Izaskun Chinchilla in a seminar in the city of Zaragoza, 2018.

Organic Growth Pavilion, Nueva York, 2015 @ Izaskun Chinchilla Architects

The award-winning Spanish architect and educator Izaskun Chinchilla exemplifies the focus of this special issue of Zarch about Women, Feminist Practices, and Alternative Practitioners in Architecture. On December 28, 2021, co-editors Lucía C. Pérez-Moreno and Ann E. Komara interviewed Chinchilla. The following essay presents that conversation, edited for clarity and flow, highlighting their discussion of key thematic topics in this issue.

Currently, Chinchilla is a Professor of Architectural Practice at The Bartlett School of Architecture (UCL, London). She studied at Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura in Madrid *(ETSAM) from where she graduated in 2001, and got her Ph.D. in Architecture in 2016.*

Chinchilla is driving her own practice from 2001. Her work has been extensively published, awarded, and exhibited. This includes Venice Biennale in 2002, Bienal de Arquitectura Latinoamericana de Chile 2002*, São Paulo Biennial 2003, Venice Biennale 2006, New Trends of Architecture Europe and Asia opened in Tokyo 2008, Biennal D'Art Leandre Cristófol in Centre d'Art La Panera in Lerida 2010, the traveling exhibition 'A city called Spain' visiting 7 international destinations 2011/2012, Innovación Abierta in Museo del Canal Interoceánico de Panama 2012, among others. Several built works, such as the House for Estela and César in Pueblo Nuevo (Madrid, 2007), the restoration of* Castillo de Garcimuñoz *(Cuenca, Spain, 2012) and the* Organic Growth *Pavilion (New York, USA, 2015) have been highlighted for trying to "open unconventional paths through researches and architectural education while being deeply concerned by a particular combination between social engagement, aesthetics and techniques to reinvent a new vision for ecological environment in her projects" (ArcVision Prize, 2013).*

Becoming a Woman Architect

In several articles, and also in social media, you confirm that you had great tutors in the School of Architecture in Madrid. However, none of the ones you consider important - Andres Perea, Federico Soriano, Iñaki Abalos, or Juan Herreros, for instance. Did you think about this when you were studying architecture? Did you have a gender consciousness while being a student of architecture?

Gender wasn't a major reflection when I was studying. I studied thirty-seven subjects, often technical, with several tutors; only two were female – physics and urban planning. I assumed this was normal and didn't consider it unusual. However in my work I started to create a reaction, designing things and pushing at what tutors took for granted – 'space' was still supreme in the pedagogical ideas. For instance, for one brief instead of creating a minimalist rationalist modernist 'house of dreams' I proposed a work containing 'unconscious'. It really had nothing to do with architecture. It was an interesting moment academically. I was reading and taking to abstract spatial concepts - French philosophy was in the air, Deleuze and Foucault - and social thinking. My ideas became complex, bringing in anthropology and more sociological thinking. This was very important to my degree.

My thesis project was notorious, a very unusual project in the Madrid school, and I was afraid of not passing. But then I won a competition. When I was finished school I was very

Feminist Thinking as an Opportunity to Revitalize Architecture. Conversation with Izaskun Chinchilla

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clear I was doing something different, but I was expecting that difference was going to be accepted in a more natural way - perhaps because in school I knew male practitioners who were, well I wouldn’t say Utopian, but definitely ‘out of the box’. Their thinking was kind of a nice thing in that environment. For instance, nobody remembers about Paco Alonso anymore, but he was considered a hero in the architecture school: “Paco, he’s a ‘real’ architect.” He was not finishing buildings, but this was because he was really, really sincere and held these high aspirations; he was not doing the commercial thing, and was not selling himself to the market. There was this heroic perspective for this kind of architect.

