



## History of the Architects? Association of Catalonia

- 1874 Creation of the Architects? Association of Catalonia.
- 1929 (27 Dec) Approval of the Royal Decree recognising the obligation to become a member of a professional association in order to exercise the profession of architect in Spain.
- 1931 (13 Jun) Constitution of the Architects? Association of Catalonia, Aragon, the Balearic Islands and Logroño.
- 1933 Demarcation of the regional scope of the Association in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands.
- 1944 First issue of the journal *Cuadernos de Arquitectura* (which in 1981 started to be published in Catalan with the name *Quaderns*).
- 1962 (29 Apr) Inauguration of the Association?s headquarters in Plaça Nova in Barcelona.
- 1978 The Association becomes known simply by the name of Architects? Association of Catalonia.
- 1984-2002 Regional rollout with the creation of five regional branches and their corresponding offices. The COAC has five branches: Barcelona, Tarragona, Lleida, Girona and Ebre.
- 1996 The COAC hosts the 19th Congress of the International Union of Architects (UIA).

### From Master of Works to professional association

As in many other European countries, the predecessors of architects in Spain were known as ?Masters of Works?, a title which gradually fell out of use until its definitive disappearance in the early 19th century. This role would be transferred to a new professional profile: the architect, who began to receive royal commissions to plan and direct projects instigated by the Crown. The first official qualifications were not registered, however, until the end of the 18th century, granted by the School of Fine Arts of San Fernando.

This institution would go above and beyond its mere academic function, starting by offering certain services to its members, most notably one of the very first tariff sheets of professional fees. Meanwhile, in Barcelona, the creation of the School of Architecture would serve as the

cornerstone for the first Catalan qualifications which, according to documentary records, date back to 1845. The grouping of those early professionals with their qualification under their arms would give rise to the Architects' Associations, which could be regarded as the true origin of the professional organization as we know it today.

The Architects' Association of Catalonia was set up in 1874 as a kind of club with voluntary membership which most newly-graduated professionals joined. These associations stretched across the whole of Spain and formed the basis for the organization of the first architects' congresses, where the subject of an official association began to be discussed. Thus at the fourth congress, held in San Sebastian in 1916, a committee was charged with drawing up the Association's regulations, which were submitted to the Council of Ministers three years later.

### **Constitution of the COAC**

Despite repeated requests from the emerging collective of architects, the requirement for association membership to practice as an architect was not recognized by Royal Decree until 27 December 1929, shortly before the end of the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera. The next steps led unavoidably to the constitution, in 1931, of six architects' associations in Spain, one of which was the one for Catalonia, Aragon, the Balearic Islands and Logroño. In 1933, Aragon and Logroño withdrew from the group to form their own association. The organization was then named the Architects' Association of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands. The Balearic Islands remained in the Association until 1978, at which time they also set up their own associative structure.

At the first meeting of the Governing Board of the Association on 4 July 1931, with Ricard Giralt Casadesús as the Dean, we can find many names that today form part of the most hallowed pages of the history books on Catalan architecture, such as Josep Lluís Sert, Josep Puig i Cadafalch, Sixte Illescas, Lluís Bonet i Garí, Josep Goday, Francesc Folguera, Josep M. Pericàs and Josep Torres Clavé.

As well as establishing the basic services for its members, with regional offices in Lleida, Girona and Tarragona, the COAC started publishing *Quaderns* in 1944, which would go on to become one of the most prestigious architectural journals in Spain. Initially entitled *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*, the journal was not published in Catalan until 1981. *Quaderns* would prove to be the perfect platform for reflecting the hottest issues and the most innovative debates capturing the interest of architectural professionals. Edited by respected professionals, in its almost 70 years of life, the journal has featured a significant amount of the history of Catalan architecture in its pages and continues to be an essential tool for the discussion and dissemination of architecture.

