Architecture, a career option for women? Romania case.

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Abstract. Many factors affecting women’s participation in the workforce are categorized as socio-cultural. Occupational segregation is mostly caused by gender based division of labor which marks radical differences between women’s and men’s abilities and responsibilities. Gender essentialism based on genetic data is indicating areas of gender competence according to socio-cultural expectations.

The immersion of gender issues in architecture, traditionally seen as a male dominated profession, raises questions about the eligibility of women professionals especially because of their fragile presence in different instances of architecture: history, theory and criticism.

The present paper is focused on the status of Romanian women architects and statistically analyzes current gender trends in architectural education, posing questions about how gender diversity influences architecture.

Many great women have established successful careers and had an impact on Romanian architecture. The third part of the paper reviews some of the key points in the development of the Romanian women’s movement of emancipation and democracy and celebrates feminine achievement in national architecture.

Keywords: architecture, occupational segregation, women architect, gender stereotypes, career choice, feminising architecture, Romania case.

1. Issues concerning women in/and architecture

The scientific discourse concerning women and architecture gathers, in socio-cultural terms, issues about the gender-typing of the profession, tensions between views on femininity and social construction of the architect as a masculine figure. The critique of the patriarchal value system of architecture is based on the proliferation of gender stereotypes regarding innate abilities linked to suppositions about gender professional performances. The social equity democratic desideratum becomes questionable when highlighting the gender pay gap, the uneven remuneration for a similar education background. The reason for this specific economic aspect has long been speculated as the problematic reconciliation between career and family life that ends with a diminution of working hours – the preference for part-time jobs, non working motherhood periods or the forced rejection of promotion opportunities and leadership tasks. There are still too few institutions that provide motherhood policies, flexible working schedule and childcare facilities.

Recurrent debates about the socio-economic status of women in the architectural profession are revealing the above facts but also the fragile presence of women in various instances of architecture: history, theory and criticism. Eileen Gray, for example, exquisite modernist artist-lacquer painter, furniture designer and architect, was absent, until recently, from historical records. Her architectural work and furnishings were overlooked and misattributed to a prestigious male architect who left his mark in the form of colourful wall murals, Le Corbusier, and/or to Jean Badovici, the Romanian architect, her lover and collaborator, more likely to stand as the creators of the elegant and modern E. 1027 house. Some photographs of Le Corbusier’s murals are published in L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui (April, 1948) but the name of Gray is omitted. The article “Le Corbusier, Muralist”, from Interiors (June, 1948), locates the painted walls “in a house designed..."
by Le Corbusier and P. Jeanneret”. Peter Adam (see Eileen Gray, 2000, pp. 334-35) draws attention on the fact that, in several publications between 1944 and 1981, the architecture and furnishing of E. 1027 are attributed to Le Corbusier and/or Badovici.¹

The absence of women from architectural history is reflected by a lack of visibility and work acknowledgements and also by misattribution of authorship credits. To exemplify this instance, one should consider the case of Denise Scott Brown, the architect wife of Robert Venturi, the well known starchitect who collected, probably without any blame, the credentials for professional couple’s work.

“The star system which sees the firm as a pyramid with a designer on top has little to do with today’s complex relations in architecture and construction. But as sexism defines me as a scribe, typist and photographer to my husband so the star system defines our associates as <second bananas> and our staff as pencils”. (Denise Scott Brown. Sexism and the star system in architecture. In: Dana Arnold. Reading architectural theory. Taylor & Francis e-Library. 2004).

This could be a case of social trivia proliferated by means of mass communication driven by stereotyped conceptions that influence career choice, opportunities and progression.

Considering the reliability of the criticism over the patriarchal basis of architecture constructed on masculine value systems, knowledge patterns and products, the problem about timeliness of the feminist wave in architecture comes into question.

The marginalisation of the “feminine” is translated in architectural terms through ornamentation or gender-specific architectural programs. There have been recorded many historical instances where the abundance of ornamentation was condemned as superfluous thus poisoning the functional essence of the architectural object.

The National Farmer’s Bank designed by Louis Sullivan was criticised by Frank Lloyd Wright due to its rich decoration considered to be useless and misleading. Not to mention the Law of Ripolin that marked the rise of naturism and modernist ideals by the “coat of whitewash” promoted by Le Corbusier in opposition to all ornate and coloured buildings, architecture that reveals its feminine decadence.

