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Nationalism and Centralism: Keys to Understanding the First Spanish Educational Exhibition (Madrid, 1882)

Nacionalismo y centralismo: claves para comprender la Primera Exposición Pedagógica Española (Madrid, 1882)

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Keywords

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ABSTRACT: The Spanish Pedagogical Exhibition of 1882 is often mentioned in educational historiography, but no monographic study has been conducted on it. In this article, I attempt to fill this gap, starting with three questions:

1. To what extent did the spatial organization and distribution of objects symbolize the power struggles within Madrid's education system?
2. What experiences did visitors have and what messages did they receive and convey from the exhibition?
3. In the few existing images of this exhibition, how were educational innovations or characteristics considered to be pedagogical progress visualized?

Palabras clave

Exposición Pedagógica
Madrid
Siglo XIX
Nacionalismo
Reforma Pedagógica
Patrimonio Escolar

RESUMEN: La Exposición Pedagógica Española de 1882 es muy mencionada en la historiografía educativa, pero no se ha realizado ningún estudio monográfico sobre ella. En este artículo intento cubrir esta laguna, partiendo de tres interrogantes:

1. ¿En qué medida la organización espacial y la distribución de objetos simbolizaron las luchas de poder existentes dentro de la educación madrileña?
2. ¿Qué experiencias vivieron los visitantes y qué mensajes recibieron y transmitieron de la exposición?
3. En las escasas imágenes existentes de esta exposición, ¿cómo se visualizaron las innovaciones educativas o las características consideradas como propias del progreso pedagógico?

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE FIRST SPANISH EDUCATIONAL EXHIBITION AND ITS INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

A few years ago, Martin Lawn lamented that the Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs had never been studied in depth by educational historians (Lawn, 2009). However, this trend has been changing, and we now have several historiographical contributions that recognize the role these events played "in disseminating educational ideas and technologies" (Lundahl, 2016, p. 24), in making visible "educational practices and institutions for external validation" (Sobe & Boven, 2014, p. 10). As is well known, the Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs were a characteristic phenomenon of the nineteenth century, functioning as "global showcases" (Viera, 2020, p. 8) in which participating countries displayed their achievements and advances in agricultural and industrial production, as well as their discoveries, inventions, and progresses in the scientific, social, cultural, and educational fields. They were spaces for learning and cultural transfer between different nations, but they were also an arena of comparison and competition, where countries fought to demonstrate their success and supremacy in terms of civilization. All these nineteenth-century exhibitions "represented a symbolic universe constructed by an emerging economic and social elite," so it can be said that "the expositions were instruments of social, political, and cultural hegemony" (Provenzo, 2012, p. 5).

In recent years, many works have been published on education at nineteenth-century World's Fairs, with a particular focus on their transnational dimension (Dittrich, 2010 & 2013). However, educational historiography has not been concerned with studying national educational exhibitions. These emerged even before the educational sections of the Great Exhibitions. Antoine Désiré Lourmand, Secretary General of the Société des Méthodes d'Enseignement, recalled that this society, on his initiative, organized two exhibitions of educational products in Paris in December 1834 and 1835, which went unnoticed and in which books were more prominent than instruments, machines, apparatus, and maps. In June 1853, on the occasion of a conference of mayors promoted by the Lord Mayor of London and intended to discuss the system of public instruction in England, a "small Exhibition of Educational Apparatus" was organized at the Mansion House (Barnard, 1854, p. 365), the official residence of the Lord Mayor. Many educational societies and the principal publishers of educational works sent books and school objects. The exhibition aroused unusual interest; newspaper reports spoke of crowds of visitors who thronged the rooms and made it almost impossible to examine the exhibits closely, and this influx of people was interpreted as evidence of the attention that educational issues were beginning to arouse in English society.

In view of this success, the British Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce decided to organize an international educational exhibition in the summer months of 1854, at St. Martin's Hall in London. One of the reasons for staging this educational exhibition was to make up for the neglect that the subject of education had suffered at the 1851 World's Fair. Therefore, the organizers set out, first, "to increase public interest in education and to showcase pedagogical approaches from around the world"; and second, "to call attention to the need for improvement and progressive approaches in education and the arts in light of changes in manufacturing and commerce" (Roos, 2019, pp. 135-136). To achieve this second objective, the typology of the objects and educational appliances to be presented was clearly defined, and there were three types: "models and plans of school buildings; arrangements, and fittings, books, maps, diagrams, models, apparatus"; "specimens of the work done in schools, viz; drawings, writings, needlework"; and "laws of public instruction, statistics of education, school regulations, timetables" ("Society of Arts," 1854, p. 6). The aim was to make the collection formed for the exhibition permanent and to establish the basis of a national museum of education.

The London Educational Exhibition was a considerable success, attracting exhibitors from the United Kingdom and its colonies, but also from France, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, The Netherlands,

Bavaria, Saxony, Russia, Hanover, Austria, and Switzerland. Even Spain had a small representation. It was here that the Froebel system was first presented in Western Europe (Martínez, 2013, p. 197). In addition, during the time it was open, lectures were given on the theory and practice of education, attended by such illustrious figures as the educationalist Henry Barnard, one of the builders of the American common-school system, and Heinrich Hoffmann, one of the promoters of the Froebelian kindergarten. However, the most important contribution of the 1854 London Educational Exhibition was that it served as a model for the design of the educational departments of the World's Fairs and pedagogical exhibitions held in various European countries from that date onwards. In general, all of these events combined two parallel activities: a congress or series of conferences offering an overview of educational progress and innovations from a theoretical perspective; and an exhibition showing the applications of these educational innovations in terms of manufactured objects and school results.

This model was also applied to the first Spanish Educational Exhibition in 1882, which was held in Madrid in June and July, following the first National Pedagogical Congress. Both were fostered by *El Fomento de las Artes* [Society for the Promotion of Arts] (García, 1987), a society whose name and objectives were similar to those of the British Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, which inspired the London Educational Exhibition of 1854. Although there is a wealth of literature on this event (Batanaz, 1982), one obvious fact has not been pointed out: the congress had a marked centralist character, since it was promoted from Madrid, the organizers were mainly Madrid educators, and the in-person conferences and speeches were also dominated by teachers from the capital. I believe that the hidden agenda behind the congress was to visibilize and validate the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* [Free Institution of Education] throughout Spain. This educational reform movement emerged in Madrid in 1876 and practiced innovative teaching methods in its nursery and primary schools, such as school trips, which it wished to disseminate and extend among Spanish teachers. However, Madrid's public-school teachers generally viewed this private and secular educational reform movement with suspicion, so they managed to secure a significant presence at the conference sessions in order to defend their traditional methods, validated by years of experience, based on memory and repetition, and justified by the poverty of their schools and students. New interpretations of the discourses and discussions at this congress can be made, based on knowledge of the emerging pedagogical elites in Madrid and their struggle to gain hegemony over the school system in the capital. However, this power struggle, which became visible at the National Pedagogical Congress, marginalized most of the educators who came from outside Madrid. Many of them learned during the preparatory session of the congress, that the speaking slots for the debates had already been allocated, with the majority of the speeches assigned to "residents of Madrid," and leaving those from the provinces with the only possibility of expressing their opinions on a sheet of paper, which would later be published in the conference proceedings (Oliveros, 1882, p. 7).

The idea of organizing an Educational Exhibition alongside the 1882 congress was said to have emerged very late, around mid-May, and was presented as the result of improvisation. It was not the first time that educational objects had been exhibited in Spain, as regional and local competitions on agriculture, arts, sciences, industry, and commerce in Barcelona, Zaragoza, León, Lugo, Valencia, Cádiz, Guadalajara, and Pontevedra had included educational sections, as publishers and school equipment manufacturers were considered part of the local industrial network. In some of these, such as the 1877 exhibition in Barcelona, calligraphy, arithmetic, drawings, and crafts by students from public and private schools also began to be displayed. However, the limited and local nature of these exhibitions prevented comparative studies from being carried out, which led some distinguished educators to call for a "national educational congress and exhibition" to be held in order to gain a clearer picture of what was happening in Spain (Rius, 1877, p. 75).

