

WOMEN ARCHITECTS AND SOCIAL HOUSING IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY (1978-2008). AN APPROACH FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

ARQUITECTAS Y VIVIENDA SOCIAL EN EL PAÍS VASCO (1978-2008). UN ACERCAMIENTO DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA FEMINISTA

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Abstract

This article addresses the presence of women architects in social housing in the Basque Country between 1978 and 2008 from a feminist perspective. To this end, the first section of the paper is devoted to the figure of the architect Margarita Mendizábal, in order to display the unequal and male-dominated professional context that the Basque architect found after her graduation in 1956. In 1978, after two decades in the profession, Mendizábal designed a project to build a hundred social housing units in Madrid, in fact, the largest social housing project that she developed during her professional career. Until the early seventies there is no woman working as freelance architect in the Basque Country. In 1977, the School of Architecture of the UPV/EHU (University of the Basque Country) was created; this fact worked as an activating agent for the presence of women architects after the beginning of the nineties. In this regard, the last section of this article provides statistical data to quantify the presence of women architects in the Basque Country. This data gathers information related to women architects teaching at the School of Architecture of the UPV/EHU,

in the professional sphere as freelance architects belonging to the Basque-Navarre Architects Association (COAVN) and, finally, in designing social housing developed by the Basque Government after taking over this area in 1981. The quantification of women out of total social housing developments shows that there are many fewer female than male architects working in this field. Furthermore, we provide a series of social housing cases authored or co-authored by women architects that show a relevant contribution to architecture and architectural culture in the Basque Country.

Keywords: women architects; social housing; Basque Country; feminist perspective; architecture; Basque-Navarre Architects Association; School of Architecture; University of the Basque Country.

Resumen

Este artículo realiza una aproximación a la presencia de arquitectas en el proyecto y construcción de la vivienda social en el País Vasco entre 1978 y 2008 desde una perspectiva feminista. Para ello, en el primer apartado se parte de la figura de Margarita Mendizábal con el objetivo de exponer el desigual y masculinizado contexto profesional que la arquitecta vasca encontró tras su titulación en 1956. En 1978, tras dos décadas en la profesión, Mendizábal realizó un proyecto para la construcción de un centenar de viviendas sociales en Madrid que fue el mayor encargo residencial de carácter social que la arquitecta desarrolló durante su carrera profesional. En el País Vasco, hasta principios de los años setenta, no hubo mujeres que trabajaran como arquitectas liberales. No obstante, la creación, en 1977, de la Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de la Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (UPV/EHU) ejercería, a partir de principios de los años noventa, de agente activador de la presencia de arquitectas en el panorama arquitectónico vasco. En este sentido, en el último apartado de este artículo se aportan tablas estadísticas que permiten la cuantificación de arquitectas en el País Vasco. Estos datos recogen información relativa a la presencia de mujeres en el ámbito formativo de la Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de la UPV/EHU, en el ámbito profesional como arquitectas colegiadas en el Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos Vasco-Navarro (COAVN) y, finalmente, en el proyecto y construcción de viviendas de protección oficial promovidas por el Gobierno Vasco desde la asunción de las competencias en esta materia a partir de 1981. La cuantificación de arquitectas sobre el total de viviendas de protección oficial refleja que hay menos mujeres que hombres trabajando en este campo. Por último, se incluye una selección de casos de vivienda social de autoría o coautoría femenina que refleja diferentes aportaciones relevantes a la arquitectura y a la cultura arquitectónica de Euskadi.

Palabras clave: arquitectas; vivienda social; País Vasco-Euskadi; perspectiva feminista; arquitectura; Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos Vasco-Navarro; Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura; Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea.

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In 1752, since the Spanish Enlightenment system established the obligation to train and obtain a diploma in architecture, with the creation of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid, the regulation of the architectural profession has assigned in parallel exclusive competences and functions to architects. These functions were essentially related to construction technology, such as the execution of public buildings, the construction of military buildings, the reconstruction of defence elements in the event of war or the management of the fire brigade of any municipality, among others.

These scientific-technical functions derived from the sexual division of trades and professions established by the Enlightened state and reinforced «the cultural stereotype that enshrines technology as an activity suitable for men» (Wajcman, 2006, p. 29). There was, as known, no place for female training on equal terms with that of men.

After the mid-19th century, with the creation of the Schools of Architecture in Madrid and Barcelona (the only two schools of architectural training in Spain until the mid-20th century) the access to formal training in architecture was not specifically forbidden to women (Prieto González, 2004, p. 481). Nevertheless, the high percentage of female illiteracy prevented, among other reasons, access to training in architecture to women, whose study required scientific-technical knowledge¹.

