

Making women's works visible: the MoMoWo project

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MOMOWO

WOMEN DESIGNERS, CRAFTSWOMEN,  
ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS  
BETWEEN 1918 AND 1945



WOMEN'S CREATIVITY SINCE  
THE MODERN MOVEMENT

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of the European Union



Series *Women's Creativity*, 1

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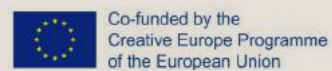
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MoMoWo Partnership:



<http://www.momowo.eu>



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# MOMOWO

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Series *Women's Creativity*, 1

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## Making Women's Works Visible: The MoMoWo Project

**What is MoMoWo?** MoMoWo - Women's Creativity Since the Modern Movement is the first project to win a grant from the European Union's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) to highlight women's achievements between 1918 and 2018 in the fields of architecture, civil engineering, urban planning, landscape architecture, conservation and restoration, and interior and furniture design.

MoMoWo's challenge is to make visible women's hidden achievements in design fields that have historically been considered almost exclusively a man's prerogative. Even today, some fields are still perceived as predominantly male.

Technically, MoMoWo is a large-scale cultural cooperative project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme (2014–2020). It is a four-year non-profit project that began on October 20, 2014.

The MoMoWo partnership is transnational and multidisciplinary. Besides the International Coordinator, Politecnico di Torino (Project Leader), the partnership consists of six co-organisers, all of which are universities and research centres in Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France, Slovenia and Italy.<sup>1</sup>

**Why the MoMoWo Project?** The project originated from empirical evidence about gender invisibility, gained during the partners' research and teaching experiences. The contemporary history of women in design professions and the tangible cultural heritage or legacy produced by their works are still mostly unknown today, not only to the general public but also to students, scholars and professionals.

Women's works are not featured in textbooks on the history of architecture, the history of building technologies and engineering, urban history or design history. Furthermore, buildings and neighbourhoods designed by women, except for those by a few 'archistars', are rarely included in mainstream histories and or architectural guidebooks of major European cities.

**What are the main goals of the project?** MoMoWo aims to reveal and promote the contributions of women design professionals to the European tangible cultural heritage and legacy, contributions that have been significantly 'hidden from history'. At the same time, considering history as a living matter,

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<sup>1</sup> MoMoWo's partners are: Creative University, Lisbon (ENSILIS/IADE); Universidad de Oviedo (UNIOVI); Universiteit Leiden (LU) –from 20 October 2014 to 30 June 2016; Znanstvenoraziskovalni Center Slovenske Akademije Znanosti in Umetnosti, Ljubljana (ZRC-SAZU); Université Grenoble Alpes (UGA); Istituto Superiore sui Sistemi Territoriali per l'Innovazione, Turin (SiTI); Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) from 1 July 2016 to present.

the project aims to promote and increase the value of the works and professional achievements of the past and present generations of women in order to give strength to future generations of creators.

The MoMoWo goal is ambitious and societal. It aims to step up support for gender equality and increase recognition for women's creativity without bias through the construction of a virtual bridge across generations, starting from the experience of the Modern Movement pioneers. In fact, the Modern Movement represents the first step in female emancipation in the architecture and design professions.

**How to increase women's visibility?** All MoMoWo activities are planned to foster knowledge, raise awareness and build consensus about women professionals.

These activities are divided into fifty work packages that are to be undertaken in close cooperation between the partners. Each activity involves downstream or upstream cultural operators, scholars, professionals, photographers, graphic designers, etc. Activities centre around research, creation, communication and dissemination.

**Mapping to know: Database with GIS.** The major research activity consists of creating a database that maps women active in Europe and European women active abroad, from 1918 up to the present time. It has been conceived and implemented to underpin the contents of the MoMoWo cultural activities and their products.

The database includes biographical data and works of both prominent and lesser-known professionals. The biographical data covers education and training, professional histories, and networks women have operated in. The networks include informal societies and memberships in trade bodies and associations. The data concerning the past was collected into three chronological spans that relate to significant periods of cultural, social and political change in Europe: 1918–45, 1946–68 and 1969–89. The database also includes the most recent period from 1989 to 2018. This last period is marked by significant historical events, namely the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the opportunities that globalization created for women working in the design and building fields.

Available on the MoMoWo website, the database increases the accessibility to building and sites through the application of the Geographic Information System (GIS).