For this reason, from the beginning of 1882, the Madrid press started to propose and assume that a "school" exhibition would be held at the same time as the National Pedagogical Congress, scheduled for

the end of May. It was referred to as a "school exhibition" because it was hoped that pupils from Madrid's schools would present their work at the exhibition to show the congress participants the recent educational progress made in the capital. However, in mid-April, the newspapers reported that this exhibition would be "of teaching objects" and that a shipment of teaching materials from Germany and Austria was about to arrive, which sparked protests from Spanish publishers and manufacturers, who approached the organizing society, *El Fomento de las Artes,* asking to participate with their own nationally produced teaching materials. *El Fomento de las Artes* responded on April 26, announcing that the exhibition would be called "pedagogical" because it would display almost exclusively educational objects. However, two days earlier, on April 24, the same society had begun inviting Madrid schools to participate in "an exhibition of teaching materials and students' work" to be held "as a complement to the National Pedagogical Congress," justifying the exhibition on the grounds that "some foreign companies had offered to exhibit their materials." (Aguado, 1882).

Therefore, it seems that *El Fomento de las Artes* was encouraged to organize the Educational Exhibition not because of suggestions from the Madrid press, but because of pressure from foreign manufacturers of school materials. The interest of these companies was entirely economic and based on their knowledge of the imminent creation of the Museum of Primary Education, which finally became a reality with the Royal Decree of May 6, 1882. Manufacturers knew full well that these museums were built with the collected materials from the educational exhibits, which very often became marketplaces where teaching aids were bought and sold like any other commercial product, giving rise to a flourishing "school industry" (Meda, 2016, p. 27). The day after the museum's founding decree was published, the press announced that the State intended to acquire the best objects presented at the Educational Exhibition for the museum, which would enable the development of a new national industry, the educational one. Although no document supported this claim, the number of exhibitors grew exponentially. The avalanche of objects received made it impossible to make any prior selection, so all were accepted and placed in the available space in less than two weeks. Thus, on June 2, access to the Educational Exhibition was granted exclusively to teachers attending the National Pedagogical Congress, and from June 9 —the day of the official inauguration attended by King Alfonso XII— it was opened to the general public.

Although the 1882 Educational Exhibition is well known and frequently mentioned in Spanish educational historiography, no monographic study has been conducted on it. In this article, I propose to analyze its most notable characteristics, attempting to answer three questions:

1. To what extent did the spatial organization and distribution of objects symbolize the power struggles existing within Madrid's education system?
2. What experiences did visitors have and what messages did they receive and convey from the exhibition?
3. In the few existing images of this exhibition, how were educational reforms or the characteristics considered typical of progressive education visualized?

To answer these questions, we have drawn on the main sources of documentation that exist on the 1882 Educational Exhibition: the extensive report published by the organizers and the observations made by visitors, most of which were published in the press of the time, both national and local. The methodology used was that of the historical-educational method. Therefore, all the publications of the time available in the Digital Newspaper Library of the *Biblioteca Nacional* and in the *Biblioteca Virtual de Prensa Histórica* [Virtual Library of Historical Press] —which has a very important collection of local newspapers and magazines— were analyzed in parallel. The non-digitized press was consulted at the *Biblioteca Nacional* and the *Hemeroteca Municipal of Madrid.* To contrast with other British and French exhibitions,

digitized documentation was accessed in The British Newspaper Archive and Gallica. In all cases, the key concept used in the searches was *exposición pedagógica* —and its translations into French and English, "educational exhibition" and *exposition pédagogique*—. The information published by newspapers of different political leanings has been compared and, above all, the information appearing in the "Madrid" and "provincial" press has been confronted, analyzing the different discourses and approaches presented in each publication. Most of the educational magazines of the time were also reviewed, especially *El Magisterio Español,* which devoted several articles to commenting on the exhibition. And, although not used directly for this article, all the catalogs and reports published on the Museum of Primary Education between 1882 and 1894 were explored.

2. SPACES IN THE SPANISH EDUCATIONAL EXHIBITION OF 1882

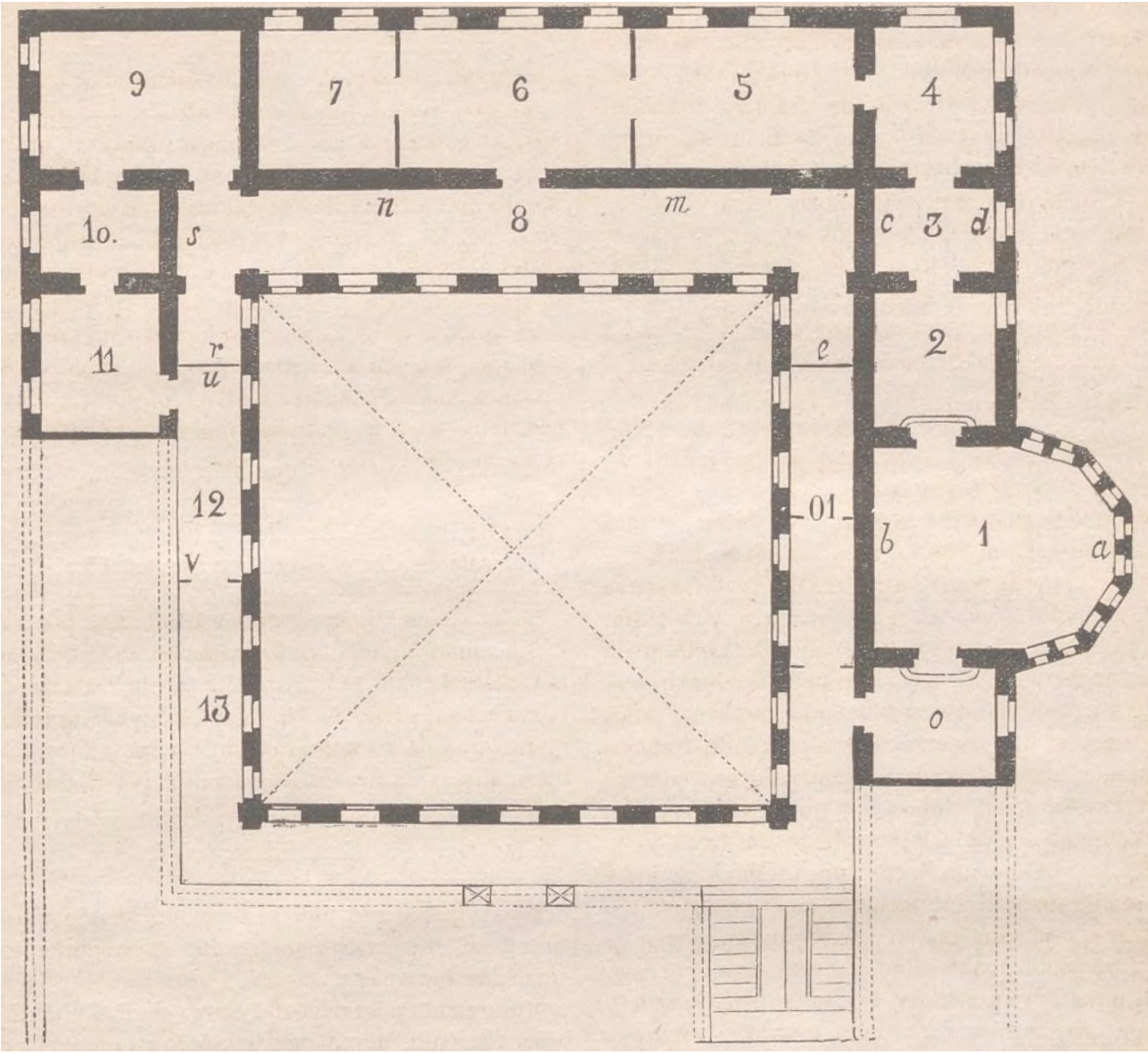
As soon as the Spanish Educational Exhibition opened its doors, the press at the time criticized the "remote and eccentric location" where it had been set up ("Exposición Pedagógica", 1882a, p. 1). And there was a reason for this: Madrid was not prepared to organize large events and lacked suitable spaces for an ambitious exhibition project. The *El Fomento de las Artes* society had initially planned to hold a small exhibition in its own halls, located in a very central location. But they were forced to find space for 3,615 objects sent by 250 exhibitors (El Fomento de las Artes, 1882, p. 7). At the last minute, the State ceded a recently constructed building for the Veterinary School on Embajadores Street. The "eccentricity" of the location was its geographical situation, in a suburb populated by factories and workshops, inhabited by workers and with an urban landscape dominated by shacks and industrial chimneys. It was a little-known place but feared and despised by most Madrileños, especially the upper and middle classes, who were the regular consumers of cultural events organized in the capital in the nineteenth century. The City Council organized special transportation from the Puerta del Sol and also provided free admission for several days a week, but the press predicted that only those very interested in educational issues would venture into these humble neighborhoods. However, against all odds, some 200,000 people visited the Educational Exhibition during the time it was open —from June 9 to 30 and July 15 to 17—, with 42,223 visitors registering on a single day, June 11. These were spectacular figures for a city like Madrid, which had a population of around 450,000 in 1882.