After graduating, a second competition opened in December. It was a gigantic project - the Europan Competition. The site was about 22 hectares of territory, including 2,000 houses, with 8 hectares of parks and green areas, and a total of 32 including industry, residential and urban. It was clear it was going to be done. I was like WOW. I won the first prize. If I had been able to do this project my career would have been solved for twenty years. I went to Santiago de Compostela to meet the mayor, and soon I realized they didn’t want me to do the project. The organizers told me very directly that they preferred the second prize. The organizers said, “yes, this is a competition, but we don’t really like the jury selection so we are going to do the second project”. And I said, “If you do that I’m going to start legal actions.”

This was really tough because I was not getting any support from the competition organization. I needed to make a very big association with José María Ezquiaga - the biggest urban planning office in Spain, and also with two big engineering companies. So I made another presentation to the mayor. They made comments on my makeup. They said, “... when you were visiting the site, we realized you were posing questions that were not what we were really expecting. This place has to be commercial. It has to be taken farther by somebody that has clients and experience. This is not really for you, so we are asking you to be reasonable and excuse yourself from this project”.

After that, they formulated another competition. It was not an open competition - you needed to present with special experience. I organized a big team, and entered again. They were asking for very complex bank support. It was kind of impossible for us to participate. In the end, they were not able to award the commission to the people that they wanted, so it wasn’t done.

Similar experiences happened in the first four or five years of my practice; I started to realize that even if I won some competition it was going to be very difficult for me to actually sign contracts to do the commissions. I had a lot of winning competition entrances; in the first ten years after graduating I won 18 second prizes. Every time I was picking up the phone and it was a second prize. It was like you were feeling good, thinking well, “I’m about to do it”, but somehow you were feeling “this is impossible, no”.

Do you think this is only connected with your gender, or was it also your age?

I think there are more reasons, in addition to the gender challenges. The architectural work I was trying to push at the time was a compromise with ecology, and also had a social aspect. This agenda was true for either public or private administration work. But it was perceived as something that was creating extra complexity. The social aspects were definitely a difficulty. There was a lack of sensibility towards psychology and social concerns that made it difficult to progress and build my projects.

I won three or four second prizes, one after the other. I remember, for example, getting the second prize in the EMV (*Empresa Municipal de la Vivienda*), the Public Housing Company of Madrid; they told me, "[...] most architects tell us that they want to do a very nice façade, and then we find a way of jumping over regulations and doing tricky things with a very complex façade. You are asking for things like allowing people to choose their house and collaborate with the designer. That's something that is really a mess for us. We are never going to go in that direction."

So somehow you had feminist values already in your proposals - although perhaps you didn't define it that way in that moment. They contrasted somehow with the kind of architecture that male politicians and technicians wanted to push.

I think there were definitely several issues. First, competitions were still blind and anonymous, but the difficulties arose because the ideas that were considered in that moment in architecture were all about space, shape and form. I was bringing ideas incorporating ecology and sociology and they was not on the table. The evaluation was "this is interesting, but it is not the first prize" because it will create too much complexity. But actually there was a second issue when they realized you were a very young woman, and then it was absolutely impossible to get anything -- a commission was clearly, clearly impossible.

Another problem came after I was practicing for around seven or eight years: people started to recognize the way I was drawing. In entering some competitions, for example, I had been trying to avoid particular architects because whenever they saw a drawing and they thought it was mine they said, "no – you know this is a Utopian girl who is doing crazy things. You shouldn't be really taking this serious". And that was really, really - for me it was illegal. Because if it was an anonymous competition nobody should be saying you are a woman, or you are 28 or you are whatever -- no. It's an anonymous competition so we need to play fair. But that was a constant thing. So then, some years into my practice we tried to draw differently in the office, to pretend we had a different style. We tried many things.

Well this is quite impressive. I (Lucía) a student when you were practicing in the first years, and I knew your work; the way you drew was amazing for me. I used to think: "How this young woman can draw in a completely different way, terrific." However, the fact that your drawing was different makes you a visible point in an anonymous competition, and that could be problem. The interesting part for me is that your way of drawing is different from the 'abstract' and 'neutral' typical one: you draw with color, you draw people using your building, you draw active and particular moments in the architecture. So the way you draw is not a 'modern' way of understanding a space.