It becomes clear that, in order to have a complete perspective on the gender dimension of architectural profession, one should consider on the one side the issues women as professionals involved in the process of making architecture and, on the other, the more subjective aspects concerning the exploitation of feminine forms in architecture, space gendering according to users, gender specific architectural programs or the “different” experience of women in the built environment. While aspects revealing women architect status in contemporary architecture can be supported objectively by socio-economic statistics, issues such as the gender influence on the architect’s design style are merely based on preconceptions about women’s characteristics translated into feminine design principles: empathy, client orientation, aesthetic sense, collaborative nature, flexibility, ergonomics, organicity etc. While male architects are more likely to prefer bold, heavy and monumental aesthetics, the female architect prefers smaller scale designs and is more attentive to details. Perhaps, these trenchant differences in design style are based more on innate gender characteristics than cultivated preferences.

If we consider the genetic datum to be non-changeable and limit our perspectives to divergent views upon architecture based on the architects gender, we can agree that female design perspective, if not suppressed due to minority reasons, might be different, and this does not always mean worse. Taking this theory further, by an exercise of imagination, one could meditate upon the exploitation of feminine forms in architecture (a priori assumptions of the idealized woman) and the transfer upon different building

components such as envelope, texture, decoration, furniture, colour etc. There have been many scientific
debates about the parallelism between human body and architectural components. Also about architect’s
gender and design style expressed through finite architectural product.

The women architects supposed predilection upon creating decorated interiors, the space being
traditionally segregated according to gender, minimises women’s abilities and narrows career possibilities.
The “feminine” design aesthetics should not be attached strictly to female architects as gender should not be
seen as a criterion for any kind of architectural judgement.

The feminist Judith Butler (Gender Trouble. Feminism and the subversion of Identity, 1990) explores the
concept “gender performativity” and defines gender as “the effect of reiterated acting, one that produces the
effect of a static or normal gender while obscuring the contradiction and instability of any single’s person’s
gender act”.

Architecture possesses a tremendous toolkit of methods and forms of display that should not be
categorized according to architects’ gender and the social construction of gender difference. “Visual culture
embodies cultural beliefs of a society in the visual output of the society”. (Karen Keifer-Boyd. Visual
Culture and gender constructions. In: The International Journal of Arts Education. InJAE8.1, NTAEC,
2010.)

The stereotypical gender roles are reinforced by gender specific behaviour. The two images presented
below are reflecting the way space is gendered in relation to users and specific architectural programs like
hospital, mall, nursery or kindergarten are related to women’s specific functions in society and reflected in
career choice.

Fig. 1: Toronto International Airport, John B. Parkin
Associates photo, 1964 (PAN 64040, Panda Associates
Fonds, Canadian Architectural Archives, University of
Calgary)

Fig. 2: Yorkdale Plaza Shopping Centre, photo, 1964
(PAN 64536, Panda Associates Fonds, Canadian
Architectural Archives, University of Calgary)

Trattati di architettura, ingegneria e arte militare (1470-92), Italian ed., Milan: Edizioni I1 polifilo, 1967; Filarete, Antonio
Averlino, Trattato d'architettura (1461-63), New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965. The theories of Vitruvius about the
appropriation of nature laws in architecture, Leonardo da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man or Le Corbusier’s Modulor are all developing
analogies between the ideal human body, always male’s.

3 See Margit I. Kennedy. Toward a rediscovery of <feminine> principles in architecture and planning. In: Women’s Studies Int.

4 Women’s interior space vs. men’s exterior space, dichotomy that places indoors the “lady of the house” while the man takes action
as provider and takes charge of the exterior of the domestic premises.

5 Simms, Geoffrey. Gendered Space and Social Conformity in Selected Modern Architectural Photographs. In: JSSAC/ JSEAC 33,
2008, 2: 3-10.

6 Idem 5.
Two different architectural programs: airport and shopping mall. The first, suited for business is occupied by men in opposition with the second, the shopping mall, a space programmed for leisure and tailored to accommodate women. As the prototype of business entrepreneur was always a male figure, women are fitted to describe consumer’s profile.