The Educational Exhibition was spread over fifteen rooms and galleries of the Veterinary School; the first two were introductory in nature, which was recognized by the organizers themselves when they numbered these spaces as 01 and 0 on the explanatory sketch drawn to help those who were unable to visit the exhibition in person understand its layout (Image 1). The promoters also planned the walking movements, or "operations of walking," according to the expression coined by de Certeau (1984, p. 97), which was their only means of helping visitors understand the narrative of the exhibition, as no general catalog was published. After climbing the main staircase, the public came face to face with gallery 01, which was clearly separated from the others and outside the marked route, and then entered through the right wing and had to walk in that direction until "exiting through the left" (Congreso Nacional Pedagógico, 1883, p. 425).

Gallery 01 displayed a prototype rural school designed by the Madrid publishing house Eugenio Sobrino y Dorado, with the teacher's desk and chair on a raised platform, desks for boys and girls, a crucifix with a canopy, inkwells and quills, several collections of wallcharts, and other objects commonly found in nineteenth-century schools (Exposición Pedagógica, 1882b). Some visitors interpreted the marginal location of this model of a rural school as symbolizing its traditional character, its representation of "long-established" teaching systems ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882c, p. 3). Other visitors explained this isolation as a deliberate decision by Eugenio Sobrino himself, who wanted to "escape the established

competition within the walls" (Ferradas, 1882a, p. 2). This statement shows us that the Educational Exhibition was highly competitive, and in fact some newspapers described it as a "contest" or "competition."

Image 1. Plan of the rooms of the Spanish Educational Exhibition of 1882



Source: Congreso Nacional Pedagógico (1883). *Actas de las Sesiones Celebradas. Discursos pronunciados y memorias leídas y presentadas a la mesa. Notas, conclusiones y demás documentos referentes a esta Asamblea. Seguido de una revista crítica de la Exposición Pedagógica de 1882, publicado por la Sociedad de Fomento de las Artes, iniciadora del Congreso*. Lib. de D. Gregorio Hernando, p. 431.

With the image of what could have been an idealized Spanish rural school etched in their minds —because the real ones were much poorer— visitors entered the Educational Exhibition through an antechamber marked with the number 0 on the sketch. The vestibules in nineteenth-century exhibition spaces were crucial to understanding the content of the exhibition and to "convey a particular educational message

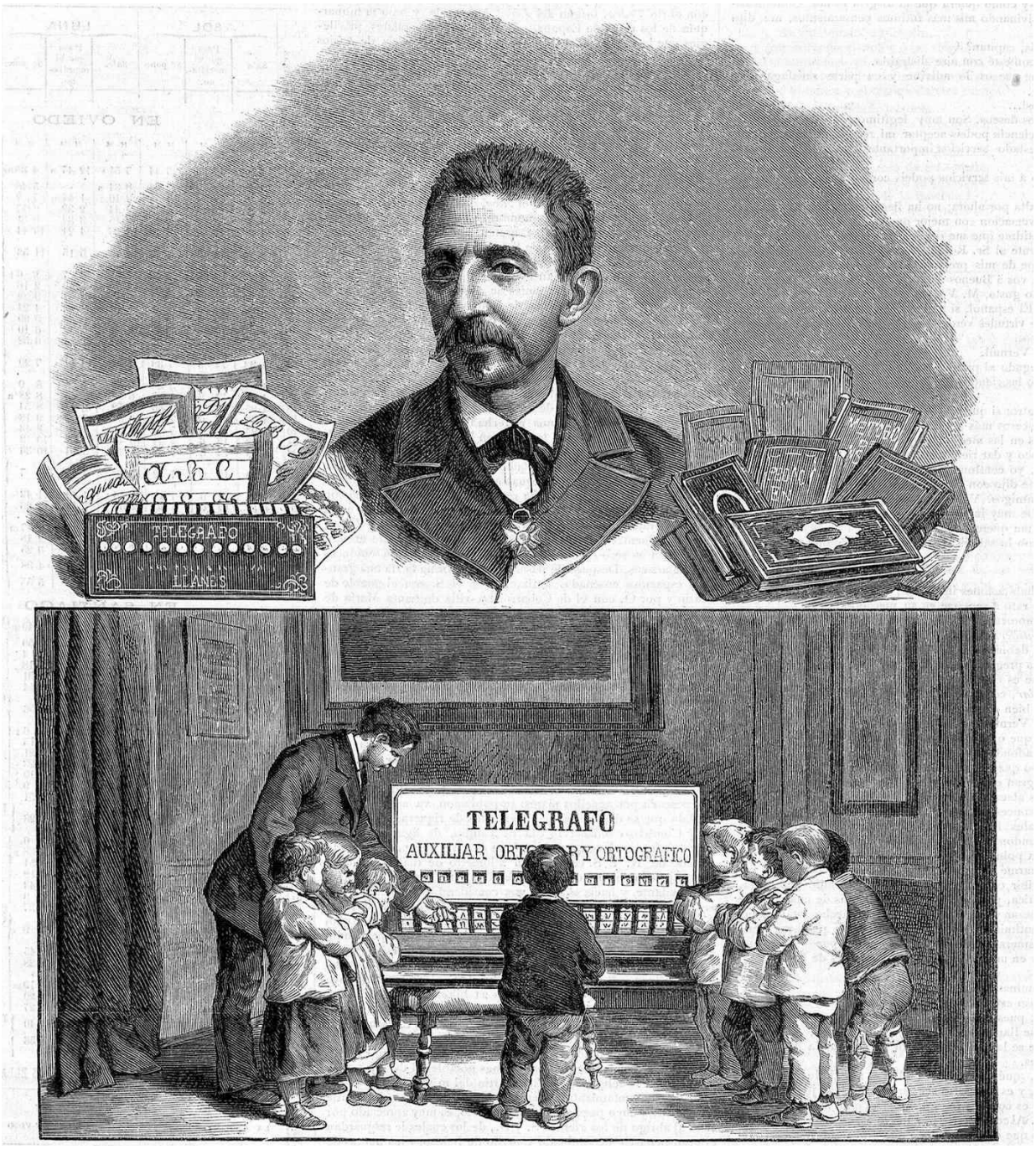
to visitors" (Beck, 2024, p. 209). This antechamber was very soberly decorated with only three elements. The first was a huge map of Madrid, which occupied an entire wall and symbolized the Madrid character of the exhibition. Virtually all teachers from the provinces complained about the predominance of schools from the capital and the poor representation of the rest of Spain; in fact, in articles published in provincial newspapers, the Educational Exhibition was never described as "national" or "Spanish" but rather as "Matritense" [Madrid-based]. But even the Madrid press complained that, although "objects from all over Spain have been able to come to the Exhibition and although many from very different regions are on display, most of the rooms have a marked local character" ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882d, p. 1) and therefore urged the government to organize a truly national exhibition in the future. The second element was a microphone used by the Piarist Brothers in their schools, a clear symbol that private education — and above all Catholic private education— was going to be well represented at the Educational Exhibition. And the third element was a pair of ephemeral columns flanking the entrance to Room 1, specially erected to display the names of important educators from Spain and abroad. However, these names do not even appear in the official review of the Educational Exhibition, which shows that the pedagogical culture of the visitors, even the teachers, was rather limited, and that the latter only identified themselves with the Spanish educator Pablo Montesino (1781-1849), the first director of the Madrid Normal School.