At the beginning of the 20th century, new laws allowed proper access to university education and to the professional practice granted by the study of these degrees². From 1931 onwards, the first enrolments of women started at the School of Architecture of Madrid. However, architectural studies were not considered appropriate for women (Núñez Pérez, 1989, p. 327).

The outbreak of the civil war in Spain, and the subsequent installation of the Franco's dictatorship in 1939 created a social-political order that

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1. It was required to have taken several high school subjects such as Physics and Chemistry, Geometry and Trigonometry or Arithmetic and Algebra, among others (Prieto González, 2004).
 2. On March 8, 1910, the Royal Order allowing women to enrol in the university on equal terms with men was approved, and on September 2, 1910, the corresponding Royal Order authorising women to exercise professions related to the Ministry of Public Instruction was passed.

identified the feminine with the domestic, which did not favour women's access to architectural studies. Indeed, since Matilde Ucelay, the first Spanish woman architect, graduated in 1936, there were only ten women architects in Spain until 1964³, two of whom stand out for their Basque origin: Margarita Mendizábal (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 1931-Madrid, 2023) and Elena Arregui (Irún, 1929-Santiago, 2018). Both women graduated at the School of Architecture of Madrid in 1956 and 1958, respectively.

At the beginning of the Spanish transition to democracy, at the end of the seventies of the last century, the activation of the presence of women architects started, both in the Schools of Architecture and in the professional sphere (Agudo & Sánchez de Madariaga, 2011; Pérez-Moreno & Santamera, 2018). Also in the Basque Country, the first women architects enrolled at the Basque-Navarre Architects Association (COAVN)⁴ began to practise as freelance professionals in 1971 (Acasuso, 2023b). At that time, the beginning of the democratic process after Franco's dictatorship brought the need for social, administrative and cultural facilities⁵ that boosted architectural production in the Basque territory (Mas, 1990, p. 11). Among the public facilities, the housing projects promoted by the Administration shaped «the evolution of architecture in the Basque Country» (Mas, 1990, p. 12). In this way, the need to build social housing became «the main element of attention to refer [...] the renewal of ideas in terms of urban planning and architecture» in the Basque Country (Galarraga, 1985, p. 3). Therefore, approaching the evolution of the presence of women architects in design and construction of public housing—which is a relevant field in architecture—provides a limited framework from which we can quantify the evolution of women's

3. Matilde Ucelay, Rita Fernández Queimadelos, Cristina Gonzalo, Juana de Ontañón, Margarita Mendizábal, Maria Eugenia Pérez Clemente, Elena Arregui, Milagros Rey Hombre, Margarita Brender and Mercedes Serra were the ten only women holding a degree in architecture until 1964 in Spain.

4. Note that in Spain all architects that work as freelance have to be registered in at least one Architects Association. For the Basque Country and Navarre's case, there is the COAVN (Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos Vasco-Navarro), the Basque-Navarre Architects Association.

5. «The transfer of power from the central government made possible the creation and re-establishment of different public and private entities» whose objective was to spread Basque culture (Lekuona, 2021, p. 166).

access to architecture, as well as to analyse this access from a critical feminist perspective.

This article is organised through two different sections linked to methodological orientation, on the one hand, and to obtaining results on the other. The first section provides background in order to depict the professional architectural context in the mid-1950s, characterised by unequal conditions in architectural production as experienced by the first women architects in Spain. To this end, this section will focus on the first woman architect of Basque origin, Margarita Mendizábal, who graduated in 1956 and belongs to the first generation of women architects in Spain. Originally, the methodology we followed was based on a broader project initially focused on tracking—by consulting specialised bibliography, and architectural journals in the Basque Country—the first generation of women architects registered in the Basque-Navarre Architects Association (COAVN)⁶, who practised in the Basque Country as freelance architects. Due to their Basque origin, genealogy on first women architects in Spain highlighted Margarita Mendizábal and Elena Arregui. While the architect Elena Arregui, who was born in Irún (Gipuzkoa-Basque Country) in 1929, has already been the object for research in Galicia—the region where she developed practically her entire professional life (Carreiro & López, 2016)—there was little information about Margarita Mendizábal beyond her birth in Vitoria-Gasteiz in 1931, the year of her graduation, 1956, and a few published projects. From late 2022 until her death in June 2023, access to her personal professional archive and subsequent interviews with her allowed us to explore her professional career, as well as to discover the projects on social housing that were signed by Mendizábal on her own, unknown until now.