2. Architecture, a career option for women

Although the present research is focused on the status of women architects in Romania, the previous approach reviewed, without exhausting the topic, some of the most debated issues regarding the insertion of gender aspects in the architectural profession, thus creating the context and stating the controversy of the subject.

“Women <take care>, men <take charge>. Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed” is the title of a Catalyst research (2005) on stereotyping that examines the barriers to women’s advancement in the workplace. The study reveals that gender-based stereotyping persists in workplace and can misrepresent the true talents of women leaders, challenging career advancement.7

Considering Romania’s case, the professional segregation according to gender persists as women are still best represented in fields like: healthcare and social services (Q: 79, 7%), education (P: 68%) and restaurants and hotels (I: 63, 4%), professions that are taking advantage of stereotyped female qualities as: caring, providing, patience, empathy and nurturance.

Men are taking over domains like: construction (F: 86,2%), extractive industry (B: 84,1%), agriculture, silviculture and fishing (A: 75,9%), fields that are using male specific characteristics.

The process of sex-typing of professions has its roots well developed through childhood activities and is referring to the stereotyped attribution of gender behaviours and values. The consequence of the process affects career choice and impacts women in the workplace blocking advancement.

The instances that disadvantage women in architectural profession: the lower percentage of female practitioners, the lack of “feminine style”, the lack of female role models as women architects are suffering from social historical invisibility, the masculine status quo that predefines design systems and formal rules and, most important, the perception about women professionals in architecture vary around Europe.

Fig. 4: Architects Council of Europe. *The architectural profession in Europe.* 2008

The Architects Council Survey (2008) reveals that the lowest percentage of women architects are accommodated in the Netherlands while France seems to have the advantage of 56% women architects. Romania is close to achieve equality between genders reflected in number of practicing professionals.

Fig. 5: Members of Romanian Architects Order: 2002-2012

Fig. 6: Percentage of women/men architects members of the Romanian Architects Order: 2012

Analyzing the following chart representing forms of professional practice adopted by Romanian women architects, members in Romanian Architects Order, we note a percent of over 50% employees, ~25% owners of individual architecture offices but less than 5% company owner. Thereby, men are holding a significant proportion of decision making with consequences on the built environment.

![Women in Architects Order- Forms of Practice: 2012](image)

Fig. 7: Women in Architects Order- Forms of Practice: 2012

In 2012, 43% percent of architects members of Romanian Architects Order are women. That seems quite fair but, if we take a look at the graphs representing graduates of university education, a paradigm shift is being revealed. The increased number of women graduates that reaches 60% women students (in the year 2012), is announcing a reverse of paradigm: the process of “feminising architecture”. The possible implications could be: the recognition, appreciation and absorption of feminine qualities in design (empathy, relatedness and collectiveness), promotion of different values and perspectives such as gender sensitive design.⁹

![Graduates chart, Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Architecture: 1951-2012](image)

Fig. 8: Graduates chart, Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Architecture: 1951-2012

⁹ The scientific research applied to urban design condemns the women experience of built environment to be overlooked (transportation, safety, lack of childcare facilities, difficulties of pedestrian movement) and the presence of women at decision levels to be mandatory regarding urban planning policies.
The appropriate question given the context of feminising architecture is: *how can women’s ways of knowing, feeling and designing influence changes and add values in existing patriarchal structures.*

Surprisingly or not, fields like interior design and landscape architecture are being dominated by female students and graduates. As design and aesthetics are falling under the prerogative of femininity, the obvious question is *if below statistics are evoking preferences or escapes of women regarding specific fields of architecture.*

![Graduates Chart- Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Interior Design: 2006-2011](image1)

![Graduates Chart- Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Urbanism, Landscape Design: 2008-2011](image2)

Fig. 9: Graduates Chart- Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Interior Design: 2006-2011

Fig. 10: Graduates Chart- Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Urbanism, Landscape Design: 2008-2011

### 3. Progression of women in Romanian architecture

The following chapter celebrates the development of the Romanian women’s movement for emancipation and democracy and women’s presence in Romanian architecture aiming at empowering through reviewing, in chronological order, some of the most important women achievements related to the architectural profession.

1848 After the revolution, the feminist wave arises demanding equality of rights between women and men and women emancipation through equal access to education (promoters: Maria Rosetti, Sevastița Bălcescu, Maria Nicolau).