When visitors entered the room marked number 1 on the sketch and called the "rotunda" due to its design, they were met with an explosion of nineteenth-century educational technology. On the right (1a), the most privileged space in the exhibition was occupied by the *Colegio de San Ildefonso.* Despite the age of this municipal school, the small number of students (60) did not justify such a prominent position, which can only be explained by two reasons. One was the enormous investment that the Madrid City Council had made in educational aids and furniture during the renovation of the center in 1878, amassing a collection of extremely expensive educational objects from the best European manufacturers, which it wanted to display and show off to Madrid society (Colegio de San Ildefonso, 1882). The second reason was the great influence that the school's headmaster, Ildefonso Fernández y Sánchez, had in the organization of the Educational Exhibition and the Pedagogical Congress. This teacher was the one who debated most heatedly with the men of the reform movement of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* the advisability of introducing excursions in primary schools. Although he was opposed to this practice, he wanted to show that his refusal was based on experience and not on an attachment to the pedagogical routines of the past. For this reason, on top of the enormous teacher's desk, which, together with the "Gothic-style" armchair ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882e, p. 2), presided over his space, he placed some children's notebooks containing "a detailed account of an educational trip to El Escorial" (Congreso Nacional Pedagógico, 1883, p. 435) organized by himself and carried out by the children of the San Ildefonso school. This is an example of how the discussions at the congress were also continued in the exhibition rooms.

But Room 1 offered many more surprises. In addition to the entire collection of books and teaching aids from the Paluzié publishing house in Barcelona (area 1b), there were different models of desks for one and two students and relief maps that frightened many visitors. There was also a very varied collection of teaching aids with very pretentious names, handcrafted by the teachers themselves, which were intended to make learning to read, write, arithmetic, geography, and physical and natural sciences easier and more attractive. Educational historiography has recently begun to examine the figure of the teacher-inventor, so characteristic of the nineteenth century and so closely linked to World's Fairs and national and regional exhibitions (Meda, 2024). The 1882 Educational Exhibition offered an extraordinary display of these Spanish teacher-inventors. Their biographies show us that they did not fit the nineteenth-century teacher prototype; all of them had a social and cultural influence that transcended the walls of their classrooms. For example, in Room 1, Vicente Pérez Sierra, photographer, artist, inventor, and teacher at the school in Llanes (Asturias), exhibited his device. It was an apparatus that he patented and called an auxiliary orthological and

orthographic telegraph (Image 2). It was designed to teach reading and writing and replaced the traditional reading charts and primers. It was "cylindrical in shape with several holes made in a straight line, in which the appropriate letters are presented, surrounding several lower discs that are rotated by a handle" ("Obras de lectura," 1877, n.p.). With this device, children could, from day one, learn and compose syllables, words, and short phrases, grasping the different combinations of the alphabet in a very visual way.

Image 2. Device for teaching reading and writing invented by teacher D. Vicente Pérez Sierra



Source: Nuestros grabados. Don Vicente Pérez Sierra, maestro de Llanes (1882). *La Ilustración Cantábrica,* June 18 (17), p. 198.

Visitors' minds had not yet processed the possibilities of all this educational material when the exhibition tour took them to Room 2, which was entirely devoted to the Piarist Brothers and left even those least inclined toward religious education speechless. There they found an electrical system of microphones, telephones, and loudspeakers designed to facilitate communication within the classroom and between different rooms in the schools, along with a collection of teaching aids, many of them invented by the brothers themselves and awarded prizes at the 1878 Paris World's Fair, and a selection of artistic, geographical, historical, geometric, and calligraphic works by students from the two Madrid schools (San Fernando and San Antón), which bordered on perfection.

With their eyes saturated with images, visitors entered Room 3, which was dedicated to non-Catholic private schools. The atmosphere suddenly became minimalist, as very few objects occupied this space. Area 3c housed the exhibition of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza,* which was divided between works by teachers and students, since, as explained in their catalog, this school did not want to display any teaching materials, which were, in any case, very modest. The aim was to show the fruits of the teaching process through everyday schoolwork, expressed in products "made with absolute sincerity; incomplete, disordered (...), incorrect." These products, which were the notebooks kept during the excursions and the collections of plants, insects, and minerals assembled at the end of these, demonstrated how the spirit of observation and the learning processes were developing in these children ([Catálogo de los trabajos presentados a la Exposición], 1882, pp. 2-3). The *Institución Libre de Enseñanza,* with its mind set on the congress debates and with a hint of arrogance, claimed that it had already carried out more than 600 excursions in the last six years. On the wall opposite the display cases of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* hung a drawing by a boy from a school in Luanco (Asturias). The drawing reproduced in pen and ink, in great detail, an engraving of the palace where the 1878 Paris World's Fair was held. The choice of this flawless children's work, placed directly opposite the schoolwork containing errors produced by the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza,* was no coincidence, as we shall see in the next section.

Room 4 contained all the objects that the organizers did not know where to place in other spaces, giving it a very heterogeneous appearance. It was filled with some 275 books and various educational objects made by teachers, as well as calligraphy work by the students. Among them was a novel drawing, a plan of the public school in Hernani (Guipúzcoa) made by the children themselves, illustrating the beginning of a pedagogical trend based on children's activities and experiential learning. However, the dominant element was the central table, on which were displayed many exquisite needleworks carried out by girls from private schools, most of them located in Madrid. Room 5 featured an installation by the Madrid bookseller and publisher Manuel Rosado, who exhibited school supplies from his shop, grouping them under the concept of "Spanish Model School" ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882f). Many observers drew a comparison with the rural school presented in Room 01 and decided that the latter, due to the greater richness of its objects and the high price asked for them, could be the prototype of the urban or city school. While Room 5, although it aroused much admiration for its "purely Spanish" character ("Exposición Pedagógica celebrada en Madrid," 1882, p. 2), elicited few comments, Room 6, called "German," was met with silence, despite its size and the richness and variety of the material on display, which included collections of Froebelian objects. The reason for this invisibility was provided by a journalist: the exhibition was presided over by "the portrait of the Emperor of Germany," which indicated "that the entire section is purely German. You can leave the Spanish language at the door, because everything there is German epigraphs or inscriptions" ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882g, p. 1). Room 7, occupied entirely by the *Real Colegio de El Escorial*, refounded by the King Alfonso XII, also deserved a similar comment: "it is difficult to find anything in that room that was built in Spain" ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882h, p. 1), although this center received much more media attention because it was under the protection of the Royal House.