The second section of this article provides a quantified approach to the presence of women architects in the Basque Country, based on three areas: education (School of Architecture of the UPV/EHU⁷), the Basque-Navarre Architects Association, and the field of social housing. The first two areas

6. The Basque-Navarre Architects Association (Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos Vasco-Navarro, COAVN) was founded in 1931. Since then, it includes the region of the Autonomous Communities of the Basque Country (with a delegation in each one of the provinces: Araba/Álava, Biscay/Bizkaia, and Gipuzkoa), and Navarre.

7. University of the Basque Country.

provide the context and timeline for women in architecture in the Basque Country. The third quantifies⁸ the presence of women architects in the development of social housing (chronologically and based on single or shared authorship) since the Basque Government took control over Housing and Town Planning in 1981.

2. BACKGROUND: WOMEN ARCHITECTS DESIGNING SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECTS THROUGH ARCHITECT MARGARITA MENDIZÁBAL (1956-1978)

According to statistics kept since the end of the Spanish civil war (July 1936-April 1939), in September 1956, the 106th class of the School of Architecture of Madrid⁹ graduated. It was composed of thirty-eight architects (Figure 1). One of them was Margarita Mendizábal, a twenty-five-year-old young woman born in Vitoria-Gasteiz. Immediately after her graduation, she opened her architecture office on her own, without associating with other partners. Thus, on one hand, she became one of the approximately one-thousand five hundred practising architects in Spain and enrolled in the Architects Association, and, on the other hand, one of the ten first women with a degree from a School of Architecture in the country. Consequently, in the mid-50s, the profession was male-dominated. Moreover, about five hundred practising architects had their office in Madrid. Mendizábal could have established her office in Vitoria, her hometown, where not only were less than ten architects practising but, she could have been helped from the well-known architect José Luís López de Uralde, who was her uncle (Figure 2).

8. Data provided by the Directorate of Housing, Land, and Architecture of the Basque Government and by the public company under the Basque Government VISESA (Vivienda y Suelo de Euskadi, S.A.).

9. The annual average for new graduates between 1940 and 1945 is only 33 architects in all of Spain. Later, between 1945 and 1950, the average remained at 35 students. Between 1950 and 1955, the number rose to 51 graduates (Gómez & Vélez, 1975, p. 157).

Figure 1. Image of 106th graduated class of the School of Architecture of Madrid (1956)



Source: Margarita Mendizábal's personal archive

Figure 2. Tribute to Margarita Mendizábal by the COAVN Delegation in Álava (1957)



Source: VV. AA., 2012.

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The construction context that Mendizábal found after graduation was mainly characterised by huge social housing developments whose purpose was to rehouse the population crowded in unsanitary self-built shacks¹⁰. Housing had been one of the leading issues for the architects of the Modern Movement since the early 20th century (Lampreave, 2003, p. 251; Lleó, 2003, p. 8). Francoist institutions promoted social housing projects, such as *Poblados Dirigidos* (New Towns) and *Unidades Vecinales de Absorción* (Neighbourhood Absorption Units), whose volume tended to encompass a plan with one thousand homes¹¹. This type of commission fell on freshly graduated architects (Aman, 2021, p. 127) who built «in a few years, over 20,000 homes» (Sambricio, 2004, p. 329). None of the ten first women architects had access to leading such projects developed by Francoist institutions, which meant huge residential architectural projects, great emoluments, and great professional prestige (Ocerin-Ibáñez & Rodríguez-Oyarbide, 2022, pp. 169-170). Indeed, the constrictive social and professional order that Francoism had imposed on women identified femininity as «the model for women at home, the backbone of the family» (Blanco Herranz, 2005, pp. 56-60). Consequently, for these women, access to large public construction projects of government buildings would have meant an effective way for professional, public, and social presence, far from the domestic feminine image imposed by the regime.

Mendizábal started to receive social housing commissions in the late sixties with her first twenty-four social housing units in Moratalaz, Madrid. This commission came from a workers' cooperative although the plot to be built belonged to the National Institute of Housing; hence, the dwellings became social housing (Ocerin-Ibáñez, 2023b). In parallel, while still a minority, women gradually began to study at the schools of Architecture, with almost forty women enrolled in the mid-sixties (Sánchez de Madariaga, 2012, p. 22).

The same workers' cooperative commissioned Mendizábal another social housing project. She designed some apartments following the rules

10. A focus was placed on developing housing, for which different national and regional regulations were approved which, in general, planned «to build a total of 550,000 homes in a 5-year period» (Cánovas et al, 2021, p. 9).