Do you consider that the fact that you do not come from a privileged family previously related in architecture, is important to the development of your career?

Yes, I think so. I am 46 at the moment, and sometimes somebody says, "yeah, you know - you are not building so many things", or "you are only building little things". And you reflect, and compare yourself with colleagues who were studying with you at the same time in university. A couple of these colleagues at the moment are clearly building more than I am, but honestly it's only a few people. One is associated with his father, a very well known, established commercial architect in Spain. Another is the son of I think the third or fourth richest guy in Spain. The third one opened an office in one of the most expensive areas of Madrid, working on small super luxurious individual houses. He's doing something. At the beginning most of his work and starting clients came from the area; he got established because they knew the father, who is an architect. He was not associated his father, but he was giving him these small jobs and little opportunities. So I think for them it's easier to get commissions. I think they are fitting what people are expecting from an architect.

But I think they didn't face the necessity of melting and creating and building up their own identity as architects. I have an excellent relationship with two of these guys. We have dinner from time to time, and they have said, "oh, but why do you say we are in a better position, because you 'are'

Figure 1. Cover pages of the books *La ciudad de los cuidados* (2020) and *Cosmowomen* (2021) by Izaskun Chinchilla.

in the real world position. We don't have any freedom and you are actually doing what you want." And I think yeah - it might be true somehow. They are fitting a pattern and they need to keep that pattern. I have been able to create a different path.

My family provided me a remarkable background. My father is a doctor. When I was little, I was busy, from making eggs collections to dissecting [...] very seriously. It was a lot of fun in my house. The love for nature that my father cultivated with me was incredible. My father is also a really amazing thinker; he's great at writing and reading. He speaks marvelously. Now he's having Parkinson's, but people are just still amazed at his verbal capacity. My mother is an expert in literature, so she brought other things. They were simple professionals. They were not connected with contractors. But definitely I have a solid intellectual background and I'm very privileged by that. Yes.

I think that my different background has directly influenced the priority order of the inputs I bring to architecture. I see that people who came from an architectural background - for them it's much easier to consider, for example, the history and landmarks of architecture, and the abstract language of space. It's a priority. They find more continuity, which for me is difficult. Like, what is the connection between Le Corbusier's moment and our own circumstances? I don't see that link, and partly it doesn't matter because I consider other aspects and considerations. For me, nature is prior to the whole history of the discipline of architecture.

Becoming a Woman Architect and a Feminist Practitioner and Scholar

In your last two books, *La ciudad de los cuidados,*[1] and the catalogue of the exhibition *Cosmowomen*[2] (figure 1) we can see a relevant influence of feminist thinking. If we compare the atmosphere in Madrid during your time as student and later working there, and now to London where you are working in UCL, the intellectual atmosphere about feminist thinking is very different. At UCL, you have the opportunity to be close to important feminist scholars such us Barbara Penner, Peg Rawes and Jane Rendell. In Madrid such scholarship was not present. Is this important for you? At what point of your career did feminist theory

1 Izaskun Chinchilla, *La ciudad de los cuidados* (Madrid: La Catarata, 2020).

2 Izaskun Chinchilla (ed.), *Cosmowomen. Places and Constellations* (Roma: Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, 2021).

become important for your professional development as a feminist practitioner and as a feminist scholar?

I wouldn't say it's just the UCL experience, although this is definitely important. Certainly it's the scholars you are mentioning - Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, Barbara Campbell - but many other people are also important, like Tania Sengupta. The UCL or the Bartlett School of Architecture is operating through a unique system, which is quite different from the Spanish university, or at least Madrid University where I was coming from.

