

Beginning of the International VET Competitions

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Introduction

This report collects the conclusions reached after researching the origins of international VET competitions in Spain and studying the competitions held between 1950 and 1975.

In this regard, we have drawn on a diverse sample of sources that offers us a varied outlook on the subject. We have looked through the following:

- Media placements regarding competitions from 1940 onwards as well as the issues related to their beginnings, such as “*Virgen de la Paloma*”, “*Formación Profesional*” (Vocational Training), “*Competición Ibérica*” (Iberian Competition), “*Olimpiada del trabajo*” (Work Olympics), and many more.
- Documents pertaining to Spanish education legislation on vocational training from the turn of the twentieth century onwards.
- Articles and books on Spanish contemporary history.
- Files from the WorldSkills Archive, through PastPerfect, as well as reports from the Spanish competitions proper.
- Interviews of persons involved in the VET Competitions and of representatives from the schools involved.

In order to give the historical and societal context in which the first competitions were held, as well as to ensure that the conclusions stemming from our research are meaningful and rigorous, this presentation includes notes on Spanish society and circumstances in the 1940s and the 1950s, and on Vocational Training in the European context as well as its expansion in Spain. This will allow us to document how national and international VET competitions first appeared, the advent of competition specialties, their participants’ profiles, the venues where they were celebrated...

As a final note to this introduction, the researchers who drafted this report would like to underline that all the information that is original and contemporary to the competitions, which were held between 1936 and 1975 (such as the one taken from *ABC* daily and *No-Do*¹, and from other media and reports from the era), reflects the ideology of an authoritarian country without freedom of expression, where the only messages allowed were the ones set by the government and where, furthermore, the ultimate goal of each and every government initiative was the indoctrination of the general public, especially youth, and to ensure their compliance.

¹ No-Do is the colloquial name for *Noticiarios y Documentales* (“News and Documentaries”), the state-controlled newsreels produced between 1943 and 1981. No-Do was closely associated to Francisco Franco’s regime.

Spain in the years prior to the championships

Economic isolation and international relations

Between 1936 and 1939, Spain lived through a civil war that left the country broken and lacking in structures. The 1940s were characterized by protectionist, interventionist and autarchic policies. The Head of State, Francisco Franco, believed that Spain, with good state management and the work of all Spaniards both in the fields and in national industries and factories, could be self-sufficient: "Spain is a privileged country that can look after itself. We have everything we need to live; our production is abundant enough to ensure our existence. We have no need to import anything at all."²

Far from what was expected, the disastrous results gave way to a deep economic recession that worsened as the decade passed and drove the country into a food scare. Franco was compelled to, exceptionally, authorize the import of essential supplies to fight the food shortage; this opportunity he, of course, used to present himself as a "saviour."

Throughout this decade, the living and working conditions of laborers, farmers, and industry and service workers, worsened³. The industrialization that Spain had been undergoing since the 1920s was interrupted and, in fact, it was not until 1955 that the living conditions of 1935 were re-established.

After WWII, because the ruling ideology was close to that of fascism and Nazism, the country lived in isolation from the rest of the world.

On March 10, 1945, American President Roosevelt let his ambassador to Madrid know that "I can see no place in the community of nations for Governments founded on Fascist principles." While the Francoist regime was left out of the San Francisco Conference, which would give birth to the UN, exiled Spanish republicans (upholders of the political regime Franco had overthrown) were invited as observers⁴.

From 1945 onwards, the Francoist Regime was compelled to introduce certain changes to its inner structure in order to indicate it was distancing itself from its initial links with Nazi Germany.

The start of the Cold War would favour Franco's government. Spain became a strategic player for the "free world," which faced a possible Soviet attack on Western Europe.

In November 1947, the USA successfully challenged both a new indictment and new sanctions on the Francoist regime put forth in the UN. Four months later, France reopened its border with Spain and, towards the end of the 1940s, Spain's relationship with the rest of the world had changed: In 1948, commercial and financial agreements were signed with France and Great Britain and, at the start of 1949, the Francoist regime received the first loan authorized by an American bank with the approval of the US government.