1879 The Women review and *The bulletin of Romanian woman league* are being published, militant feminist press edited by Sofia Nădejde.

1883 Maria Zăhărescu is the first licensed women graduating from the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, Bucharest.

1892 Romanian architecture education started at the end of XIXth century as a private school under the authority of the Romanian Architects Society.

1895 Takes place in Copenhagen the 2nd International Conference of socialist women proclaiming March, 8 as the International Women’s Day.

1897 The Architecture Department from Bucharest School of Fine Arts is founded.

1913 Henrieta Delavrancea (1894-1987) is admitted as architecture student but she interrupts the studies during World War II. She will become the colleague of Virginia Andreescu Haret, Marioara Ioanovici, Horia Creangă and Lucia Dumbrăveanu.

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10 The graph is not exhaustive and represents a short review of the most representative dates concerning women’s activity in the Romanian architecture field. (working paper)
1915 | Lucia Dumbrăveanu (1895-1956), cousin of Henrieta Delavrancea, is admitted at the Superior School of Architecture.

1916 | Henrieta Delavrancea is interrupting her classes and she starts working as volunteer nurse during World War II.

1919 | Virginia Andreescu Haret (1894-1962) was the first woman to graduate from the Superior School of Architecture in Bucharest. She continues her studies in Rome.

1920 | Lucia Dumbrăveanu, called “Lucus” and Horia Creangă are admitted, after two attempts failed, at Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris (at the same exam, G. M. Cantacuzino ranked first at artistic skills). The two future architects along with Dumitru Savescu chose Gustave Uumberstock, second Prix de Rome, to be their supervisor.

1921 | Henrieta Delavrancea designs probably her first oeuvre: the German house from Nehoiu.

1923 | The Romanian Constitution gives women the right to vote in local elections.

1924 | Henrieta Delavrancea restarts her studies interrupted for 8 years.

Solange d’Herbez de la Tour is born in Romania but leaves the country in 1945 and moves to France. She will be the founding member of two women organizations, and will gain many distinctions: Legion of Honour with the rank of Commander Honour Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, Emeritus member of Works Group Sports and Leisure of Architects International Union, National Order of Merit - the rank of Knight, honorary member of the Bucharest branch of Romanian Architects Order. She tried to gain equal rights for men and women architects in France through the annulment of the law and obligation to be of masculine gender and with accomplished military duty, in order to be architect of historical monuments and architect at the Vicinal road service. She had numerous interventions at international level for obtaining equal rights for education and work regardless of gender.

1926 | Henrieta Delavrancea graduates from the Superior School of Architecture in Bucharest.

1928 | Eugenia Greceanu is born (promotion of 1953, Ion Mincu University of Architecture), architect specialised in conservation and restoration of the national built heritage and the study of historical monuments.

1932 | Henrieta Delavrancea wins, against Creangă team, the first important architectural contest for the headquarters of Hygiene and Public Health Institute.

1946 | Doctor Florica Bagdasar is the first women Minister of Health. The first women prosecutor was Silvia Plăieșu and the first dean was academician Raluca Ripan.

Elena Voinescu was awarded her architectural diploma (valedictorian). She will be involved in the design of the new wing of the Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism in Bucharest (as the architect project manager).

1947 | Solange D’Herbez de la Tour, was awarded by the Faculty of Architecture established in Bucharest within Polytechnic Institute, the architecture diploma.

Paraschiva Iubu was awarded her architectural diploma. She developed a long collaboration with arch. Octav Doicescu and N. Cucu (between 1966-1976) and was decorated with the Work Order, 3rd class, awarded by Petru Groza in 1954 (for the architectural works from The Opera Theatre in Bucharest).

1952 | Ion Mincu Institute of Architecture was opened and in the same year, Duiliu Marcu was elected president of the new established Architects’ Union of RPR (Popular Republic of Romania).
Arch. Solange D’Herbez de la Tour (b. 1924), born in Romania and established in France, wins an important architectural contest (housing). The Parisian press exclaim: “Enfin une femme architecte. Enfin une vraie femme”.

1953-1955 After World War II until 1989, the Romanian government banned private practice and the state controlled the architectural design practice.

Establishment of “Proiect București” Institute.

1957-1989 The Women’s National Council was set up gathering all women associations from all over the country. The council supported actions for the defence of the right to work and securing the civic, juridical and social equality of women and men.