The idea of the unit is that they preserve a kind of - let's say unique approach to architecture, and there is a genuine search in the direction of the university for a variety and diversity of approaches. In Madrid, there was always this feeling like "maybe we have different *Unidades Docentes* (Teaching Units), but we all have like a common background." The Madrid School of Architecture is a polytechnic so there was a common background for all the units; we balanced history and aesthetics, human thinking and engineering, and we were to be equally good in all of them. There was an acceptance of the technical aspects of architecture as superior in importance and priority to the social or daily life aspects -- this vision of the structure being more important than the enclosures, being more important than the details, and the finished work almost forgetting people. You only take care of all these little things if you want to become an interior designer. There was a very strong identity assumed in all the different units and by all the different tutors.

In London, it is completely the opposite. For instance, you have people who are actually doing video just because they say the only thing that is important in architecture is the story telling, and it is just about that. They likely will never do an engineered detail. There is really strong diversity in the selection of the units, and that is quite intentional.

This is my 11th year at the Bartlett. I was reflecting and thinking about the 16-18 units that have been running at the Bartlett in the last ten years. I was looking at all of the big differences, and realizing that there was a lot of attention to graphics, there was a lot of attention to space, devices, installations, fabrication. There was definitely a bigger variety and greater approaches, but still the design units were looking more at the container of life – the social, and daily life itself. There was careful thinking about how we were actually inhabiting the space as bodies, as biological entities, as social entities.

This has a strong reflection in the area of history and theory because Barbara Penner, Jane Rendell, and Tania Sengupta are in history and theory, not in the design area. This correlation created an opportunity of bringing a focus to the design units that would be well supported by the history and theory department. It was the sense at the Bartlett that students don't spread over too many areas – they do design, and the history theory module supports this. For instance, students in the 4th year do an essay, and in the 5th year they do a thesis. We try to work together, in the same direction. So for me it was very strategic to be able to have these amazing women with strong feminist investigations and ideas, and scholarship already published in books and articles, and to collaborate with them to support students interested in this way of thinking and designing.

One year we made 'women in architecture' as a theme. We have made 'the caring city' as a theme; this year we made it 'vulnerability'. In some years, we had more than 80% women students in the unit. So yes, it was this confluence. We were able to have more students, more support from the history and theory department. They start doing briefs, and exploring these kinds of topics that were actually impossible to bring to Madrid University ten years ago.

This is very interesting because in the Spanish system to try to do something like that, join efforts from the history and theory and the design department, is very difficult. It's an important issue that maybe in the Anglo-Saxon academia it's easier to find these connections.

In feminist thinking, personal experiences are crucial, and our reality as women is diverse. Despite the fact that all women share patriarchal cultures, philosophers such as Rossi Braidotti say each woman is different, and also (following Deleuze) that a woman changes over time 'becoming' a different woman in time. This is also the lesson. In our opinion, there is an evolution of your position in architecture that comes from your personal life. For example, in your book, *La ciudad de los cuidados*, children are very present. This is a relevant point in the book. Does it come from your experience as a mother? Most of the successful women in architecture do not have children. Now, you are pregnant with your second child, you are sharing this moment in your social media as a positive, relevant fact in your professional career. At what point do you think it is important to support maternity for women architects?

For me it has been a whole, unexpected trouble. Before having children, I was postponing. I had my first child when I was 36. And I was completely frightened, thinking, "If it's already difficult, how is it going to happen when I have a child?" I also started to get these little comments ... people telling me "yeah, probably you will care a bit less about your professional career " and "it's normal, take your time, it's just like 10 or 15 years. Yeah - it's the same for everybody." I lost a couple of contracts. In the first maternity, they stopped calling me even for lectures for more than 2 or 3 years. A colleague of mine told me, "yeah, that's why women are flowers with just one spring because the spring only lasts while they are not yet mothers". It felt true. When my child was 2 years old I was completely panicking, thinking this can't be it. I have been working for more than twenty years. I have been not sleeping, entering competitions, doing all the personal effort. And now, I am not even considered for lectures.

So I made the craziest effort doing the "City of Dreams" New York Pavilion competition.[3] We won – the only team from outside the US. We carried out a kickstarter campaign to fund the pavilion's construction; we raised $24,000 dollars, but probably we were spending three times that amount. I never tallied the account. I don't know how I got the money. I asked everybody - my parents, family. I don't know. I was feeling: if this was not done, that's it -- my career is over.

