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## Along the Way: MORE than a Congress

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### Abstract

*We, all feminist architects and researchers - Amelia Vilaplana, the architectural studio Equal Saree, María Novas and Serafina Amoroso - met during the seminars held in Lisbon in 2015 on the theme Matrices, organized by Patricia Santos Pedrosa. This congress aimed to continue the symposium ArchitectAs. Redefining the Profession, which took place in Seville in 2014 and was organized by Nuria Álvarez Lombardero. Based on what we learned from these two events, it seemed important to us to continue the congress in order to both reinforce the work developed in previous editions and attempt to open the debate in a transdisciplinary manner, inviting contributions that could enrich the discussion from fields outside academia. This also included highlighting participatory practices and urban experiences carried out by or in collaboration with public administrations, among others.*

**Keywords:** MORE, feminism, architecture, conference

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### Resumen

*Nosotras, todas arquitectas e investigadoras feministas - Amelia Vilaplana, el estudio de arquitectura Equal Saree, María Novas y Serafina Amoroso - nos conocimos durante los seminarios celebrados en Lisboa en 2015 sobre el tema Matrices, organizados por Patricia Santos Pedrosa. Este congreso pretendía dar continuidad al simposio ArchitectAs. Redefiniendo la profesión, que tuvo lugar en Sevilla en 2014 y fue organizado por Nuria Álvarez Lombardero. A partir de lo aprendido en estos dos eventos, nos pareció importante dar continuidad al congreso tanto para reforzar el trabajo desarrollado en ediciones anteriores como para intentar abrir el debate de*

*forma transdisciplinar, invitando a contribuciones que pudieran enriquecer la discusión desde ámbitos ajenos al académico. Esto incluía también poner de relieve las prácticas participativas y las experiencias urbanas llevadas a cabo por las administraciones públicas o en colaboración con ellas, entre otras.*

**Palabras clave:** *MORE, feminismo, arquitectura, congreso*

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## 1. Text

It was a pleasure for us to have the opportunity to participate in the *VI ICAG - International Conference on Architecture and Gender* in Valencia. We are excited that these conferences have become a regular event where we are invited to share experiences and stories about this ‘journey’ we began many years ago, each from our own different and personal backgrounds.

We, all feminist architects and researchers - Amelia Vilaplana, the architectural studio Equal Saree, Maria Novas and Serafina Amoroso - met during the seminars held in Lisbon in 2015 on the theme *Matrices*, organized by Patricia Santos Pedrosa. This congress aimed to continue the symposium *ArquitectAs. Redefining the Profession*, which took place in Seville in 2014 and was organized by Nuria Álvarez Lombardero. Based on what we learned from these two events, it seemed important to us to continue the congress in order to both reinforce the work developed in previous editions and attempt to open the debate in a transdisciplinary manner, inviting contributions that could enrich the discussion from fields outside academia. This also included highlighting participatory practices and urban experiences carried out by or in collaboration with public administrations, among others.

For this reason, we decided to collaboratively organize **MORE**, the *III International Congress on Architecture and Gender*, which took place on January 2017 at the University of Florence in Italy, following one year of hard work. The event was extended with the publication of its digital proceedings, released during the pandemic in 2020, featuring over 50 international contributions from countries in Southern, Western, and Northern Europe, as well as from Latin America, North America, and others.

But why **MORE**, and what does this acronym mean? **Merge, Open, Resignify** and **Expand**. This is what we aimed to achieve with the conference: to broaden the disciplinary framework of architecture from a feminist perspective. For these very reasons, we sought to open the traditional congress model to a wider range of contributions, playing both with content (structured under four different axes of debate) and with the formats. We had the intuition that part of the knowledge we wanted to explore was not exclusive of the academic debate but was also happening elsewhere. That is why we proposed different activities and spaces for conversation.

A *Cities Best Practices* session was organised to involve people working in municipalities. The session was designed to encourage the exchange of results from successful urban practices. Specifically, representatives from the cities of Vienna (Eva Kail), Santa Coloma de Gramenet (Zaida Muxí and Nuria Parlón), as well as Santiago de Compostela, Sassari (Valentina Talu), and Bogotá (Mónica Sánchez,) were invited to participate.

To create additional spaces for collaboration and conversation, two workshops were organized: 'AMORE. Collective Action' (held at the School of Architecture in Florence) and 'The perception of everyday spaces from a gender-based perspective' (held in the urban spaces of Figline e Incisa Valdarno). Both workshops, through their distinct approaches, explored individual and collective awareness of inequalities in urban settings, emphasizing the production of space as a collective process.

The four main thematic tracks of the congress were: *MORE Than Objects*, *MORE Than Cities*, *MORE Than Academia* and *MORE Than Humans*. Through these themes or axes, we aimed to explore the boundaries of what is currently understood as architecture and urban design from an expanded feminist perspective.

Specifically, *MORE Than Objects* focused on deconstructing the concept of the canonical building, approaching the building not as a mere object. *MORE Than Humans* (which was an innovative thematic trend at the time, in 2017) helped us reflect on the new strategies feminisms can bring to ecologies, sustainability and multispecies coexistence.

On the other hand, *MORE Than Cities* highlighted how urban space reproduces and perpetuates asymmetric and biased gender ideologies and representations. It focused on critical works and texts that involve a re-reading of the past to address historiographical gaps, acknowledging the legacy of overlooked spatial models and patterns and the forgotten or undervalued contributions of leading women architects and urban planners from the 20th century. This track also included research that emphasized the participatory, affective, and emotional dimensions of urban spaces, exploring urban practices that deconstruct patriarchal dichotomies and categories. Additionally, a video essay was included in this session to expand the conventional format of research, exploring the interaction between (constructed) spaces and sexist stereotypes, while revealing the role of technologies, big data, and media in promoting gender biases.

Lastly, the papers included in the thematic axis *MORE Than Academia* reflected on interdisciplinary work and the feminist approach to spatial education, from school to university. This track examined how to cross disciplinary boundaries in the field of education and learning, a distinctive feature of feminist pedagogical practices. These topics aimed to sensitize all levels of educational institutions to redefine teaching models and patterns; in the field of architecture, this could occur through practices that hybridize writing, construction, drawing, and MORE.

We were also privileged to have the participation and presence of two outstanding keynote speakers: Liza Fior, architect and one of the founding partners of the London-based firm *muf architecture and art*, and Liisa Horelli, environmental psychologist who has developed her academic career at Aalto University in Finland. Both represented two distinct approaches that aligned with the conference aims: critical contributions from professional practice on the one hand, and from academic research on the other.

Over the last ten years, throughout the various editions of the congress, we have delved into the intricate interplay between architecture, urban design and gender, exploring how our (built) environments both reflect and shape societal norms and values. We have observed how spaces can empower or marginalize, and how our roles as architects, planners, and designers carry profound responsibilities.

Our participation in the *VI ICAG - International Conference on Architecture and Gender* in Valencia—an opportunity we deeply appreciate thanks to the entire organizing committee—has allowed us to further our knowledge and continue challenge existing norms. From our initial encounter in 2015 to 2023, we remain committed to advocating for spatial practices that serve as powerful tools for advancing social justice and equality. We are enthusiastic about continuing this essential work and applying the knowledge gained from forthcoming congresses. We also look forward to crossing paths again along the way.