11. For example, it is worth mentioning that for the *Poblado de Entrevías*, in Madrid, 2,144 homes were built, and 1,723 in Fuencarral (Cánovas et al., 2021, pp. 18, 42).

established in the 1976 Housing Act in Official Protection (*Ley de Vivienda de Protección Oficial de 1976*), which were developed in 1978, in the midst of a political transformation and social and cultural liberalisation. At that time, some Spanish women architects, such as Anna Bofill and María Teresa Muñoz, participated in international monographic feminist debates (Hervás & Blanco, 2020, pp. 6-8). This was also a time when women architects began leading large collective housing projects. In this regard, it is relevant the Palomeras neighbourhood in Madrid, led in 1979 by architect Carmen Bravo Durá (along with another three male architects), where over ten thousand homes were built (Cordero et al, 2022, p. 101). Mendizábal's project, one hundred nine social housing units in ACTUR¹² in the new town of Tres Cantos in Madrid, is certainly smaller in volume, but still the largest projects that the architect designed.

Moreover, within architecture, new approaches stood out with proposals such as the Experimental Homes by Rafael Leoz in Torrejón de Ardoz. At this time, Mendizábal was immersed in teaching the theories of Amos Rapoport, John F. C. Turner, and Nicholas John Habraken, in a doctorate course she taught at the School of Architecture of Madrid where she had worked since 1966. Consequently, Mendizábal proposed a participatory design process for those homes, based on meetings and assemblies with the clients, but mainly by sending a large survey, which helped to plan and establish the desires and needs of users (Ocerin-Ibáñez, 2023b). Thus, both the interior of the homes, the collective spaces (Figures 3 and 4), as well as the environmental symbolic role of the buildings within the neighbourhood were determined based on participatory architecture. In this regard, we can assert that Margarita Mendizábal's architecture became part of the architecture of Madrid in the late seventies, where women architects from the first generation «demonstrated that they could be determining factors in proposing new residential models» (Cordero et al., 2022, p. 107).

12. Acronym for «*Actuaciones Urbanísticas Urgentes* (Urgent Town Planning Actions)» The city of Tres Cantos was one of the first ACTUR developed in Spain. It was created from scratch in a location between the municipality of Colmenar Viejo and the city of Madrid, with the objective of relieving the demographic pressure that Madrid was suffering (Egea, 1993).

Figure 3. Exterior of the 109 social housing units in Tres Cantos, Madrid, designed and built by Margarita Mendizábal (1978)



Source: Margarita Mendizábal's personal archive

Figure 4. Exterior of the 109 social housing units in Tres Cantos, Madrid, designed and built by Margarita Mendizábal (1978)



Source: Margarita Mendizábal's personal archive

3. WOMEN ARCHITECTS IN PLANNING AND BUILDING PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY (1982-2008)

The professional architectural context in the Basque Country was characterised by a very low number of registered architects—in the COAVN—and the almost absence of women architects (Ocerin-Ibáñez, 2023a, p. 39). Architectural culture¹³ was barely noticeable compared with the two main traditional centres of architecture in Madrid and Barcelona, although the well-known architect Oriol Bohigas—and later driving force behind the School of Architecture of the Basque Country—speculated with the Basque region as a «possible third cultural hub, together with Catalonia and Madrid»¹⁴ (Fullaondo, 1970). Nevertheless, architecture reflected the transformation process of the «social and political shift, the result of moving from an authoritarian to a democratic regime» (Guasch, 1980, p. 255). The activating and driving spotlights of architectural culture—specialised journals, congresses, exhibitions, and conferences—were carried out almost exclusively in Madrid and Barcelona until the creation of new Schools of Architecture, with the goal of graduating the necessary architects that the developmental market was demanding (Ocerin-Ibáñez, 2017). From that moment onwards, graduate architects, and consequently professionals, experienced exponential growth (Fernández Alba, 1975). However, the number of women at schools of Architecture was still scant¹⁵.

Decentralisation of architectural education—despite the proximity of the School of Architecture of Pamplona, created in 1964, and the one in

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13. The lack of suitable cultural platforms for cultural dissemination and discussion was one of the main issues in the lack of architectural culture in the Basque Country, according to the renowned architect and critic Juan Daniel Fullaondo (1970).
 14. Fullaondo considered that the Basque Country could be an architectural culture spot providing that it promoted architectural discussion and criticism, not only by the mere existence of a School of Architecture, but also by the publication of magazines, organisation of conferences or critical debate sessions like those that took place in Madrid and Barcelona. The absence of adequate cultural platforms for cultural discussion was one of the main problems of the absence of an architectural culture in the Basque Country for the architect Juan Daniel Fullaondo (1970).
 15. The School of Architecture of Seville graduated 5% of women between 1965 and 1968 (Trillo de Leyva, 2010, p. 302); the School of Navarre, founded in 1964, graduated three women architects in the second class of 1970 (VV. AA., 2015, pp. 4-5).