1960 Solange D’Herbez de la Tour was founding the French Union of Women Architects (UFFA).

1963 Solange D’Herbez de la Tour, was founding in Paris, the International Women’s Union (UIFA-Union Internationale des femmes Architectes)

1965-1989 During the communist period of glory the myth of gender equity was proliferated. Women were equal social workers and mothers of nation (productive and reproductive tasks). The statistics showed that the majority of women worked in education and healthcare under minimum salary. The situation in this aspect, in sensible the same in present days.


1972 The 3rd UIFA Congress in Bucharest: “Idées et collaboration des Femmes Architectes pour l’humanisation des espaces urbains nouveaux”. The Romanian Architects Union awards her with the award for her entire activity.

1977 Arch. Henrie Delavrancea Gibory stands, without any positive answer, against the demolition of many Bucharest monuments (Văcărești monastery, Antim monastery, Mihai Vodă monastery, Sf. Vineri Church).

A contest for Bucharest political and administrative centre area was launched through the Romanian Architects Union. On 28th of April 1977 15 models were presented, 15 teams of architects and among them the Youth Team led by young arch. Anca Petrescu (at only 28 years of age).

1982 March, 6- takes place the last meeting between Nicolae Ceausescu and the Youth Team regarding Peoples’s House. Arch. Anca Petrescu (b. 1949) was named chief architect of the masterpiece of the communist regime. On the construction site were demolished thousands of buildings, important churches, synagogues, Uranus district, Republicii Stadium, Mina Minovici Institute (the forensic institute) etc.

1992 The National Confederation of Women in Romania was set up and joined over 26 women’s organizations from all counties. Besides it, there were more than 25 other organizations dealing with different aspects of the feminist movement in Romania.

1993-2000 Arch. Eugenia Greceanu was the president of the National Romanian Committee ICOMOS. She was also a member of the Monuments Commission between 1970-1973 and 1990-1996.

2000 IAWA (Internet Archive of Women in Architecture of Virginia Polytechnic) publishes a newsletter about Women in Romanian architecture.

2002 National conference for the establishment of the Romanian Architects Order.

2003 Arch. Anca Bratuleanu receives the Stefan Bals award for restoration of Bordești monastery.

Arch. Ana Maria Zahariade wins the Herder Prize awarded by Alfred Toepfer Foundation from...
Hamburg for contributing with knowledge, development and preservation of eastern and southeastern European culture (other Romanian winners: Zaharia Stancu, Ana Blandiana, Constantin Noica, Marin Sorescu, Nichita Stănescu, Tudor Arghezi etc.)

2006 Award of honour (Opera Omnia) for arch. Eugenia Greceanu (Romanian Architects Order).


2008 Award of honour (Opera Omnia) for arch. Elena Voinescu (Romanian Architects Order).

2012 The Department of Theory, Architectural History and Heritage Preservation of Ion Mincu Institute of Architecture was named “Sanda Voiculescu” after the name of the architect and professor Sanda Voiculescu (1938-2001) that revived, after 1989, the Department of History and Theory of Architecture.

Arch Viorica Curea was elected president of the Romanian Architects Order.

4. Conclusion...

Instead of a conclusion, a few words of Prof. PhD. arch. Sarah Wigglesworth (University of Sheffield):

“...We need to be careful that the toxic combination of increasing number of women with a downgrading of status does not simply turn architecture into a low-wage, feminised profession such as nursing and social work or a dilettante’s finishing school subject”.

The process of feminising architecture through last years high percentage of women graduates of architecture universities could mean a shift in paradigm of known architecture value system. Hopefully, this fact corroborated with the existing social opinion about architectural profession, will not mean a degradation of the architect’s status as British award winning architect Sarah Wigglesworth pointed out. More research that celebrates and empowers women ought to be carried on in order to record and make visible women’s professional activities. A series of awards are aiming to congratulate women’s designs11. But are they really helping women’s image or in fact enhance the existing professional gender gap?

5. References


11 Jane Drew Prize, Women Architect of the year (Architects Journal, United Kingdom), Emerging women architect of the year(Architects Journal, United Kingdom), Milka Bliznakov Prize (IAWA, USA)
JSSAC/ JSEAC 33, 2008, 2: 3-10.


