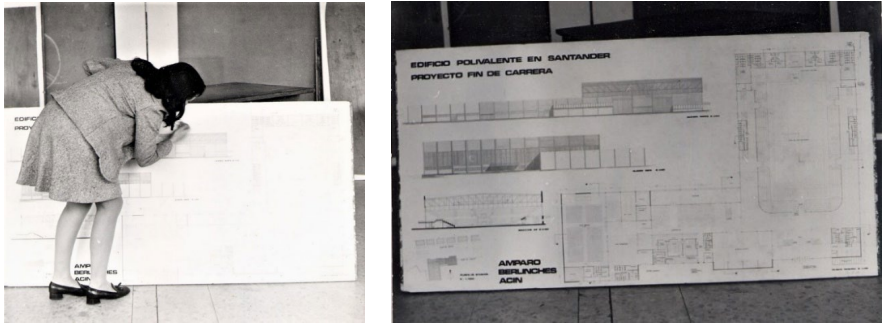
It is noteworthy to mention that, in the 1957 study plan, the design studio module was already present in the first academic years, moving to the third and subsequent years in the 1964 study plan. This meant that students had to start designing early on and dedicate many hours to it each week.

In the 1966-67 academic year report, Carmen Bravo Durá is mentioned as the representative for project design and as the administrator of the Council, both positions elected by her peers. As design delegate, Bravo was the liaison with the professors, who in this academic year were Alejandro de la Sota with his assistants Francisco González, Carlos Trabazo, José Carlos Laredo and Juan Navarro Baldeweg. They worked on projects related to housing, phytopathological station, a beach hut, a restaurant, and a motel, some in teams of ten people, as well as a project on Le Corbusier (Memoria, 1966, p. 3).

Regardless of the sections, as they were called in the syllabus, the Final Year Project was a new work that each student had to develop. In 1971, students María Victoria Laffón and Maruja Gutiérrez Díaz presented a hotel, while Amparo Berlinches and María Jesús Zueco developed a multi-purpose building in Santander. Zueco still remembers that her project was chosen among the twelve best works, being the only female student. She travelled with her eleven colleagues to Santander, where they were received by the mayor and exhibited their projects<sup>12</sup>.

A couple of years later, Carmen Bravo presented a museum inspired by Mies van der Rohe's Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, whose way of organising the space impressed her<sup>13</sup>. Bravo had married a fellow student during her studies and already had two daughters when she submitted her project. Rita Iranzo was also a mother of two girls when she submitted her Final Year Project in 1975: a home for the elderly (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Amparo Berlinches retouching the presentation of her Degree Final Project, 1971



Source: Courtesy of the architect

12. Josenia Hervás's interview with architect María Jesús Zueco Royo, August 29, 2023.

13. Josenia Hervás's interview with architect Carmen Bravo Durá, September 16, 2023.

## 7.2. Cultural activities

The last graduating class of the 1957 study plan, known as the 122<sup>nd</sup> promotion, was very close-knit and participated in numerous extracurricular activities. Departments of music, theatre, painting, and architecture were established in 1966. Ana Iglesias González, whose father was a renowned pianist, oversaw organising activities related to music, and it is not surprising that she managed to arrange a concert with Narciso Yepes, Odón Alonso and the Madrid Philharmonic, among other events. In the painting section, there was a committee consisting of three female and three male students: Amparo Berlinches, Maruja Gutiérrez, Isabel G.<sup>a</sup> Elorza, Fernando Colomo, Luis Pangua, and Fernando Tudela. This group was responsible for providing information about exhibitions in Madrid, such as those of Miralles and Zobel at Juana Mordó's, or Vela Zanetti at the Biosca gallery. They also brought a short film on Picasso to the school, facilitated by the French Institute. Extracurricular activities related to architecture were handled by student Fernando Tudela, who reported on various lectures offered that year, such as the one given by the architect André Wogenscky on Le Corbusier, which aroused great interest among his peers. The theatre group was very active, and the performance of Federico García Lorca's *Bodas de Sangre* at San Agustín College is remembered. During the 1967 academic year, student M.<sup>a</sup> Teresa Rodríguez, along with Juan Valera and Gonzalo Fernández, organised a study trip through Andalusia (Memoria, 1966, p. 7) (Figure 6).