Valladolid, created in 1968— did not have, at least not initially, the effect of mass graduates and professionals in the Basque Country as it happened in Madrid and Barcelona.

Regarding the presence of women architects in the Basque region, while opening the school in Pamplona led to a relative increase in women architect graduates, it was still a far cry from being the equivalent to men. While in 1974—ten years after its creation—nearly 300 students in total graduated, of which only 30 were women (VV. AA., 2015, pp. 4-5). However, the presence of women architects in the Basque Country was hardly influenced by the number of women architects graduated in Navarre, as most of them settled in that region to practise their profession¹⁶. These women architects were part of the «progressive and growing incorporation of women in architecture studies, such that during these years of ‘transition,’ we find a first generation of women architects» (Pérez-Moreno & Santamera, 2018, p. 33) in the architectural field. As we will see in the next section, the creation in 1977 of the School of Architecture in Donostia/San Sebastián will boost the graduation of women architects in the Basque Country.

3.1. Brief Overview of the Evolution of the Presence of Women Architects in the Basque Country (1978-2008)

While the foundation of the School of Architecture is considered a milestone in the history of architecture in the Basque Country, as it activated the local architectural culture of the time, the positive effect that the creation of this educational institution had on women joining architecture is hardly mentioned. Initially this school was dependent from the School of Architecture of Barcelona¹⁷. In 1978, its second year of existence led to the graduation of

16. The Gipuzkoan Maite Unzurrunzaga and Cristina Fontán, and the Biscayan Guruzne Arroitia and Maivi Morrás, are some of the first women graduates of the School of Architecture of Navarre (AA.VV., 2015, pp. 4-5) who returned to the Basque Country to work as architects and who, therefore, became members of the respective COAVN Delegations in Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia.

17. The diplomas of the first graduates were issued by the School of Architecture of Barcelona until the 1981-82 academic year, when the School of Architecture officially joined the University of the Basque Country/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (UPV/EHU).

the first woman architect in the Basque Country, the Catalan Montserrat Ruiz Fabr . As shown in the following table (Table 1), after Ruiz Fabr  graduated, women’s registration continued rising, reaching 19% on average at the Basque school; while the proportion at the schools of Architecture in Spain was around 15% (Agudo & S nchez de Madariaga, 2011, p. 160). In the late eighties, this number exceeded 30%, and in the late nineties, it was over 50%, anticipating the widespread feminisation of Schools of Architecture from 2007 onwards (Agudo & S nchez de Madariaga, 2011, p. 160).

Table 1. Enrolments in the 5th year at the School of Architecture UPV/EHU

Women enrolments. School of architecture UPV/EHU			
(5th Year)			
Year	Whole enrolments	Women	Percentage
1978	27	1	3%
1981	26	3	12%
1982	23	4	17%
1983	<i>no data</i>	<i>no data</i>	<i>no data</i>
1984	35	5	14%
1985	31	6	19%
1988	28	9	32%
1990	65	16	24%
1992	76	27	35%
1999	148	83	56%

Source: Table prepared by Olatz Ocerin-Ib n ez in collaboration with Erika Morcillo
 Fuentes based on data provided by School of Architecture UPV/EHU

The number of women architect graduates swiftly increased in the Basque Country, maintaining from 2001 until at least 2011 a proportion greater than 54% of female graduates in relation to total graduates (Table 2). Thus, this is similar (in the same period) to other schools of Architecture, such as the University of Alcal  de Henares (Ch as, 2011, p. 98), the School of Madrid (Agudo & S nchez de Madariaga, 2011, p. 163), and the School of A Coru a (Novas, 2021, p. 127).

Table 2. Graduates from School of Architecture UPV/EHU (1995-2011)

Graduates in the School of Architecture UPV/EHU				
	Women	Men	Total	% Women
1995-2000	133	184	317	42%
2001-2006	469	404	873	54%
2007-2011	360	287	647	55%

Source: School of Architecture UPV/EHU

These data on access to education in architecture in the Basque Country contrast with the scant presence of practising women architects. While, in the early eighties there were only fourteen women architects registered¹⁸ in the Basque-Navarre Architects Association, in the early nineties there were still fewer than fifty women architect members (Table 3). It is relevant to know that the province of Álava was characterised by the fact that María Paz Larrumbide was the only practising architect from the time she joined the COAVN in 1974 until 1980 (Acasuso, 2023b, p. 107; Larrumbide, 2023, p. 197). Also in Spain, in the mid-nineties, according to data from the Higher Council of Architects Associations in Spain (Consejo Superior de Colegios de Arquitectos de España or CSCAE), there were only about three thousand five hundred women members, which meant that they signed projects and led their own architectural works (Urrutia, 1997, p. 712).