### **A key role during the Franco years**

After the Spanish Civil War and with the consolidation of Franco's dictatorship, the COAC took on a prominent role in upholding democratic rights and freedom of expression in a society in which these very principles had been persecuted. For many years the meeting rooms at the COAC became hotbeds of debate, where, under the auspices of a meeting convened on the subject of architecture, the issues actually addressed went way beyond these boundaries. Many of those meetings were held clandestinely or were suspended by the government's representative of the time, whose presence was mandatory at any public gathering.

At no point did the COAC simply sit back and observe the social resistance to the dictatorship.

Proof of this is its presence at the *Caputxinada* of 1966, and not just with any representative but including the Dean himself. Antoni de Moragas i Gallissà, the Dean of the COAC at that time, was among the 500 people whose two-day barricade in the Convent of the Capuchins in Sarrià turned out to be one of the most decisive landmarks in the students' movement against the Franco dictatorship.

### **A new and controversial headquarters**

A few years before the *Caputxinada*, in 1962, the COAC had taken a decisive step forward in its modernization and integration in the social fabric of the city with the inauguration of its new headquarters just a few metres from the Cathedral at the heart of the historic quarter of Barcelona.

Led by the Dean at that time, Manuel de Solà-Morales de Rosselló (6), the COAC embarked on the transfer of its existing headquarters in the Eixample district to a new building in an area of the city where historical memory and a certain urban decay lived side-by-side. In a process that was dogged by controversy (7) and public debate, the project by Xavier Busquets turned out to be the winner of a tender that involved two rounds. Moreover, the eight stories of the building were designed by other architects.

One of the hallmarks of the COAC's headquarters are the screen-printed drawings by Pablo Picasso (8), reproduced on a 57-metre long mural on the façade. The Norwegian artist Carl Nesjar was charged with transferring the drawings of the brilliant artist from Malalga onto huge concrete panels using the sand-blasting technique.

In 2012, the 50th anniversary of the construction of the headquarters in Plaça Nova, today a real landmark and symbol of the city, was marked with an exhibition and conference that served as an opportunity to present the *Architects' Association of Catalonia 1874-1962*, which looks back over the history of the Association up to the point that it moved to Plaça Nova.

### **The territorial expansion of the Association**

In the most recent history of the Association, the end of the 1980s marked another important turning point. Between 1941, when the current headquarters for the Ebre were set up in Tortosa, and 1988, when the Osono regional office opened in Vic, the COAC had maintained its territorial structure intact, limited to the four provincial capitals, plus the Ebre regional branch mentioned above.

In 1988, however, a new period of territorial expansion began, which would culminate in 2002 with the completion of the renovation of the decentralized office in the Eixample, the former headquarters of the Association on Gran Via in Barcelona. In the meantime, five other regional branches were established: Bages-Berguedà, in Manresa; Vallès, in Terrassa; Garrotxa, in Olot; Empordà, in Figueres and Pyrenees, in La Seu d'Urgell, plus four decentralized offices (Canet de Mar, Sant Joan Despí, Reus and Barcelona).

With these efforts to increase its presence in every corner of Catalonia, the COAC managed to address two of its most important objectives: to promote the dissemination of the culture of

architecture, and to make its services more accessible to every Catalan architect.

In 2006, as a result of the bursting of the real estate bubble and the start of the economic crisis that has had a particularly devastating effect on the construction sector and the architectural collective, the Association was forced to adjust its size and facilities across the country while minimizing, as far as possible, the impact of these measures on its services to its members.

### **A vocation of service to its members**

Its vocation to support the professional practice of architecture translates into a whole range of services which the COAC offers its members to assist them in the day-to-day practice of their profession. These include the Josep Lluís Sert Architectural School, the Competitions Office, the Library and Historical Archive, the Technical Consultancy Office, the Job Bank service and the Legal Advisory.



[1]

---

**Copyright@ Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya** : <https://www.arquitectes.cat/en/el-coac/history>

#### **Links:**

[1] <https://www.arquitectes.cat/en/printpdf/printpdf/186>