If we study the exhibition floor plan (Image 1), we can see that Room 8 could only be accessed from Room 6, and that visitors, before reaching it, had to pass through Rooms 5, 6, and 7, which contained the most spectacular teaching objects in the entire exhibition, but also those that were most "foreign" and uncommon in Spanish public schools. For this reason, the location of Room 8 has enormous symbolic significance, as it housed all the products from the public schools funded by the Madrid City Council. Next to it, and parallel to it, was Room 10, dedicated to the *Jardines de la Infancia,* Madrid's first Froebelian school, which was also public and funded by the state. It is clear that this section of the exhibition established a triple dialogue. First, it encouraged a comparison between the "national" —represented exclusively by examples from Madrid— and the "foreign" —magnified by the "German" installation. Second, it highlighted the differences between the "private"— symbolized by the *Real Colegio de El Escorial* – and the "public" – personified by the municipal and state schools of Madrid –. And thirdly, it highlighted the difficult balance maintained throughout the exhibition between the educational objects, which filled Rooms 5, 6, and 7, and the children's schoolwork, which filled Rooms 8 and 10.

Room 9 housed "the ostentatious installation of the rich and well-known publishing house of Gregorio Hernando" ("Exposición Pedagógica. Séptima visita," 1882, p. 2), which brought together several hundred schoolbooks and educational objects perceived as more affordable and familiar in most Spanish schools, "from the most modest to the most exalted" ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882i, p. 1). Room 11 was entirely occupied by the *Colegio Nacional de Sordomudos y de Ciegos* [National School for the Deaf and Blind], which presented the prizes it had won at the World's Fairs in Paris (1867), Vienna (1873), Philadelphia (1876), and Paris (1878), thus proving itself to be the most awarded educational institution in the entire exhibition. Its objects were completely new and different from those presented in other rooms. For example, they exhibited models made by students to facilitate intuitive teaching for those who could not see, including a large model of a city with all the obstacles that could be found on its streets, designed as preparation for educational walks (Villabrille, 1882, p. 11). The tiny Room 12 was designed as a comparison between the sewing work done by the students of the *Escuela Normal Central de Maestras* [Central Normal School for Women Teachers] and the *Asociación para la Enseñanza de la Mujer* [Association for the Education of Women], the former being a public center, and the latter a private center, founded and inspired by the intellectuals of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza.* Room 13, which was actually the exit gallery, was filled with objects made by teachers and Froebelian handicrafts made by children from the nursery school in Figueres (Gerona). The marginal and hidden position of these works suggests that there was an intention to make them invisible, despite the interest that Froebel's methodology aroused among Spanish educators at the time. However, the strategy of concealment did not work.

3. AUDIENCES AT THE SPANISH EDUCATIONAL EXHIBITION OF 1882

A tour of all the rooms in the exhibition leads us to conclude that the distribution of spaces and objects in the Educational Exhibition was not guided solely by practical, aesthetic, or pedagogical reasons, but was also the result of tensions and negotiations between the producers of the material and its users —the teachers— and power struggles between the different educational elites in Madrid. But how did visitors interpret the messages conveyed by the organizers, and what were their own experiences of the exhibition? We lack the resources used by visitor studies to analyze the emotions of the audiences who visited the 1882 Educational Exhibition, but we do have numerous reports and articles in which the most educated representatives of those audiences recounted their own experiences or those of other visitors they observed during their walks through the rooms.

Clearly, the most illustrious visitor and the one who received the most media attention was King Alfonso XII. He officially opened the Educational Exhibition on June 9, together with the entire royal family and part of

the government. This act was significant enough in itself, because the monarchy did not usually visit poor neighborhoods. His presence, therefore, determined the success of the exhibition. But he did not limit himself to a mere ceremonial tour; he walked slowly through the rooms, talked to several teachers, and delivered messages that were apparently very politically correct and inclusive, in which he praised everyone incessantly. However, only a few exhibitors received his special attention. The first installation he stopped at was that of the *Colegio de San Ildefonso,* because it was in Room 1, and there he read the children's notebooks and works with great interest. And that interest acted as a sounding board, as many newspapers reported that this school had made educational trips to El Escorial. He then moved on to Room 2 of the Piarist Brothers, where, at the entrance, a child gave a well-prepared greeting, and where the teachers themselves showed him all the objects, especially a device for learning to read and write invented by Father Mendía, which aroused the king's curiosity and was obviously publicized by the press in the following days. In Room 3, he encountered the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* and took note of the plants and minerals collected by the students during their excursions, asking "questions" and making "astute observations", and these two actions suggested a hint of debate ("Exposición Pedagógica", 1882j, p. 1). In Room 5, from publisher Rosado, he signed an elegant souvenir album of his visit, and it does not appear that he made any further symbolic gestures.

From that moment on, the Educational Exhibition was open to the public and, according to press reports, attracted five very specific groups of visitors: teachers, women, children, the working class, and journalists. The distribution of objects and the composition of decorative ensembles were very reminiscent of those established at all World's Fairs, and, in fact, those who attended the 1878 Paris exhibition claimed to have had the same visual impressions. The aesthetic on display was typically Victorian, colorful, crowded with educational objects that were mixed and confused and even repeated in different rooms. It is quite possible that visitors, like those at London's Crystal Palace, felt "overwhelmed" and experienced "symptoms of anxiety" (Alvandi, 2011, p. 13) at their inability to assimilate and interpret the thousands of images before their eyes. This anxiety was evident in the frequent justifications and self-criticism for not listing all the objects on display or for forgetting some of the most important items. They attributed these errors to the lack of a general catalog "that could and should serve as a guide and has not been printed." ("Exposición Pedagógica. Sexta visita," 1882, n.p.). The organizers attempted to alleviate this shortcoming by placing guides in each room explaining to the public the value and use of each of the objects on display. These guides were employees of publishing companies, principals or teachers from the exhibiting schools, and even students from those schools. In addition, visitors developed various strategies to take in the exhibition. The most common was not to go beyond Room 3. Most of the published reviews describe spaces 01, 0, 1, 2, and 3 at length, but say little about the remaining rooms, going no further than a general categorization summarized in a single sentence. The second strategy was to visit the exhibition repeatedly, stopping only in one or two rooms on each visit, thus breaking the official route marked out by the organizers and missing out on the exhibition's storytelling. The third strategy was to copy verbatim the materials described in the catalogs published by some of the exhibitors and summarize very briefly the content of the rooms that did not have a catalog.

The latter was the strategy most commonly used by the few teachers who published extensive reports on the Educational Exhibition. It was open exclusively from June 2 to 6 to those who had attended the National Pedagogical Congress, and 1,913 teachers visited it during those days. In addition, they had the opportunity to visit several of the Madrid schools present at the exhibition —for example, the *Colegio de San Ildefonso* and the *Jardines de la Infancia*— and observed their daily educational practices. Many also visited the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza,* but it does not appear that any of them got to know its primary school. They listened to a series of lectures organized in the afternoons, when the official sessions ended, and were invited to have "refreshments" (Roure, 1882, p. 395). One might think that, after participating in a conference where

traditions and innovations in education were so heatedly debated, teachers would be very curious to observe and evaluate the results of a progressive school such as the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza.* But this was not the case. In most of their reports, they copied or summarized the catalog of objects, without personal comments, and clearly showed much reluctance to criticize its procedures, but they did not praise them either. A teacher from Palencia stated that "the intuitive method is the fundamental basis of teaching in this society" (Ferradas, 1882b, p. 2). This was the same conclusion reached by a teacher from Lugo, who did not understand why the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* rejected the use of educational material, which also derived from the same intuitive method. He therefore believed that the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* would achieve the same results "through the intelligent use of various commonly used teaching aids" (Chave, 1882, p. 200). A public-school teacher in Madrid, Pedro Ferrer y Rivero, however, did perceive that the discourse of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* went beyond the pedagogical principle of intuition, because it proposed "the participation of the student in his own work with an educational tendency" (Congreso Nacional Pedagógico, 1883, p. 438). However, this teacher adopted the dominant position defended by his Madrid colleagues at the National Pedagogical Congress, namely: teachers understood the idea of children's activity and would also be delighted to go on excursions throughout Spain with children if they had a favorable educational environment and the support of families and authorities.