18. Teresa Unzurrunzaga, Maite Zelaia, Raquel Martínez de Ubago, Belén Galdós Tobalina, Pilar Riocabo, Guruzne Arroitia Astelarra, María Jesús Zueco Royo, Juana María Freixedas Estebanez, María Paz Larrumbide, Ana María Fernández Alday, Isabel Cámara, María Isidra Busturia, Cristina Fontán, and Maivi Morrás (Acasuso, 2023b).

Table 3. Number of registered women architects in the delegations of Álava, Biscay, and Gipuzkoa of the COAVN (1971-2016)

Total women architects				
	COAVN- Álava	COAVN- Biscay	COAVN- Gipuzkoa	Associate members the Basque Country
1970			1	1
1971-1975	1	4	5	10
Until 1980	1	8	7	16
Until 1990	6	26	12	44
Until 2000	20	79	60	159
Until 2010	60	260	256	576
Until 2016	37	185	152	374

Source: Acasuso, 2023a, p. 183

3.2. Presence of Women Architects in Social Housing Projects in the Basque Country (1982-2008)

The early eighties in the Basque Country were marked by the Spanish transition process to democracy along with the creation of the autonomous regions' legal frames. Thus, on the 27th of November, 1981, powers over construction, town planning, and housing were transferred to the Basque Government, taking all responsibility for public construction (Unzurrunzaga, 2018, p. 35). The transfer of assets in public housing—oriented toward new policies that left values from the dictatorship behind and assumed new social values—meant that, during the eighties, most construction in the Basque Country fell under the shape of social housing (Montero, 2018, p. 23). Architects such as Ana María Fernández Alday, Matxalen Fuldain Iturri, and María Paz Larrumbide, who had been practising the profession since the mid-seventies, were some of the first¹⁹ women to design and construct social housing

19. Others such as Maivi Morrás Zuazo, who was graduated at the School of Pamplona in 1976, and who was a grandniece of the architect Secundino Zuazo, became the first president of the COAVN in 2008.

projects in the Basque Country. Indeed, in 1983, one year after the Basque Government received the transfer of power over town planning and housing, the first two projects of social housing whose design team included at least one woman architect were submitted (Table 5).

Upon analysis of general data from the first decade after receiving authority over social housing, we observe that over 35% of projects executed included at least one woman architect in the design team. Notwithstanding, upon observation of this data broken down by number of homes, it decreases by more than ten points, with the result that a woman architect participated in approximately 25% of total homes (Table 4).

Table 4. Social housing projects built between 1983 and 1993 where at least one member of the design team was a woman architect

Social housing between 1983 and 1993 (Basque Government/Eusko Jaurlaritza)				
	Gipuzkoa	Biscay	Álava	Total
Number of homes	1180	1820	423	3423
Total projects	10	11	16	37
Num. wom. arch. homes	42	775	38	855
Total wom. arch. projects	1	12	1	14
Percentage of women arch homes	3.56	42.58	8.98	24.98
Percentage of women arch. projects	10	109.09	6.25	37.84

Source: Table prepared by Olatz Ocerin-Ibáñez in collaboration with Erika Morcillo Fuentes based on data provided by VISESA and the Directorate of Housing, Land, and Architecture of the Basque Country and (Unzurrunzaga, 2018, pp. 34-37)

Table 5. Social housing projects by architecture firms with at least one woman among their members

Social housing in the Basque Country. Developed by the Directorate of Housing and VISESA (Basque Government)			
Period	Number of projects by women architects	Total number of projects	Percentage of projects executed by women
1982-1988	1	57	1.75%
1989-1996	22	106	20.75%
1997-2002	30	80	37.50%
2003-2008	31	176	17.61%
2009-2013	11	59	18.64%

Source: Table prepared by Olatz Ocerin-Ibáñez in collaboration with Erika Morcillo Fuentes based on data provided by VISESA and the Directorate of Housing, Land, and Architecture of the Basque Government

Regarding the timeline, it is noteworthy the significant increase in the number of projects designed by teams including a woman architect among their members during the 1997-2002 period, coinciding with the ‘construction boom’ in all Spain. Also beginning in this period, authorship of social housing projects is set under the title ‘architects’ and sometimes by a section called ‘collaborators’, naming architects who worked and collaborated, at some point, in the development of the project. In these sections, we can find more a balanced data in regard with female presence.