Society and repression

Spanish society was "repressed, regimented, and re-Catholicized."⁵ It was a repressed society because the new powers-that-be aimed to "eradicate everything that the previous liberal society had, one way or another, begotten," the population lived scared, fearful of a report from a neighbour, of being mistaken...

² Carlos Barciela López, *Guerra civil y primer franquismo (1936-1959)*, Eds. by Francisco Comín, Mauro Hernández and Enrique Llopi, (Barcelona: Historia económica de España Siglos X-XX. Crítica, 2002), pp. 355

³ Enrique Moradiellos, *La España de Franco (1939-1975). Política y sociedad* (Madrid: Síntesis, 2000), pp. 84 and 85

⁴ Moradiellos, *La España de Franco*, pp. 95

⁵ Santos Juliá, *La sociedad*, Coord. by José Luis García Delgado, (Madrid Franquismo. El juicio de la historia. Temas de Hoy), pp. 73

It was a regimented society because all activities were strictly subject to the control of a single party, *“Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las JONS”*⁶ (and its dependent bodies, such as *“Organización Sindical Española”*⁷, the *“Frente de Juventudes”*⁸ (National Delegation of the Youth Front), or *“Sección Femenina”*⁹, which became a network of “pervasive” leadership that encompassed all Spanish society and indoctrinated all citizens.

And it was a re-Catholicized society because the Catholic Church asserted itself as the head of both the education system and of the public spaces that, little by little, were evolving as the 1950s progressed into the 1960s.

The result of this, from the 1940s onwards, was the flight of thousands of people. They left the country because of their beliefs, and, from the 1950s onwards, there was an exodus of hundreds of thousands of men and women seeking work outside of Spain in order to survive and sustain their families.

In this context, where freedom was lacking, the media were state-owned. All messages were determined by the government, and if any message came into the country from abroad, it had to be supervised and undergo a censorship process.

The need to train youth, a new chance to indoctrinate

In this devastated country, a country that lacked a strong economic system, a country without industry, a country without specialized labour, a country that had only very recently been accepted as part of the Western Bloc¹⁰, it became crucial and necessary to foster the training and specialization of Spanish youth. The aim was to rebuild the country which, firstly, had been ravaged by the war and, secondly, was stagnating due to its economic and structural principles.

It was also a perfect way to indoctrinate youth. Franco himself, in 1946 and in a hearing with the leaders of the *Obra de la Formación Profesional*, *“underlined how gratifying it was to spend time with the representatives of a sector as important for the nation and for the revival of Spain as that, urging them to work enthusiastically and with faith in a better Spain.”*¹¹

⁶ Literally, Spanish Falangist of the Councils of the National Syndicalist Offensive.

⁷ Institution managing the only authorized trade union in Spain from 1940 to 1977, during the Francoist years. All workers and business owners had the obligation to be affiliated to it.

⁸ The National Delegation of the Youth Front was a body created in 1940 to indoctrinate young people into the principles of Francoism.

⁹ The Female Section was the women’s branch of Falange Española (the only legal political party during Francoism). It was the only women’s organization during the Francoist dictatorship, to give shape to women’s behaviour and lead women the right way, according to the principles upheld by the regime.

¹⁰ As Mr. Ferreiro, General Director of VET, explained in a hearing before Franco: “in these times in which an international conspiracy threatens Spain and the world’s major challenge is to achieve harmony between intelligence and work, this agency (speaking about vocational training, which he represents) makes itself unconditionally available in order to completely achieve this harmony.”

¹¹ “Audiencias en el Pardo”, *ABC Sevilla*, 28th March 1946.

Vocational training in Europe

Vocational Training models

State-run education systems first appeared in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century as a result of the ideas upheld by defenders of the French Revolution.¹²

Before that, the training needed to learn a trade was mostly acquired through the guilds system and it was similar in most of Western Europe¹³. This was a key institution in which the apprentice, a disciple to the master, would work (thus learning the trade) in exchange for the education he was receiving.