On June 17, the press reported that the Educational Exhibition had been open for eight days and had already been visited by 86.712 people, 90% of whom belonged to the working class ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882k, p. 3). As the organizing society, *El Fomento de las Artes,* sought to educate the working classes, it promoted access to the exhibition for the most disadvantaged groups, but carefully avoided mixing social classes by setting some days with free admission and others with paid admission. It also kept careful records of the number of visitors, and it is very possible that, depending on the circumstances, it reserved the right to admit individuals who did not seem socially acceptable. The press, of course, highlighted at all times the orderly behavior of the visitors and pointed out some anecdotes that demonstrated their limited exhibitionary culture, all of which took place in Room 1. For example, the most repeated anecdote featured a large relief map spread out on the floor, in which "the pieces of sea are so perfectly imitated that, as the map is large, people step back so as not to fall into the stormy waters" ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882i, p. 1).

It seems that the Educational Exhibition had a marked gender bias, with the vast majority of visitors being women. On paid days, a "large number of elegant and distinguished ladies" appeared ([Exposición Pedagógica], 1882l, p. 3), who were only interested in the handicrafts made by girls from public and private schools in Madrid. On free admission days, female workers from the tobacco factory opposite the Veterinary School would attend ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882m, p. 3). They went straight to Room 5, where the work of girls from private schools, some of them only seven years old, was on display, and "there the women form a compact wall every day. A chorus of approving exclamations rises in that space in the presence of so much lace, so much silk, so much embroidery on display" ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882n, p. 1). Both bourgeois and working-class women also visited Room 8, where the public schools were located, and there they spent "several hours examining the meticulous work of the daughters of Madrid's workers" ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882ñ, p. 3). Children visited the exhibition on Thursday afternoons, accompanied by their teachers, on what were possibly the first mass educational excursions in the capital, as every Thursday around a thousand pupils from public and private schools attended, staying at the exhibition for around three hours. The children's favorite room was Room 6, as among the German exhibitors was Charles Schropp, who presented some toys from his Madrid shop to the delight of the young audience.

The most powerful messages were written in the newspapers. The press of all ideological tendencies agreed to send out a double nationalist message. The first nationalist message sought to reach an audience eager "to see refuted by eloquent facts the disadvantageous and mistaken concept that outsiders have had no

qualms about expressing through maps and magazines" ("La Exposición Pedagógica Española," 1882, p. 1) about the backwardness of Spanish primary education. The context was that of the World's Fairs in Paris (1867 and 1878), where a map and a report by Manier on public instruction in Europe were presented. Spain, together with Turkey, occupied the last two places, but "instead of causing public opinion to unite to take steps to improve the situation, the report was not believed and simply dismissed as a false accusation" (Del Pozo, 2009, p. 168). Since then, the press had been engaged in a campaign to prove that Spanish primary schools were on a par with those of other enlightened European countries, and the Educational Exhibition provided the evidence needed to support this claim. The entire press collected testimonies from anonymous but highly educated foreign visitors who declared that "this event placed our country in a preeminent position in terms of culture, dispelling concerns and doing justice to the progress of public education" ("Noticias de la Exposición Pedagógica," 1882, n.p.). However, the only three foreign visitors identified by name, who were diplomats from Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands, did their profession proud and spoke very courteously, but without making any assessment. Despite everything, the dominant discourse surrounding the Educational Exhibition was markedly triumphalist and aimed at hammering home the idea that Spain, in educational matters, was in a position to compete successfully in future World's Fairs, so that Spaniards could regain their lost national pride. The second nationalist message was framed in terms of economic protectionism. The Educational Exhibition showcased a large number of Spanish publishers and manufacturers that could supply teaching materials to schools, which were praised once again using the image of triumphant competition at future World's Fairs. The dominant discourse in the press was reflected in its silence on the contents of the "German" room and in its praise for schools that used materials manufactured in Spain. The aim was to create public opinion favorable to the promotion of a national educational industry.

The Educational Exhibition also had a competition phase, similar to that of the World's Fairs, although with even more generous prizes. The press showed its intention to influence the juries by reporting specifically and extensively on installations or objects on display that aroused their affinity or sympathy. The opening phrase chosen was always the same: "One of the installations that most catches the eye..." or "Among the objects that most catch the eye..." Their discourse demonstrates, once again, the competitive nature that the press attributed to this exhibition. Thus, the newspaper *El Liberal,* which was very close to the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza,* devoted two long articles to commenting on the exhibition in triumphalist terms, with the discourse reserved for competitions: "We believe that this school is superior to all others and that none of its competitors (...) could have equaled or surpassed it"; and furthermore, it asserted that she was aware "that her means and resources are superior to those of any other center" ("Exposición Pedagógica. La Institución Libre de Enseñanza," 1882a, pp. 1-2). These discourses also show that educated visitors were able to interpret and transform some of the messages conveyed in the exhibition. Let us recall that opposite the display cases containing the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* excursion notebooks, a detailed child's drawing of the 1878 Paris World's Fair was hung. The organizers' intention was probably to encourage the public to compare the perfection of this work with the imperfection of the excursion notebooks. However, the journalist's comparison was different: he saw, side by side, an old system, the fruit of tradition, and a modern system, born "of reason and truth" ("Exposición Pedagógica. La Institución Libre de Enseñanza," 1882b, p. 2).

And the press played one last role, that of highlighting exhibitors who had gone unnoticed, overshadowed by other much more powerful figures. A prime example is the Froebelian work of the children from the nursery school in Figueres which, as we have already seen, was placed in Room 13 and went unnoticed. The teacher at that school was Esteban Trayter y Colomer. It seems that he learned about the Froebel system at the 1878 Paris World's Fair, began to apply it in his school, and was encouraged to come to Madrid to publicize his experience, not on his own initiative, but at the urging of other Catalan colleagues. He attended the sessions of the Pedagogical Congress, listened to the lecture on Froebelian methodology

given by its leading representative in Spain, Eugenio Bartolomé y Mingo, the principal of the Madrid *Jardines de la Infancia,* and remained silent throughout. He visited the school, along with many other congress participants, and there he had a "very lively discussion" (Roure, 1882, p. 395) with Mingo. If we interpret the rhetorical expressions of the time correctly, what happened there was that Trayter refuted some of Mingo's statements, that is, a teacher from a small town in Gerona dared to oppose the great authority in Madrid. From then on, the press began to publish those short articles that began with the phrase "One of the installations that has most caught our attention...". These articles denounced the fact that Figueres' Froebelian work had not been appreciated due to its marginal location in the exhibition. Some articles also provided information about Trayter's identification with the "progressive movement" of modern pedagogy ("La Exposición Pedagógica," 1882, p. 3), providing details that could only have been known by people close to the teacher. Trayter himself attributed the praise he received in the press to the work of his colleagues, although the campaign was probably successful because some political agents were involved with it. This whole process symbolizes the invisible but very present framework behind the Pedagogical Congress and the Educational Exhibition: the desire of Madrid's educators to impose their pedagogical leadership on the rest of Spain and the struggle of educators "from the provinces" to prove that innovative schools also existed outside Madrid.