Table 6. Social housing projects with at least one woman architect on the team, organised by provinces

	Social housing projects designed in the Basque Country by architects or teams including at least a woman architect				
	Num. of projects				
	Gipuzkoa	Biscay	Álava	Total projects	Total Wom. archs.**
1982-1988		2		2	3
1989-1996	1	19	2	22	14
1997-2002	7	14	7	28	21
2003-2008	2	25	6	33	21
2009-2013	3	6	1	10	14

* Social housing developed by the Directorate of Housing and VISESA (Basque Government)

** Considers the architect only once, even if she executed several social housing projects.

Source: Table prepared by Olatz Ocerin-Ibáñez in collaboration with Erika Morcillo Fuentes based on data provided by VISESA and the Directorate of Housing, Land, and Architecture of the Basque Government

In terms of region, it should be noted that the province of Biscay was the region with the most projects executed by women architects, as opposed to Álava or Gipuzkoa; the latter being the province with the fewest projects with women architects on their teams (Table 6).

Table 7. Social housing design teams led by women architects

Public housing. Developed by Directorate of Housing and VISESA (Basque Government)			
Period	Projects led by wom. archs.*	Equal teams**	Majority male arch. teams***
1982- 1988	0	0	1
1989- 1996	4	5	13
1997- 2002	3	13	14
2003- 2008	2	10	19
2009- 2013	4	5	2

* Team with one or several women architects

** Teams with 50% women and 50% men

*** Teams with at least one woman architect, a minority as opposed to men

Source: Table prepared by Olatz Ocerin-Ibáñez in collaboration with Erika Morcillo Fuentes based on data provided by the Directorate of Housing, Land, and Architecture of the Basque Government

Finally, it is worth mentioning that social housing projects carried out alone by women architects occur very rarely, not exceeding four projects in periods of five years. However, it is also noteworthy that, during the ten years prior to the 2008 crisis, the number of teams that drafted social housing projects promoted by the Basque Government was very similar to that of teams made up solely of men (Table 7).

3.3. Sample of Social Housing Projects Authored or Co-authored by Women Architects in the Basque Country (1982-2008)

Of all the social housing projects studied, we would like to shine the spotlight on a few cases, due to their singularity. In this regard, the first social housing projects built in each one of the three provinces with a woman architect in their team are noteworthy, because they set the timeline for the participation

of women in public housing. The first in the Basque Country was designed by Ana María Fernández Alday and Matxalen Fuldain Iturri (Ocerin-Ibáñez, 2023a, p. 56) who were part of the design team alongside Andoni Acedo, Eduardo Múgica, and Joseba Escribano in 1982. The commission consisted of fifty social housing units in Barakaldo (Biscay) (Figure 5). The next project was in late 1989 in Vitoria-Gasteiz, the capital of Álava, with a team composed of the architects Isabel Martí and Juan Adrián Bueno (Figure 6).

Figure 5. 50 social housing units, Bilbao, Ana María Fernández Alday, Matxalen Fuldain, and others



Source: Alberto Pinilla Oroz's personal archive

Figure 6. 38 social housing units, Vitoria (1989), Isabel Martí and Juan Adrián



Source: Alberto Pinilla Oroz's personal archive

In Gipuzkoa we have to wait until 1993 for a social housing project developed by the Basque Government with the participation of a woman architect. It was the Navarre native architect Gloria Aríztegui Huarte who, along with architects Antxon Martínez Salazar and Lucas Etxebeste, led the design of forty-two single-family attached homes in the Intxaurreondo neighbourhood of Donostia-San Sebastián (Ocerin-Ibáñez, 2023a, pp. 62-63) (Figure 7). This dwellings stood out because they were selected to form part of the exhibition entitled *Construir desde el interior (Building From the Inside)*²⁰, whose curators were architects Cristina García Rosales and Ana Estirado in 2000 (Figure 8). This exhibition was relevant in Spain's architectural culture, since it was the first exhibition devoted to the work designed and built by women architects. After its inauguration in 1999 in Alcalá de Henares, the exhibition toured in Madrid in 2000, passed through Donostia-San Sebastián in 2001, and then travelled to Vitoria-Gasteiz that same year, where works by the Basque women architects Gloria Iriarte and María Paz Larrumbide were included (Ocerin-Ibáñez, 2023a, p. 64).

Figure 7. 42 social housing units, Donostia/San Sebastián, Gipuzkoa (1993), Gloria Aríztegui, Antxon Martínez de Salazar, and Lucas Etxebeste



Source: Alberto Pinilla Oroz's personal archive

20. The exhibition was structured around different themes, such as the home, everyday life, the school, co-existence, work, and others. It was promoted by the Directorate of Housing, Architecture, and Town Planning under the Ministry of Development.

