

a cura di

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MORE

*Expanding
architecture from
a gender-based
perspective*





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The present volume collects the papers, lectures, video-essays and workshops presented during a three-day-session (26th to 28th January 2017) which took place at the School of Architecture of the Università degli Studi di Firenze (UniFi, Italy) and Figline e Incisa Valdarno.

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FROM ARQUITECTAS TO MATRICES —AND THEN TO MORE

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The article here presented is a personal narrative and has the exclusive goal of recording memories for the future. Therefore, it describes the events presented below from a situated perspective: the author's one. This privileged position, first as a participant, and now, as a narrator, could be problematized. Too often, this is an essential step in feminist research that we tend to —naively and reductively— forget. But already in 1929, Virginia Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own* (2001, p. 2): “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” That is, she must have space and time to independently think and write. Taking this premise into account, this narrative starts.

After meeting in Sevilla in March 2014, an idea came up: organizing the 2nd International Congress on architecture and women in Lisbon. We were enthusiastic about it. We knew we were in the path of the consolidation of a relevant line of research in the South European context and, indeed, this was something new in Portugal.

Immediately, the theoretical and practical organization started. It lasted for almost a year.¹ In the first stage, the biggest challenge was to discuss and define the theme of the congress. The gendered title “ArquitectAs” was a clear statement in the Spanish case. The same idea could not be applied in Portugal, and there were two main reasons why. On the one hand, in the Portuguese language, the word *arquitecta* (women architect) is well-established —unlike *arquitecta* in Spain, where many women architects are still called *arquitecto*. Choosing that word would not be a radical statement. On the other hand, we aimed to take new steps, to develop and expand the many possible intersections within Architecture and Women/Gender. Then, the concept of “Matrices” emerged. Besides, it could be easily translated into English and Spanish without losing its original meaning in Portuguese.

As explained in the official website of the congress, this concept “has several definitions and they are all inclusive by nature. Matrices are environments where things develop, the models

¹ This congress would not have been possible without the institutional support of the Director of the Department of Architecture (ULHT), João Sequeira, and, above all, without the valuable work of the rest of the Organizing Committee, especially Maria João Matos and Eliana Sousa Santos.

or patterns that shape formations, and they can also reinvent an environment. These images are suited to address the current patterns of change regarding architecture and gender” (Matrices, 2015b). This expansion of past, present, and future discussions intersected with the idea of widening the themes. This also facilitated the exchanges among disciplines. Then, we established four tracks to focus on: Practice, Academia, History and Data (Matrices, 2015a). The tracks “Practice” and “Academia” aimed to reflect on the contexts in which the professional practice takes place — both in an architectural and academic level — while analyzing the practice itself. The track “History” highlighted the relevance of contributions that documented female architects’ stories through time. Lastly, the track “Data” expressed the need to gather and reflect on the present data, official figures, and facts which reveal continued gender inequality. During four days at the Lusófona University, a total of 16 parallel sessions, round tables, as well as the opening and closing conferences (with Ariadna Cantis and Jane Rendell, respectively), took place. Judging by the number of attendants, it could be considered a successful event. The goal came true; besides the constant exchange of ideas among participants, the diverse group built common bridges for future actions.

In terms of organization, we worked hard on trying to get financial support outside the University. This would allow us to bring to Lisbon as many prominent international experts as possible. Nevertheless, some organizations refused to support the proposal. The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, for example, an institution with a long tradition of supporting nonmainstream projects and cultural activities, was one of the refusals that shocked us the most.² Less surprisingly were the doubts of the construction companies’ organization. In case, the difficulties to find any financial support proved that reflecting on architecture and the city from a gender-based perspective was not considered important or worthy of support in Portugal in 2015. Since a similar event will occur in 2021 — as part of the project *W@ARCH.PT: Women Architects in Portugal: Building Visibility (1942-1986)* —, it will be interesting to see what has changed, or not, concerning the institutional support. Nonetheless, through this struggle we have learned how being understood by professional organizations and our peers is an essential requirement for the near and distant future. As time passes, we realize how we became surprised when the opposite happened, and we got institutional support. Fortunately, these surprises are more and more frequent.

² The congress took place thanks to the participation fees, a small grant from Portugal’s Foundation for Science and Technology, and the spaces provided by the Lusófona University.

Yet, we feel that there is a hard way ahead of us, even if the network of people is constantly expanding. On the one hand, in certain moments, the successes of those people's projects are minimized by paternalistic statements such as "these subjects are trendy now". On the other hand, it continues to be difficult that those initiatives have an impact on everyday life. As I have stated, it is vital to consolidate those networks and oppose "the idea that we are alone" (Pedrosa, 2018). This is the most basic need of professional women architects, researchers, and teachers, but also activists. Only women intersectional solidarity allows us to continue the fight. And in this path, MORE is another remarkable meeting place.

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