My mother came to New York; we were living there for almost two months. I was going to Governor's Island every weekday morning at 5:00 to work with my hands, welding, and doing a lot of physical effort. At 6:00 or 7:00 I headed back to Queens. My mother was with the child and he was desperate to see me, since I was breastfeeding at the moment and everything. But I felt super! I don't know where I found the energy. Where was this strength is coming from? It was like a superhero thing. I was clear it was also motherhood that was bringing this super positive feedback. I was also thinking how unfair this was – that it was a competition, and I won because there was not all the Spanish establishment scrutinizing what we were doing. I was paying for it myself, getting the money, doing everything. Facing insurance in the US, I was crying a lot, and panicking about what could happen working every day with volunteers on the island. It was crazy. And then suddenly when it was done, people started to think, "you know this girl has a baby, but she is managing. She's actually doing things." It opened a lot of things because we were able to end that successfully.

After this I had a very, very fertile six years. I did the PhD dissertation, and the professorship. We completed the restoration of Garcimuñoz Castle, a big project that we had been working on for thirteen years. We had co-working projects; eight or ten projects were completed in six years with my little child. I suppose that proved that we could make it, no? But for me it was horrible the feeling of "okay - now I have done what I have to do, and all my duties are under control" - it was crazy for like five years. Then, I tried to have a second child. It was very difficult for me to get pregnant again; we tried many things and I have had four miscarriages. It has been really tough. So, you recalibrate: "If I want to love architecture until I'm 80, or at least 65 when I will retire like a normal person, I need to have a good life, and more balance." I don't need to feel – I don't want to feel - that I am sacrificing everything because of this career. It is wonderful that I have been able to get my second pregnancy, but it's also a miracle. I think it is really important to make a reflection on many levels.

You were mentioning *The Caring City (La ciudad de los cuidados).* I think children and all other the social groups that are not the male, white, working class normative human being in the center of the patriarchal thinking can help us think of alternatives of space, living together, social aspects and obviously urban development. It's important to reconsider how architecture can rebalance our global relationship between work and private life; this balance is really, really important.

In *Cosmowomen*, we can see a discourse that comes from philosophical sexual different thinking. Numbers of women architects in UK, USA and Spain leaving the profession are very high, as well there is a pay gap. Likewise, solo-leadership of firms by women is very difficult to find. What can we do, as scholars and researchers, to boost female leadership? Do you think that young women architects can develop differences in architecture practice?

Okay, these are several questions. The first one I have discussed with many friends; some of them don't agree, but I think we need to balance how we present the lack of opportunities associated to women, and the empowerment

3 Joey Jacobson, "Izaskun Chinchilla Architects' Organic Growth Pavilion Opens on Governors Island," accessed March 27, 2022, https://www.archdaily.com/645311/izaskun-chinchilla-architects-organic-growth-pavilion-opens-on-governors-island.

that being a woman could represent. Initiatives like #Me2 have been great in some regards because they have revealed very difficult situations that women have been living, in the shadows. However, my concern is that the gender debate is all about pay gap, glass ceiling, a lack of opportunities, women abandoning the professional career of architecture, lack of recognition or recognition in prizes, lack of historical references, and lack of opportunities in general – this represents women as victims. We are identifying things that are very important, that we need to change, that we need to create awareness about - all of this is true, but we need to change the work, and not represent women as victims.

This is what I was aiming for in *Cosmowomen,* in collaboration with Cristiana Collu, the director of *La Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderno e Contemporanea di Roma.* She is an amazing thinker, and we said, okay - let's send a message: "Being a woman is an opportunity". It can be key to solving three of the major crisis that has been affecting architecture in the last forty years, which architects have not been able to resolve. First, the disconnection with society. Society feels we are not really useful, not really practical, not really aware, not really connected. Then we have the ecological crisis. From the 70s, we have been asked to reposition architecture against climate change, and in many instances this is still not happening. There is also the perception that architects are part of financial crises and situations that are not good. For instance, in Spain architecture and architects were perceived as promotors, and part of the speculation activities. Women were not there to affirm the social awareness and the social purpose of architecture. So, we said, "okay, architects are not good at dealing with this; they are not even good at general communication with society ... and most of them are men."