Figure 6. The 122<sup>nd</sup> graduating class of the ETSAM at the door of the School, ca 1965



Source: Courtesy of the architect Ana Iglesias

### 7.3. Female protagonism

The female students of the 122<sup>nd</sup> graduating class accounted for less than 6% in percentage compared to the male peers<sup>14</sup>, however, it is evident that they were active participants and organisers of most cultural activities and study trips offered at the school. This means that their involvement with architectural culture went beyond achieving good grades. Architects Berlinches, Iglesias and Zueco recall those years similarly: they were aware that it had been challenging for them to get there, and they felt a profound sense of responsibility.

There was a spirit of equality that we imposed. I would not let them pay for my sandwich, or if they did one day, the next day I was already paying.

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14. Out of a total of 207 students, twelve of them were women.

I also did not like everyone to stepping aside for me to pass through the door first. My surname helped me; I always said that Zueco is the last one on the class list... so the last one to enter. They laughed and understood; it only had to be explained once<sup>15</sup>.

Many of these female students formed intense friendships that they still maintain today. Their studies concluded in the first half of the seventies, and they were active participants in the architectural profession during the transition period, becoming experienced architects in the following decades.

#### 7.4. Professional activity

The twelve women who began their studies at the Escuela de Madrid became twelve architecture professionals with a multifaceted dedication. María Jesús Zueco founded her own studio with her design colleague from school. After graduating in 1971, they got married in 1972 and set up their office in Mondragón. She recalls being a multitasking architect, to whom the entire town turned for housing and premises. As the head of a building site, she was introduced to the trades as: «M.<sup>a</sup> Jesús, the architect's wife; she will tell you how she wants things done, and after correcting the good man and making things clear, I thought, thank goodness my husband is not a surgeon» (Zueco, 2023, p. 196).

Carmen Bravo also established an office with her husband and other professional colleagues. During the Spanish transition and throughout the 1980s they, along with several offices, shaped the new neighbourhood of Palomeras (Bravo, 1983, pp. 50-54), south of Madrid (Cordero, 2020, p. 8) (Figure 7).

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15. Josenia Hervás's interview with architect María Jesús Zueco Royo, August 29, 2023.

Figure 7. Carmen Bravo with the Palomeras Sureste team, 1981.



Source: Courtesy of the architect

The importance of communal spaces in this type of multifamily housing was evident in a lecture given in 2023 (Bravo, 2023). In her extensive career, notable works include restoration projects such as the Sinagoga del Tránsito in Toledo and the refurbishment and commissioning of the new López de Ayala Theatre in Badajoz, which was of special relevance to her and presented great management challenges (Verissimo, 2016). Bravo's and her associates' work has been widely published both in Spain and abroad.

Ana María Fernández Puentes fondly remembers her former colleagues Rita Iranzo and M.<sup>a</sup> Teresa Rodríguez. Upon completing her degree, she worked in the office of César Portela and later set up an independent studio with Pascuala Campos (the pioneer and first professor of Architectural Design in Spain who graduated from the School of Barcelona). The most noteworthy projects from that time were the nine cooperative housing and



studios in the old town of Pontevedra, known as Cooperativa San Martiño (1990-1998). After years of collaboration between the two women, Fernández became independent and currently runs an office actively seeking funding for the rehabilitation of several collective houses in Cotobad, Pontevedra<sup>16</sup>.

Isabel García Elorza, along with a group of architects educated around Saturnino Cisneros (Juan Carmona, Manuel Fernández and Jesús Heredia), won the first prize in the 1978 competition for the planning of the new university in Zaragoza (Martínez, 2001, pp. 122-123). She subsequently built the Faculty of Law new lecture hall between 1983 and 1996 (Lus-Arana & Pérez-Moreno, 2021). This was not her only award; in 1987, she won the Ideas Competition for Temporary Removable Wooden Shelters, organised by the MOPU, and in 1995, the preliminary project for the rehabilitation of the Canal Imperial de Aragón. Along with Manuel Fernández, she renovated the Palacio de los Torreros in 1978 for the new headquarters of the Aragón and La Rioja Architects Association, which in 1982 became a historic-artistic monument (García & Fernández, 1982). Between 1992 and 1997 she worked in the municipal office of Plan General of the Zaragoza City Council, later collaborating with the Regional Government of Aragón.