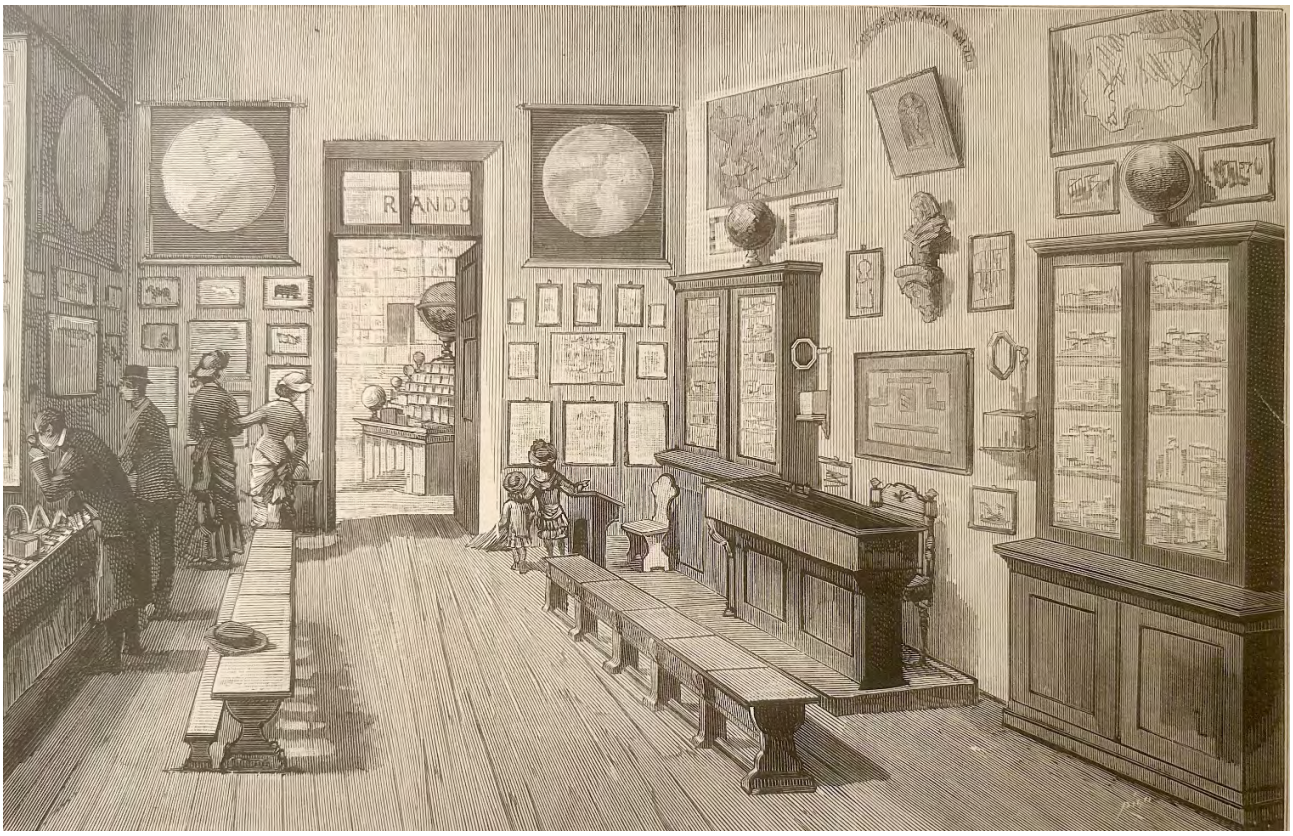
4. VISUALIZING EDUCATIONAL REFORMS AND PEDAGOGICAL PROGRESS

The Educational Exhibition was a highly visual spectacle, although viewers may have ended up closing their senses to the overexposure of images. It is therefore interesting to analyze the representations of this event that were published, to see if they managed to convey the message of pedagogical progress that appeared repeatedly in the written texts. I have never found a photograph of this event, which is unusual but understandable, as the illustrated press had barely incorporated this technology. Only three engravings were published in the magazine *La Ilustración Española y Americana,* which are well known and have been included several times in other works, but have never been studied. The engravings were made between June 2 and 6, when the exhibition was open only to teachers and when descriptions and comments on the objects on display had not yet been published. The author of the drawings was Juan Comba y García, who has been considered "the father of photojournalism in Spain" (Márquez, 2006, p. 399). His personal relationship with King Alfonso XII and his desire to show the modernization of the country during his reign made him the perfect candidate to illustrate pedagogical progress. The engraving of the exhibition was the first he made as a "graphic set," defined as such because it presented "various aspects of the news through independent images, shown autonomously on the same page" (Bobo, 2002, p. 170). Juan Comba often created these sets from photographs, a technique he began using after his European trip in 1880-1881, during which he bought a camera. These engravings were therefore constructed as follows: Juan Comba went to the Veterinary School, visited the exhibition, which was almost empty, and took some photographs, and perhaps also made some sketches from life. He decided for himself which three rooms best conveyed the progress of education in Spain, as this was the message that the magazine wanted to convey to the public. He then engraved three images on a wooden plate with burins, which were transferred to paper and published in the magazine just before the opening, to give readers the vivid impression that they too had been at the Educational Exhibition and had participated in the event.

The image that Juan Comba identified with educational progress —understood as methodological progress— was the one found in Room 10, the installation of the *Jardines de la Infancia,* the Madrid nursery school that followed the Froebelian system (Image 3). That is why Juan Comba devoted twice as much space to it as to the other two rooms. His drawing bears a striking resemblance to the written accounts. On the wall to the

right of the image, the teacher's platform and desk were placed next to his baroque armchair, reproducing the frontispiece of one of the school's classrooms. The official chronicler of the Educational Exhibition, Pedro Ferrer y Rivero, commented that the principal of the *Jardines de la Infancia,* Eugenio Bartolomé y Mingo, sat in that armchair every day to explain the Froebelian methodology to interested visitors, and thought that Mingo had "the enormous commitment to accredit these establishments in Spain" (Congreso Nacional Pedagógico, 1883, p. 436), a statement that ignored Trayter's experience, located just a few meters away. On either side of the teacher's desk were two large cabinets containing all the children's work, made according to Froebel's system, from paper cutouts to simple pieces of furniture. That wall was dominated by a bust of the German educator. On the back wall, whose door led to Room 9, there were many wallcharts for object lessons and six maps surrounding the entire room, showing the surface of the earth in different positions, as if viewed from different points in space, the outline of which can also be seen in Comba's engraving. On the left wall, on a table possibly covered with the Spanish flag, the Froebelian material was placed. It was highly valued that this material was made in workshops in Madrid, under the direction of Mingo, and possibly reproducing foreign models also on display on the table, about which nothing was said. The interest shown by visitors in this material is symbolized in Comba's engraving by a male figure who appears to be examining these objects with a magnifying glass. The artist represented the appeal of object lessons for children with two child figures; the older one explains one of the pictures to the younger one, placing her hand on her shoulder, a composition very characteristic of the nineteenth century to visualize mutual teaching between children of different ages. The two women looking at other wallcharts on the same wall seem less interested, one pulling her companion's arm, perhaps to hurry off to the women's workrooms.

Image 3. Installation of teaching materials for schools in the Froebel system (Kindergartens)



Source: Drawing by Comba. Exposición Pedagógica (1882). *La Ilustración Española y Americana,* June 8, XXVI (XXI), p. 349.

Image 4. Froebel nursery school, called “Jardines de la Infancia” (detail)

Source: Drawing by Nao. Madrid. Nueva Escuela Central de Párvulos, sistema Froebel, denominada “Jardines de la Infancia” (1879). *La Ilustración Española y Americana,* May 30, XXIII (XX), p. 356.