That was what Alphonso X the Wise¹⁴ defended in the document *Siete Partidas*¹⁵ as well as in the *Novísima Recopilación de las Leyes de España*¹⁶, whose eighth book, Title 23 (called “*los oficios, sus maestros y oficiales*”¹⁷), ruled on the work that apprentices could provide in guilds, as had been done previously.

It was not until the 18th and 19th centuries, after the birth of industrial capitalism in Europe, that completely new VET systems appeared in different countries – and where they took completely different shapes –¹⁸; consolidation took place in the mid-19th century.

These two events are so intertwined that the Second Industrial Revolution (1870-1930) would be responsible for the creation of a vocational training system necessary to make labour more efficient as well as to adjust it to a new manufacturing style that required different technical profiles, involving workers who were qualified and hailed from different disciplines.

From the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, the three classic vocational training models for youth appeared, each suited for the different political structures and for the different national economies in which they appeared as a response to the loss of the centralized “training” model the guilds offered. These three models are known as the market economy model, the bureaucratic model, and the dual model.

The market economy model, England

The government guarantees necessary, basic education, but companies undertake training and skilling, and they do so on a for-need basis. This training may occasionally be financed, but, as a general rule, the persons receiving training pay for it. In this system, there is no State supervision of training, nor are there accredited final exams, although there may be privately issued certificates certifying the skills and competencies acquired.

Bureaucratic and state-regulated model, France

The government is in charge of determining both the supply and the demand of skills. Most of the educational burden falls on the schools and training centres, and it involves a high academic profile. Thus, it is the State that is in charge of organizing VET jointly with professional schools, although these often are privately financed by companies. Training and skills acquisition are not geared towards acquiring specific knowledge needed by companies; it focuses on teaching students general and technical knowledge that will allow them access to advanced and higher courses. This model remains in force.

¹² Mercé Berengueras Pont and José María Vera Mur, “Las leyes de educación en España en los últimos doscientos años”, *Supervisión 21. Revista de Educación e inspección*, 38 (2015):1-23. URL:

http://www.usie.es/SUPERVISION21/2015_38/SP_21_38_Articulo_Leyes_educacion_ultimos_200_anos_Berengueras_y_Pont.pdf

¹³ Ignasi Brunet and David Moral, “La formación profesional en la Unión Europea. Nuevas claves para su interpretación”. *Revista RIO*, 17 (2016): pp. 65-97.

¹⁴ J. Martínez Girón, A. Arufe Varela, X.M. Carril Vázquez, *Derecho del Trabajo*, (A Coruña: 2a edición, Netbiblo, 2006), 60-64.

¹⁵ *The Siete Partidas* was a Spanish statutory code compiled between 1252 and 1284.

¹⁶ *The Novísima Recopilación*, published in 1805, is a collection of Spanish law that was used for legal studies in the 19th century.

¹⁷ Literally, “trades, their masters and officers”.

¹⁸ Brunet y Moral, “La formación profesional en ...”

Dual-corporate model, Germany

This is a continuation of the corporate learning system (conceived of by the guilds system) and relies on the State's collaboration. Throughout the 19th century, German apprentices went to trade schools where, apart from receiving strictly professional training, they were also provided with civic tools. These schools evolved, towards the turn of the century, into vocational training centres. Therein lies the root of the dual system, a training strategy based on the students' getting working experience on the job and at their vocational (and civic) school. Companies pay for the training given in-house, apprentices receive wages in exchange for their work throughout the training period, and vocational schools are funded by the State. Qualifications certify graduates at a national level, accrediting that they have the skills necessary to work in their corresponding trade and furthermore ensuring them the opportunity to access advanced courses.

It was in the mid-20th century, during the Cold War, that these models had a two-pronged impact on society: they increased the competitiveness of an increasingly qualified population in their respective economies, and they took on a new social role, as a rung up the social ladder for the working class.

The beginnings of the Spanish educational system

In Spain, the first great legal text to enshrine the idea that education is a set of proceedings and purposes that must rely on the State for its organization, funding, and control is the Constitution of 1812, heading IX.

This is where the foundations for the Spanish education system are laid out, although it would not be until the middle of the 19th century that a budget was approved allowing for a certain degree of modernization.