Not all the women architects of the 122<sup>nd</sup> promotion dedicated themselves to new construction or rehabilitation within a studio. Maruja Gutiérrez Díaz, through a postgraduate research scholarship at the University of Edinburgh, encountered the field of computing. In the 1980s she was appointed head of Centro de Información y Documentación del Área Metropolitana de Madrid (Information and Documentation Centre of the Metropolitan Area of Madrid), in charge of regional information systems. In her article in the *Ciudad y Territorio* magazine, she was already demanding greater transparency in urban planning information so that urban planning would be understandable to the entire population (Gutiérrez, 1981). She joined the European Commission in 1988 as a specialist in modern technologies, eventually becoming head of the Innovation Unit at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture. The highlights of her European career include updating and networking the Commission's

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16. Josenia Hervás's interview with architect Ana María Fernández Puentes, July 18, 2023.

libraries, the *eLearning* initiative, and the successful *eTwinning*, which continues today as a platform for twinning between European schools. However, there is a transcendental work in which she is immensely proud: the creation, along with three other people, of the official website of the European Union (Europa.eu)<sup>17</sup> (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Maruja Gutiérrez in the North Sea during her directorship at the European Commission, 1996



Source: Courtesy of the architect

After retiring, she returned to Madrid to work as an independent consultant in the fields of new technologies and education. Her book *Formación innovadora, Nuevos modelos para la formación en la Administración pública*, addresses both aspects focused on public entities (González & Gutiérrez, 2013).

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17. Josenia Hervás's interview with architect Maruja Gutiérrez Díaz, September 23, 2023.

Amparo Berlinches and Ana Iglesias have also worked for various public administrations<sup>18</sup>. Until 1985, both architects collaborated with the Instituto de Restauración y Conservación del Ministerio de Cultura, with numerous interventions in churches, town halls, monuments, and historic areas in Spain (Hervás, 2021) (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Ana Iglesias on the vault of the Church of Santa María de Alaejos (Valladolid), 1975.



Source: Courtesy of the architect

They were already specialists in rehabilitation and restoration, but continued their training after completing their degree, taking various courses in France, Germany, and England. Berlinches won the Premio Nacional de Restauración y Rehabilitación de Edificios (National Prize for Building Restoration and Rehabilitation) in 1980 for her work on the Mudejar Church of San Martín de

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18. Josenia Hervás's joint interview with architects Amparo Berlinches and Ana Iglesias, January 16, 2020.

Valdilecha (Madrid), where she supervised the restoration of structural and decorative elements, mural paintings, and archaeological research (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1980).

1985 was a year of vital importance for Spain and Portugal due to the signing of their accession treaties to the European Economic Community. The *Operation Welcome* was organised, and professional women from both countries were invited on a trip to strengthen relations with their counterparts in Italy and Ireland. European authorities aimed to extend these trips for women to different countries so that «the other half of society» could carry out joint actions<sup>19</sup>. Berlinches participated in this delegation as an award-winning architect. These were the first steps to encourage joint exchange of experiences within the EU framework (Hervás & Blanco, 2020). The same year, Ana Iglesias requested voluntary transfer to the Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid (CAM) as Arquitecta Jefe de la Inspección Técnica (chief architect of the Technical Inspectorate), where she worked for five years alongside archaeologist Pilar Mena in excavations linked to the sites in the historic center of Madrid. Berlinches also moved to the CAM in 1985, as directora del Centro de Restauración del Patrimonio (head of the Heritage Restoration Centre), becoming deputy director general of Architecture from 1987 to 1995. It was during this period that, together with the COAM, the architecture guides of Madrid were written. Since then, Amparo has not stopped working on the monitoring and cataloguing of the built heritage in Madrid (Berlinches, 2023).

Ana Iglesias took on the role of head of rehabilitation of the Empresa Municipal de la Vivienda (EMV) of Madrid in 1992. During her tenure, the institution received two Europa Nostra awards in 1998 (special mention for the rehabilitation of the historic center) and 2003 (special mention for the tourist and cultural pedestrian axis in the Paseo del Prado-Bailén). As head of Residential Innovation Projects (2005-2012), within the EMV, she was involved in national and international projects (Manubuild, INVISIO, CETICA I3CON, BALI) that emphasised user participation, housing flexibility, application of new materials, and energy efficiency. She participated

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19. European Commissioner for the Environment Carlo Ripa di Meana's letter to Amparo Berlinches, December 12, 1985. Amparo Berlinches's professional archive.

in the development of Madrid's first eco-neighbourhood, where a district heating system was constructed for cogeneration of heating and DHW using fuel cells. Additionally, she installed, for the first time in the city, a pneumatic waste collection system (Hervás, 2021).