**Sharing knowledge and experience: Workshops.** Three International Historical Conferences/Workshops with interviews with women's professionals were conceived as peer-to-peer learning activities, in order to share knowledge and experience.

The topics of the three workshops –held in Leiden 2015<sup>2</sup>, Ljubljana 2016<sup>3</sup>, Oviedo 2017– have reflected the three 20th century historical periods of the database. The first period, from the end of the

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.momowo.eu/1st-international-conference-workshop-booklet/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.momowo.eu/2nd-historical-workshop-booklet/>

First World War to the end of the Second World War, witnessed the official entry of women into the building and design fields. The second period, from the end of the Second World War to the student revolt of May 1968, was a time of expanded opportunities for female design professionals. The third period, from the student revolt of May 1968 to the fall of the Berlin Wall, was characterised by significant production, both qualitatively and quantitatively, due to the 1968 youth uprisings in Europe and the ensuing contribution of the new feminist movements.

The MoMoWo workshops have been an opportunity to stimulate critical debate, to foster new studies as well as to collect materials for the database implementation.

This e-book is the first issue of open-access publication series devoted to the studies that originated from each workshop.

**Communicating and fostering networking, active citizenship and know-how transfer: Open Days.** A key communication and networking activity is the annual open day in partners' countries held in professional women's studios to celebrate Women's Day on March 8. Via the professional orders which are patrons of the project, women professionals are invited to open their studios to visitors (students, young professionals, citizens, municipal administrators, building companies, potential commissioners) and present their works and projects, thus fostering active citizenship and creating a sense of community.

This activity has provided new professional contacts and opportunities for transferring know-how through generations. More than sixty architecture, engineering and design studios run by women opened to visitors in the 2016 and 2017 editions of this successful activity.

**Self-promotion and active involvement of creators: Agenda web page and Cultural-tourist Itineraries.** Since its inception, the MoMoWo website has an Agenda Web page where architects, engineers, designers and other users can advertise creations, publications, and activities related to MoMoWo's mission.

MoMoWo teams worked on the design of cultural-tourist itineraries of works created by women. The main result has been a guidebook.

In order to design this editorial product, an innovative and interactive approach has been applied downstream. This approach consisted of the active involvement of women architects and designers to suggest works to be included into the MoMoWo itineraries. This approach was tested during the Turin preparation of the first MoMoWo public presentation at the Festival Architettura in Città 2015. On that occasion, a call was launched, via the architects and engineers' associations, to receive works from women professionals to be presented to the public. The call asked for the creator's favourite work and not necessarily the most popular one. The works selected by MoMoWo have since become part of the Turin walking tours, "Women and the City: Fragments of an architectural talk," and of the open-air installation, "W = Women".

The MoMoWo installation was formed from the QR codes of the single works and provided the festival participants and tourists a virtual journey across buildings and interiors designed by women in Turin.

The professionals who participated in these events have become MoMoWo's first ambassadors and we offered to publish their works in the MoMoWo guidebook published in 2016, *Women: Architecture & Design Itineraries across Europe*.

**Disseminating through cultural tourism: Guidebook.** The MoMoWo guidebook resulted from MoMoWo's cultural tourist itineraries. It is the first architectural guide devoted specifically to women's works in Europe. It is a 236-page book presenting 18 itineraries and 125 works. The itineraries focus on four cities (Barcelona, Lisbon, Paris and Turin) and two countries (the Netherlands and Slovenia) that are representative of the MoMoWo partnership and evocative of cultural, geographic and landscape varieties across Europe. A biographical article about one or more women pioneers completes the geographical sections.

The MoMoWo guidebook is a pilot product since its format can be extended to other cities and countries, as well as to others fields of interest.

The purpose of this publication is to encourage visitors to have a personal dialogue with European cities and countries along the most varied and even unusual itineraries showcasing different types of urban and non-urban works, sites, and buildings.

To include a large number of women professionals, we decided to restrict the number of works from the same creator, thus favouring the visibility of many different creators and lesser known architects and interior designers worthy of attention for the quality of their work. The selection of works was undertaken to offer a wide variety of building types and to include *ex novo* buildings or reuse of existing buildings, refurbishments and restoration works, extensions of buildings, urban designs, garden designs, landscape architecture as well as interior designs.