No one commented on the fact that in a corner of Room 10 there was an individual desk with its own table, in line with the prevailing model in the United States. The Educational Exhibition was full of these desks, with manufacturers displaying their most modern examples. It seems that they had been adopted in many private schools, which is perhaps why they did not attract attention. They must have been part of the school furniture at the *Jardines de la Infancia,* as other drawings of its classrooms from the same period (Image 4) show similar desks. But what is really surprising is that the center of the drawing was occupied by two rows of desk units, the most characteristic model of what Pedro Luis Moreno has called “old”-style school furniture (2005, pp. 73-74). These were long, narrow tables that could seat six, eight, or ten children, with separate benches and no backrests (Martínez and Esteve, 2024, p. 65). Although they were already outdated in 1840, most Spanish public schools were still using them in 1882. Individual desks such as those in the *Jardines de la Infancia* represented modernity in contrast to these desk units, which they sought to replace. Therefore, the only possible explanation for their presence in the *Jardines de la Infancia* classroom is that they belonged to another room and were placed there by mistake or due to lack of space. Comba photographed and recorded what he saw, thus turning what was to be the central image of methodological progress into a symbol of tradition.

Image 5. Installation of teaching materials at the *Real Colegio de El Escorial*

Source: Drawing by Comba. Exposición Pedagógica (1882). *La Ilustración Española y Americana,* June 8, XXVI (XXI), p. 349.

The second engraving in Comba's composition depicted the *Real Colegio de El Escorial* (Image 5). Its presence was justified by the fact that it was a personal project of Alfonso XII, who had refounded the center in 1875 and entrusted its direction to the priest José Hospital. But it was also a representation of educational progress from a technological perspective. Room 7 was overflowing with rich educational material from abroad, all of which had won awards at various World's Fairs and had been acquired by José Hospital at the 1878 Paris Fair or given to the king by its builders. Although the identity of the center had not yet been defined, it clearly had a Catholic orientation, symbolized in the image by the figure in a cassock and shovel hat, both indicative of his priestly status. The perspective and framing of this engraving are designed to place a French-made box as the central figure, most likely the box of object lessons described in the catalog of this installation, which contained samples produced by nature and their applications to art and industry, explaining how man modified these raw materials to satisfy his three basic needs: food, clothing, and shelter ("Exposición Pedagógica. Sexta visita," 1882, n.p.). Given this description, it is impossible not to wonder whether the box contained the embryo of the first idea of the centers of interest that the Belgian educationalist Decroly would propose twenty-five years later.

Image 6. Installation of teaching materials in Madrid's municipal schools

Source: Drawing by Comba. Exposición Pedagógica (1882). *La Ilustración Española y Americana,* June 8, XXVI (XXI), p. 349.

The third engraving in Comba's composition depicted Madrid's municipal public schools, housed in a large gallery numbered as Room 8 (Image 6). We know that this room had its own discourse because its design was entrusted to the general inspector of Madrid's schools, Valentín María Mediero. This discourse was based on three pillars. The first was authenticity. The gallery housed the five types of public schools funded by the Madrid City Council: nursery schools, elementary schools for boys and girls, high schools, and adult schools, presented as a rudimentary outline of lifelong education. Each one was displayed with the objects and furniture commonly used, and photographs of several municipal schools were even exhibited "to show that nothing has been taken there that does not exist in the establishments" (Congreso Nacional Pedagógico, 1883, p. 428). And indeed, Comba's engraving shows, in the background, an "old"-style desk like the two that appeared in the foreground in the *Jardines de la Infancia,* which makes me suspect that these desks belonged to the municipal schools. The second pillar was the presentation of results. Hundreds of children's works, especially calligraphic drawings and very sophisticated needlework were displayed on the piece of furniture on the right of the engraving. These school products were, of course, in line with a very traditional view of education, but it is also true that this was the type of education that parents,

especially mothers, wanted for their daughters. When the women working at the tobacco factory marveled at the girls' embroidery, what they saw was a better future for those girls. Hence the third pillar of this room, which was the display of a new identity for municipal schools: "open, wide open are their doors to the children of all classes of society" ("Exposición Pedagógica," 1882o, p. 130). A new discourse on public education was beginning to emerge, perhaps remotely influenced by that of the American common school, which also recognized the value of school as a tool for social mobility. Therefore, this engraving represents educational progress in social terms.

Valentín María Mediero wanted to make Room 8 a "classified landscape of education," understood as a space "that envisioned the differentiation, specialization, and democratization of public education" (Mah, 2007, p. 75). Comba's engraving can be considered a schoolscape, as it shows us the visual and spatial organization of the space in which the Madrid public school was represented, and provides relevant information about the placement of furniture and decorative elements. Among the elements it reveals —because they were omitted from the texts— is a composition of national flags and municipal coats of arms symbolizing the nationalism of the authorities and the Madrid teaching profession, and their identification with an idea of Spanishness based on superiority and pride. This nationalism is what prevented any criticism of the exhibition of Madrid's public schools, what concealed or justified their obvious backwardness, and what produced a discourse shared by the teaching profession and the press that was full of grandeur and self-complacency, but very unconstructive.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The first Spanish Educational Exhibition in 1882 was very improvised. No objectives were set, no public announcement was made, and there was no time to select objects. However, invitations were sent to certain individuals and institutions, which indicates that the organizers had an exhibition concept in mind and an idea of what they wanted to show. In the absence of a statement of intent, the only way to know what the exhibition was trying to achieve is to analyze how the spaces were distributed and how the objects were placed in them. The first conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the exhibition was fundamentally Madrid-based. Most of the publishing houses and manufacturers were from Madrid; even the famous "Germans" were Madrid merchants and intermediaries seeking to represent Central European companies. Most of the schools and teachers who attended with their inventions and their students' work were from Madrid. And the visitors and observers of the exhibition were also from Madrid. The underlying intention was therefore to showcase the achievements of Madrid's education system. This is why many of the products sent from all over Spain were placed in marginal or inconspicuous positions, missing out on the opportunity to exchange experiences and learn more about what was happening outside Madrid.

The only three images I know of from the Educational Exhibition do not convey any message of pedagogical progress. It seems that the same mistake was made that was repeated at every World's Fair, which was to impress by creating installations with an abundance of material, but without showing how that material could transform children's education. In fact, all the schools that exhibited highly sophisticated scientific and educational objects failed to provide examples of students' work showing how these objects could be incorporated into everyday educational practices. On the contrary, the work on display —calligraphy, copies of drawings and maps, decorative crafts— tells us of a school that had turned its back on life, but perhaps not on society. The Educational Exhibition was located in a humble area and most of its visitors belonged to the working class. They all admired the work of the public-school students, but the women were particularly enthusiastic about the needlework and decorative crafts done by the girls. Perhaps some of the female

cigarette makers reflected on this and realized that school could offer their daughters a better life than the factory where their mothers worked. Therefore, a perhaps unintended result of this exhibition was to bring public schools closer to their users, the working class.

Most likely, the exhibition was intended to be comparative, and perhaps it was also meant to be a good setting for discussing the shortcomings of public schools and proposing solutions. However, its reinterpretation in a nationalist key prevented any criticism from emerging. The press turned the exhibition into a symbol and proof of Spanish educational progress; a visible demonstration of the supposed falsehoods spread at recent World's Fairs by representatives of other countries. Therefore, only praise was possible. Although the poverty of materials and furniture in Madrid's public schools was very visible —and even more so given the location of its installation— only acclaim was heard about the display of objects in Room 8. Although most of the students' work showed that it was the result of traditional methodologies, its perfection of execution was applauded. The flaws were seen, of course, but they were hidden because the aim was to keep the bourgeoisie and the middle classes in a fantasy world, to continue flattering their national vanity with talk of racial superiority and to continue feeding their national pride with the belief that Spain was a world power. The Educational Exhibition thus became yet another episode in what would soon become known as "the problem of Spain."

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