Rita Iranzo Fernández's professional career focused on teaching from the very beginning. She completed her studies in 1975, and in 1976, she joined the Architectural Graphic Expression department. Iranzo followed in the professional footsteps of her mother, Rita Fernández Queimadelos, one of the pioneers of Spanish architecture. However, Iranzo's student life was interrupted by her social and political commitment during the Franco dictatorship. Her partner, Luis Erik Clavería, who would later become the first democratic mayor of the Real Sitio de San Ildefonso-La Granja, was a significant figure against the Franco regime. Faced with serious threats, they decided to move to England.

In the early 1970s, Iranzo had to balance her distance studies with a part-time job in London at the Easton, Robertson, Preston & Partners office. She maintained close contacts with her study companions and had a strong connection with Ana María Fernández Puentes due to their family backgrounds related to the Residencia de Señoritas in Madrid, a cultural reference point in the 1930s with a solid network of connections between Europe and the United States (Lemus, 2022, p. 15). While mother and daughter never worked together, Rita's daughter recalls accompanying her mother on inspections related to her role as an architect for school buildings:

I have heard my mother say many times, it must be done tonight... I have also folded blueprints and had to check that the seven copies were in order before taking them to the appropriate institutions or to the Architects Association<sup>20</sup>.

Rita Iranzo, from her position as an architect and professor, participated in the seminar *Urbanismo y Mujer. Nuevas visiones del espacio público y privado*, first held in Málaga in 1993 and the following year in Toledo. These encounters were funded through the European program NOW (New Opportunities for Women) by the newly created women's institutes (Blanco & Hervás, 2023,

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20. Josenia Hervás and Eva Hurtado's interview with architect Rita Iranzo Fernández, July 7, 2023.

p. 408). They were organised by the Ph. D. architects Rosa Barba Cánovas and Adriana Bisquert Santiago (then professors at the ETSAB), Pascuala Campos de Michelena (then professor at the ETSAC), along with the sociology professor M.<sup>a</sup> Ángeles Durán Heras, pioneers in addressing the relations between gender and architecture. Isabel León García, the secretary of the CSCAE, coordinated the courses, being their target public registered women architects throughout Spain. Iranzo contributed two chapters to the proceedings book *Color y Ciudad* (Iranzo, 1995a) and *Habitar: Habilitar y Rehabilitar* (Iranzo, 1995b), as well as numerous published articles. She continued teaching at the ETSAM until her retirement, obtaining her doctorate in 2015 at the age of seventy with the doctoral thesis *Color y arquitecturas revocadas de La Granja de San Ildefonso: urbanismo mano-nido*, with Pascuala Campos, who then had become full professor, as a member her thesis committee.

María Victoria Flórez Laffón was a friend of Rita Iranzo since early age. Both studied at Colegio Estudio and shared classrooms again during their architecture studies. María Victoria's aunt was also an architect, like Iranzo's mother, but in addition, her father and her illustrious grandfather, Antonio Flórez Urdampilleta, were architects. Antonio Flórez was recognised, among other merits, for systematising the design and construction of school groups between the 1920s and 1930s. Flórez Laffón participated in the catalogue and exhibition on her grandfather's work held at the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid, and in 2017, she donated the project's graphic documentation for the renovation of the Royal Theatre to the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando. Her professional career has developed in the public company Aena, which manages airports in Spain.

María Teresa Rodríguez-Carrascal Rosado was admitted in September 1979 to the selective exams to apply for a position as Arquitecto del Servicio de Extensión Agraria (Agricultural Extension Service architect), where eleven candidates competed, including another woman architect, M.<sup>a</sup> Sonsoles Albi García (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1979). She is listed as an active entrepreneur, and her children continue the family legacy as the third generation of architects. They have worked on various projects, but one particularly notable for being a family project: the transformation of an old building into a hotel, the *Posada del Agua*, located at El Burguillo reservoir in 2007 (Jaen, 2023).

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

The seven pioneering woman architects who graduated under the 1914 and 1932 ETSAM study plans were aware of their uniqueness. Their determination to achieve excellence is evident, an inevitable condition of this new minority, and it served as a testimonial example that influenced the evolution in the polytechnic classrooms.

The number of women architects graduating under the 1957 plan exceeds fifty. Women in Francoist Spain represented a mere 5% of the architecture profession (Agudo Arroyo & Sánchez de Madariaga), a gender gap only overcome years later. During the decline of the dictatorship and over the democratic transition, they did not consider feminism as the main theme for debate. The lack of freedom in Spain held greater importance for women's collectives so gender issues were usually envisioned as ancillary concerns (Cuesta, 2003).