We felt there is something in the female background that better positions women to solve the crises that have been affecting architecture. We honestly think that we have good philosophical, historical, cultural missions to say, "Yes, we are starting to get there". Eco-feminist theory says the expectation of women and the expectation of the environment have been running as parallel lines. Women have not been entrenched in the systems of exploitation and depletion of all the resources; we are more conscious of the capacity for preserving, saving, and respecting resources in a different way.

Women also have a better connection with activities that are considered everyday life. There are amazing women who have been working for the most advanced academic programs, and educating children and writing and cleaning and doing multiple things at the same time. So you have this background of practicality in daily activity, managing things that are important in your life. And definitely we have another perception since we already have been sub-dividing our time into activities we do for free and activities we do for pay. We have this idea of the female economy being practically related to caring activities that are not paid.

We saw a big opportunity to say sure, all this is true: we have the pay gap, we have the glass ceiling. I will never deny that. But what we tried to put together in the *Cosmowomen* exhibition and the catalogue shows we are prepared to go one step forward in the things that architects are generally not doing well. We can improve the discipline.

Becoming an Alternative Practitioner

Interlocking the two previous topics, it is possible to consider you as an alternative practitioner. Perhaps, just the fact that you are a woman leading an architectural studio 'alone' with feminine feminist values is what makes you an alternative practitioner. The last interview in *El Pais*[4] said that you were a 'rara avis'.

What do you think is necessary to do in architecture practice to understand feminine/feminist positions as something NOT alternative? All these values are working in favour of life and care, they are working to avoid climate change, so why 'alternative'? Masculine values are the dominant - how can we encourage society to view such values as positive? What can we do?

This is a very important topic, and it can be subtle. It can be like operating in a quite invisible layer. And it's important. I think it's aggressive saying to a woman architect like me is that you are a utopian architect. This happens to me in a lot of interviews, and for me it's "grrrrrrr". Whenever they say this (she laughs) my husband knows. He was listening during the last radio interview and says: "hey (thumbs up) they talk of this". They said nothing around almost everything I am starting, and I'm addressing practical points. It's like "ah, no - you are in the field of utopia". This is deactivating to me. Even some clients have come to me and said, you know a colleague of yours

4 Anatxu Zabalbeascoa, "Qué no funciona en las ciudades, por qué no lo hace y cómo podría hacerlo", *El País,* November 30, 2021, https://elpais.com/cultura/del-tirador-a-la-ciudad/2021-11-30/que-no-funciona-en-las-ciudades-por-que-no-lo-hace-y-como-podria-hacerlo.html

Figure 2. Image of Cosmowomen exhibition at *La Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderno e Contemporanea di Roma.*

from the school of Madrid, he told me, "No, she's not really interested in doing architecture; she's just in theory." This has been said by many architects to clients and people in the administration – it's a way of not having you hired. It's a super aggressive thing, a super dirty game. Super dirty.

A second thing happening is that, as you say, these female values are considered somehow a minority. This is something that I'm complaining, answering, and fighting really, really actively. In every gender debate that I am in, there is somebody saying "yeah, yeah - the female things is very important but what about queer culture?" Always, I am supportive, and queer culture is important to acknowledge, but queer people are 0.02 percept of humanity. Women are 57% - it is not a minority – it is a majority. Fighting for female culture will benefit queer. I am fighting for diversity in general.