Figure 8. Gloria Aríztegui (left) along with Cristina García-Rosales and Ana Estirado (right)



Source: Cristina García-Rosales's personal archive

Moreover, we should highlight a project from 1990 by well-known woman architect Beatriz Matos, along with her partner Alberto Castillo, who built two 80-social housing unit building in Basauri, Biscay (Ocerin-Ibáñez, 2023a, pp. 59-61) (Figure 9). This project was one of the first to win the second European Biennial Housing Competition²¹ for young architects. The project has been featured in several exhibitions and publications since then. The architect María Paz Larrumbide, who was the only registered woman architect in Álava until the mid-nineties, executed her first social housing project in 1992 in Biscay (Figure 10).

21. EUROPAN is a European competition for architects younger than forty. Its purpose is to give life to periodical research and experimentation in contemporary housing, where winning architects receive a construction and execution award for their project. This competition was a veritable catalyst for architectural culture in Spain in the nineties.

Figure 9. 80 social housing units, Basauri, Biscay (1990), Beatriz Matos and Alberto Castillo



Source: Alberto Pinilla Oroz's personal archive

Figure 10. 64 social housing units, Abanto and Zierbana, Biscay (1992), María Paz Larrumbide



Source: Alberto Pinilla Oroz's personal archive

Finally, the four projects executed solely by women architects working alone between 1995 and 2008 are of note. The first of them, chronologically, develops 23 social housing units in Ermua, Biscay, designed and built after 1995 by architect Otilia Otxoa—one of the first female students of the School of Architecture at the UPV/EHU) (Figure 11). Additionally, that same year, María Paz Larrumbide, built 36 social housing units in Ortuella, Biscay (Figure 12). In addition, at the end of that year, Teresa Segura Trujillo began the project for 32 social housing units in Muzkiz, Biscay (Figure 13). Lastly, the architect Ana Eguia Solaun was commissioned with designing 18 dwellings in Okondo, Álava, although site management was awarded to another team with male architects among its members (Figure 14). After the completion of these buildings, there were no more projects or works carried out solely by women architects until 2013.

Figure 11. 23 social housing units, Ermua, Biscay, Otilia Otxoa



Source: Alberto Pinilla Oroz's personal archive

Figure 12. 36 social housing units, Ortuella, Biscay (1995), María Paz Larrumbide



Source: Alberto Pinilla Oroz's personal archive

Figure 13. 32 social housing units, Muskiz, Biscay (1995), Teresa Segura



Source: Alberto Pinilla Oroz's personal archive

Figure 14. 18 social homes, Okondo, Álava (1999), Ana Eguia Solaun



Source: Alberto Pinilla Oroz's personal archive

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the first section of this article, Margarita Mendizábal, the first woman architect of Basque origin, showed us the male-dominated and unequal professional practice in the 1950s that the first-generation of women architects had to face. Mendizábal had to practise for twenty years to receive a commission in 1978 for over one hundred social housing units in Tres Cantos. This commission is the largest social housing project she was granted in her professional career.

In the second section, the study presents an overview of the evolution of women's presence in architecture in the Basque Country, focusing the analytical framework on public housing between 1982 and 2008. A previous study in higher education showed that the School of Architecture of the UPV/EHU became a relevant agent for female agency in architecture in the Basque Country. Nevertheless, this fact was not reflected in professional practising

by reviewing the number of enrolments at the Architects Association—and therefore in the professional sphere—where the presence of women remained very low from the early eighties until 2010, approximately.

The timeline for designing the first public housing projects where at least a woman architect belonged to the design team began in 1982 in the province of Biscay, shortly after the Basque Government received power over housing and town planning. Álava was the next province in the late eighties, and Gipuzkoa did not have a social housing project with female co-authorship until 1993.

On one hand, it should be noted that women's participation in social housing projects increased considerably between 1997 and 2002 (Table 3), precisely before the 2008 crisis. However, the number of women architects keeps on being barely lower than men architects developing social housing projects in the Basque Country during this period.

On the other hand, it is remarkable that there are few social housing projects exclusively designed by women architects working alone. This trend changed over the following years, especially after the beginning of the 21st century, but the numbers were still lower than projects drafted by mixed teams or by male architects.

At the beginning of the 21st century, it should be also noted that projects by women architects in the Basque Country were part of a pioneer initiative in displaying the specific contributions of women architects through the exhibition on architecture by women called *Construir desde el interior (Building From the Inside)*. The work of architects Gloria Aríztegui, Beatriz Matos, Gloria Iriarte, and María Paz Larrumbide figured among the exhibitors.

Finally, it can be concluded that women architects in the Basque Country have been present in the design and construction of public housing since the transfer of powers to the Basque Government (1982) once Franco's dictatorship ended and the Spanish transition period to democracy advanced in the territory.

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