Yet they were the first professionals active during the Spanish transition. In a strongly hierarchical and centralised landscape, they contributed to modernising it from relevant leadership positions in several fields. Twelve of them made up the 122<sup>nd</sup> graduating class, closing the stage of architectural studies with admission exams predating the 1964 study plan.

Besides, the majority of them came from affluent backgrounds with progressive spirit which gave support, not always easy, to the unusual decision to enter a male-dominated profession. An advanced mindset for women of their time is confirmed by their shared interests in sports, music, and particularly their passion for travel and stays abroad.

The drop-out rate from studies or the profession was virtually non-existent, despite a context that encouraged women to quit their jobs when they got married. Their commitment to balancing family life and managing the chosen new professional role stands out, despite the prevalence of a very traditional social and legal status still applicable to them.

Such determined effort during their time at the university continued in long and fruitful careers as architects, often working alone, as well as in collaboration with their husbands and other colleagues. This is precisely a typical feature of the architect profession, its endogamous nature, which all

these women explain from their undeniable role as authors and responsible for their works<sup>21</sup>.

Being part of a struggling minority, this condition generated a network of friendships and complicity among them, a ‘network of women’ that accompanied them, punctuating their work with meetings, travels, collaborations, and vivid memories of belonging to a group. A fact that, however, they do not easily explicit.

A relevant example of sorority can be found in the relationship between a woman already experienced as an architect and an aspiring one. This is the case of Matilde Ucelay and Elena Arregui, whose respective graduation dates are more than twenty years apart. Yet it can be stated that one woman was a mentor to the other, since Ucelay accompanied Arregui in the search for a drawing academy to prepare his entry into the Madrid School (Novas-Ferradás et al. 2020, p. 5). For her part, Professor Margarita de Luxán recognised Juana de Ontañón, twenty-five years older than her, as her reference, since de Luxán began her career as an architect hired by Ontañón’s office. Similarly, Margarita Mendizábal, who joined the Architectural Design Department of the ETSAM in 1965, must also have been a mentor for Emilia Checa, eleven years younger than the former, when the latter began teaching alongside her in 1968.

Amparo Berlinches, in a lecture given in 2018, highlighted the role played by those women architects who preceded her—Matilde Ucelay, M.<sup>a</sup> Cristina Pintor and Rita Fernández Queimadelos—and recounted her experience as an architect (Berlinches, 2018). Moreover, Berlinches made explicit that she decided to study Architecture because of her elder sister, Isabel, who was already a student at the ETSAM before she joined the School and graduated in 1969. Years later, Carmen Rojas took part in a round table of women architects where publicly acknowledged that «I owe a lot to Amparo Berlinches, she truly was my teacher, my mirror in which I had to look at myself to see if I could ever look like her», getting from Berlinches a loving gesture of

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21. There are two research projects with maps that locate the built works of many of these women architects. The MUWO website (<https://muwo.unizar.es/>) and the NAM app (*Navegando Arquitecturas de Mujer*: <https://navegandoarquitecturasdemujer.ua.es/navegando-arquitecturas-de-mujer>).



complicity (Berlinches, 2023). Thus, we can see how the figure of Berlinches is a generational link between the pioneering female architects and the later promotions of women architects still working actively.

The multifaceted nature of professional careers, being an inherent condition of the architect profession, is particularly remarkable in the ones of the first women practitioners. In almost all cases, they worked at or run their own offices, but there are also many who hold other positions of responsibility in the Administration, University, professional associations, or elsewhere. A multiplication of tasks that was related to survival and the difficulty for them to access more significant commissions, but also to their own culture as women who took on political responsibilities and were committed to change during the democratic transition in Spain.

These women architects also confirm another characteristic of the vocation for architecture in general, which is the tendency to prolong the moment of retirement. They maintained, until advanced ages, certain public, and participatory activity in professional forums, such as some work in the studio and on projects that often result in connection and continuity with younger generations<sup>22</sup>.

They are authors of significant architectures but also general directors, heads of departments, advisors, businesswomen, municipal architects, doctors, professors, experts, and participants in international forums, among other proportionally numerous achievements. With their work, they represent the female references that precede and shape the generations that witnessed the transition from the dictatorship to the 21st century. They themselves contributed to the beginning of studies on architecture and gender, whose true dimension is still to be properly known and valued.

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22. The ACE 2021 survey carried out by the Architects' Council of Europe reflects that over 40% of architects state they have no intention of retiring or plan to do so after the age of 70.

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