The MoMoWo guidebook has been printed in 3000 copies –freely distributed– and the digital version is available open-access.<sup>4</sup>

**Raising awareness and building consensus: International Competitions.** To raise awareness and build consensus about MoMoWo's mission, two international competitions were organised during the first-year project. The challenge was to transform potential audiences and non-audiences from passive receivers into active creators.

The first competition for the design of the MoMoWo visual identity, logo and a promotional object was launched at the inception of the project. This competition was open to graphic designers under the age of 35, while women prisoners in the Lisbon penitentiary manufactured the promotional objects.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.momowo.eu/cultural-touristic-itineraries-guide-book/>

All submitted logos have been exhibited under the title "MoMoWo thread" at the Festival Architettura in Città 2015, in Turin. The logos were printed on objects of daily use such as pillowcases, dish towels, aprons, tablecloths, and placemats silent witnesses to time divided between a building site, a design project, a washing machine and an iron. The idea for the exhibition set-up originated from a quite playful observation about the role of women that is still perhaps not entirely free from the 'sweet tyranny' of housework.

The second competition, **Photography reportage on a woman designer's own home**, was devoted to self-perception and representation. It focused on existing mediation between domestic activities and professional work. These reportages portray women professionals inside the home designed, not for a commissioner, but for themselves and their families.

In 2017, the selected reportages have been exhibited in Turin at the Festival Architettura in Città and in Seoul at the 26th World Architects Congress of the UIA - Union Internationale des Architectes.

These photographic projects are also part of the MoMoWo International Travelling Exhibition and its catalogue, which are the main means of project dissemination.

**Showing women's achievements: International Travelling Exhibition and its Catalogue.** The MoMoWo exhibition opened in Oviedo in July 2016 then moved to Lisbon, Grenoble, Delft, Eindhoven, and Ljubljana. After its Turin stop in 2018, the exhibition is expected to move to other cities in Europe and beyond.

The exhibition is organised into two sections, indoor and outdoor, and addresses not only specialists but also the general public and non-audiences. The outdoor section, showing the results of the photo competition, is designed to be viewed in urban public spaces, such as streets, courtyards, squares, and train stations. The indoor section consists mainly of an interactive digital exhibition entitled "MoMoWo. 100 Works | 100 Years | 100 Women" that shows the first results from the MoMoWo database.

The Catalogue describes how women in Europe have reacted with inventiveness to the architectural and design profession's restrictive and sometimes discriminatory practices, engendering innovations in their professional fields.

The number of published works is symbolic, as 'one hundred' could also mean 'countless' as in the Latin word *centum*. The number of women designers –each work has a different designer– derives from MoMoWo's choice to represent many different creators, consequently also popularising lesser-known figures.

This catalogue is a 360-page book with more than 550 images, 100 entries, 13 thematic essays, and covers 28 countries in Europe and beyond. More than 300 women architects and designers are listed in the index of names. The 45 authors of texts are not just members of MoMoWo's teams but also European experts invited to contribute to the project.

The first section of the catalogue presents the 100 works exhibited and the biography of their 100 authors.

Alongside the 100 selected works goes “ChronoMoMoWo”, the timeline of women’s achievements in winning greater civil rights, higher education, and public recognition of their work or career.

Hopefully, this book will suggest new historical visions that include the greatest works by women architects and designers in the mainstream history of architecture and design, thus enriching the discipline.

Like all other collections, the meaning of MoMoWo’s collection cannot be completely defined by the intrinsic values of its collected works. It derives meaning by its ability to provoke a conscious process of attributing meaning by its public. To support this dialectical process and to avoid the risk of treating History as a series of *sequentia fxa* or even closed ‘totalities’, a series of essays provides the reader with arguments that cross and break the linear sequence, sometimes bypassing the geographical confines of Europe and offering examples and comparisons from elsewhere in the world.

The Catalogue maps a fascinating and evocative history of tangible European cultural heritage created by women. Being a ‘sampling’, the MoMoWo collection is a slice of history, telling us something that transcends specific values of the presented works, becoming not only a bridge between creator and user but also between the authors and future creators.

The Catalogue was published in a run of 3000 copies and freely distributed. An open-access digital version is available at [www.momowo.eu](http://www.momowo.eu).<sup>5</sup>

**Seeking new research pats.** The MoMoWo 2018 International Symposium at the Politecnico di Torino seeks new research paths and activities that highlight and disseminate knowledge that eliminates gender bias against women in the present and in future societies.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.momowo.eu/travellingexhibitioncatalogue/>



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