The first corpus of Spanish educational laws was collected in 1857, in the *Ley Moyano*, which remained in force well into the 20th century¹⁹, until the passing of the bill *Ley General de Educación* (Law on General Education) in the 1970s. Among its basic objectives²⁰, it stated that education should be centralized, secular, mandatory (primary education, ages 6 to 9), but not free (except for persons registered as paupers known as "*pobres de solemnidad*"), and assured one school for boys and another for girls for every five hundred inhabitants, one "*instituto*" or secondary school per province, and a total of 10 universities.

This law, *Ley Moyano*, intensified the State's role in educational matters and actually made of education a public issue. In terms of merit, it was the first real approximation to a progressive education system, enshrining, for the first time²¹, "the separation of middle education into the academic route – geared towards university – and the professional route – geared towards a job market of jobs that called for low- and medium-skilled workers." This laid the groundwork that allowed the *Escuelas de Artes y Oficios* to offer vocational education.

And, in the 20th century, the very important the Law for Industrial Training (*Ley de Aprendizaje Industrial*) was passed in 1911, which led to the enactment of the Statutes of Vocational Training (*Estatuto de la Formación Profesional*) in 1928. A network comprised of provincial centres, *Escuelas Elementales de Trabajo*, and *Escuelas Superiores de Trabajo* was created, all of which depended on the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (*Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social*²²), where classes were taught. The most significant feature was that most students were either employed or were apprenticing in companies.²³

¹⁹ 9th September 1857 Law, commonly known as Ley Moyano, controlled the "*Régimen de Instrucción Pública Elemental, Superior, Profesional, Especial y Universitaria*" (literally, the Elementary, Advanced, Vocational, Special and University Public Education Scheme).

²⁰ Ignasi Brunet y David Moral, "La formación profesional en la Unión europea. Nuevas claves para su interpretación". *Revista RIO*, 17 (2016): pp. 65-97

²¹ José Saturnino Martínez García, Rafael Merino, "Formación profesional y desigualdad de oportunidades educativas por clase", *Témpora: Revista de Historia y Sociología de la Educación*, 14 (2011): 13-17, URL: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4157025>

²² Labour and Social Welfare Ministry

²³ Sebastián Campillo Frutos, "Evolución Histórica de la FP", *Educación en el 2000* (2003), 25-28, URL: <http://www.fundacion.uocra.org/documentos/recursos/articulos/Evolucion-historica-de-la-FP.pdf>

The institutional framework of VET in Spain from the 1940s onwards

In the previously described scenario, throughout the Francoist regime, Spanish education was largely in the hands of the Catholic Church. However, and specifically in the case of vocational training, the jurisdiction of four institutions overlapped with regards its implementation and financial backing: The Ministries of Education and Labour, the Catholic Church, and companies and corporations.

After the Civil War, the combination of the new government and the country's economic situation led to an educational restructuring. This reform entailed significant changes that affected both the nature of the centres as well as their organization: new courses, titles, staff... which led, in 1949, to the appearance of a new law on Industrial Vocational Training.

This law resulted in a technical and career-oriented baccalaureate or high school studies calling for one year of general education and four more years devoted to professional specialization, as well as *Institutos Laborales* (by 1970, there were some 298 of these²⁴).

This law was superseded by the law of 1955, *Ley Orgánica de Formación Profesional Industrial* (Organic Law on Industrial Vocational Training)²⁵, the first structured by-law on professional studies that furthermore obliged companies to pay a fee destined to fund the vocational training system.

Professional studies were divided into three stages²⁶:

- **Pre-apprentice:** two years, accessible from the age of twelve, devised to offer basic knowledge.
- **Apprentice:** three years, accessible from 14 years of age onwards. Once finished, the apprentice earned the title of *Oficialía Industrial*²⁷ in one of 15 fields. The goal was to provide "basic knowledge, both theoretical and practical, pertaining to an industrial occupation." This law mandated remaining in the educational institution throughout the first year and dividing the second and third years between the centre and the company.
- **Master:** two years, in order to sign up one had to be an *Oficial Industrial*, and, upon completion of those studies, one earned the title of *Maestría industrial*²⁸. According to the Law, a Master must know how to operate each and every one of the machines and tools used in the industrial field of the company in which they perform their professional tasks, furthermore the Master needs to be fully familiar with their inner structure, and must know how to use them and what the proper handling of each and every one of them is, and additionally the Master must be qualified to distribute the workload among workers, and have a clear grasp of the company's activities.