I was hired by Hong Kong University as invited professor last year. Our last brief was about caring activities in several Hong Kong districts. In the review, the a colleague participating in the debate said, "We are very happy that you have been here in the university working in this design module, bringing social consciousness to this university. Because although they have been working with many different minorities previously - as homeless - they have never had a whole course about women in the city." *[Izaskun holds finger up – making a point – check - wink]* Look at this. Homeless. Women. Ooohhh ... Minorities.

Women are seen as part of vulnerable communities, together with homeless and queer groups. I think this is a super important thing that we need to first of all fight and answer and protest. We need to say, "No guys. Women are not a minority." In fact we are getting most of the important things done. We are educating, we are writing, we are creating money, we are cultivating. Most of the important things that the humanity has to do are done by women. So, yes, we need to present all these.

One important point in your discussion here: we think that not all the women in the schools of the architecture embrace femininity as something positive. A lot of the women architects continue defending masculine values

in a neutral way. The fact that women that use feminine values are considered a minority is also because of this fact. Not all women, even some of the students, realize they are being educated with historical and traditional mainly masculine values. Even today, in a lot of schools of architecture masculine values are not even considered masculine explicitly, mainly because there are not identify with 'traditional masculinity,' they are considered natural, the tradition. So when a woman professor talks about feminist thinking s in an explicit language, it is consider a 'minor' discourse.

I agree that this will only change when there are female initiatives – for instance, for running magazines, prizes, and university programs in a different way. Magazines like *El Croquis* or *Arquitectura Viva,* have been super important in the last 30 years to identify architectural quality... but they have a challenges in front, they need to decide if architecture is more important as an object, no mattering the authors, or as a culture, contributing to seek diversity.

Yes, I'm an individual and I can evolve. But they are supposed to show the panorama of architecture in the world, and we are moving slowly. Some parts of the official culture of architecture have not move a fraction. I also know that many people think one day the 50% ratios won't be necessary, and that day will be amazing. This won't sound nice, but I absolutely disagree. I think the compulsory female ratios have to be there, everywhere.

For example, I very honestly say, and this is something I am writing about, that public and private promoters – especially promoters building a good quality of buildings - shouldn't be allowed to hire only male architects. You want to be a promoter? Perfect. Hire 50% of women. You will end with equity. Why is it not possible to say that if you want to hire architects, and you are building – how many - 300 houses, 3000 houses every year? – that you hire equal number of female architects and men. This needs to be done in every sector of architecture. It's not just academics. You want to have architectural awards? Great - 50% of them need to go to women. You want to publish about architecture? 50% of it needs to be about women architects. It's a slow, small process, but it has to be done. I know some people don't like the compulsory rates, but I think this is one of the only possible paths.

So the last question: What advice would you offer to women approaching the practice or profession of architecture? We have had these conversations. My feeling is that there is sort of an unconscious trip we all do through our childhood and adolescence for becoming an architect and getting the degree. And I think this trip is longer for female students than for male students.

There are cultural habits. When you are a male, you usually like sports. I always ask students so they become conscious to looking. What is male room or a female room? If you are putting together female room - is it all pink? Or you look at the dolls we were playing when we were girls, no, and how we would dress, um - all the games were playing, and everything. This is where it starts.

What I will say is that I think it is very important keep the essential aspects of how women create, and how women studying architecture create their own identity, and feel that there is something valuable about that identity. I'm not talking about just one. Many girls have been playing to be mothers when they were children, and many 'were not.' And many were playing with Barbie doll and many were not. Many were into STEM science, and many were not.

But that differential identity, I think it's always valuable. I think the main message is to tell these women starting to study architecture or starting to practice, that architecture as a profession, and society can benefit a lot from these unique background that they are having.

So there are a lot of men practicing as men, but very few people actually having a female background and exploring it in depth, and looking at how it can be useful for society. Yes, I think the advice is that. Understanding that the same things that were helping you to create your identity can help others to have a better environment.

Yes, this is a very important message – to have your own identity ... a reflection and relation to personal experience and values. Thank you so much for sharing your story and ideas.

Image Sources

Figure 1. La Catarata, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea.

Figure 2. Izaskun Chinchilla Architects.

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