This syllabus was not introduced in its entirety, because, in March 1958, a new education plan divided into two stages (apprenticeship and expertise) was enacted.

In Spain, a country with very low basic education levels, this vocational training model was quickly adopted by companies and acknowledged by the population, and it was in force until 1975.

²⁴ Simeón Fernández de Pedro y González de la Fuente, "Apuntes para una historia de la Formación profesional en España", *Revista de Educación*, 239, Ministry of Education (1975)

²⁵ Published in the Boletín Oficial del Estado (Official State Gazette) on the 6th July 1956.

²⁶ María Jesús Martínez-Usarralde, "Consideraciones a una ley paradigmática en la historia de la formación profesional española: la Ley de Formación Profesional Industrial (FPI) de 1955", *Participación Educativa*, 6, (2015): pp. 108-113, DOI: 10.4438/1886-5097-PE

²⁷ *Oficialía industrial* was an old vocational educational title, equivalent to Spain's current *Formación Profesional de Grado Medio*. It was the second-highest level of vocational education attainable in Spain before earning a degree as of today.

²⁸ *Maestría industrial* was an old vocational educational title, equivalent to Spain's current *Formación Profesional de Grado Superior*. It was the highest level of vocational education attainable in Spain before earning a degree as of today.

It was in 1955 that the *Universidades Laborales*²⁹ were created. The ULs were an institution created for the children of underprivileged workers; under the remit of the Labour Ministry and funded by the fees paid by workers and companies. These institutions covered secondary schooling, Vocational Training, and some technical engineering degrees. Of the 21 ULs, at a time when it was neither frequent nor well accepted that women study, two were for women and were located in Saragossa and Cáceres³⁰.

Obra Sindical de Formación Profesional

On June 6, 1941, *Obra Sindical de Formación Profesional*³¹ was created in response to the demand for vocational training: this VET was to be effective and fitting to then-current needs. This project aimed to unify the training available by developing a national plan through which to control vocational training in managerial, technical, and ideological terms. This ambitious plan encompassed both the manufacturer's professional education as well as the apprentice's, that is to say, the preparation of youth for their entry into professional life and the "specialization of adults through quick courses of variable duration." Thus, *Obra Sindical* devised a unified system of labour skilling, professional requalification, and redistribution, as well as a parallel and complementary social protection scheme. Furthermore, *Obra Sindical* attempted to make the means and teaching resources for vocational training universally available, in order to maximize and generalize its implementation while reducing the efforts involved and improving the system's general efficiency and efficacy. It follows that books and handbooks were published which would be used by every teacher in the country. *Obra Sindical* attempted to create a new system that would take workers by the hand and adapt them to the economy's shifting needs, bearing full employment as its ultimate goal³². Schools like the renowned *Virgen de la Paloma* were Vocational Training union schools, and they were the venues where several international competitions were held.

Along this same educational line, another step was taken on October 18, 1957, when *Oficina Sindical de Formación Profesional Acelerada*³³ was born. Its goal was to train skilled workers within a very short timeframe (under six months). This is when "instructors" appear, who were in charge of training skilled workers and, at first, in charge of drafting the necessary teaching material. The centres that were established and relied on the *obra sindical* geared their activities towards educating the children of the workers and, at the same time, during evening classes, towards training the workers themselves. The schedules of these evening lessons were planned in such a way as to be compatible with working schedules, and the contents included technical and human development education. This training would allow for their promotion within the companies employing them, retraining them, if needed, and ensuring active improvement. For instance, the *Escuela de Formación Profesional Acelerada* nº 1, in Barajas-Madrid, was the venue where the 1967 international competition took place.

Companies

*"The idea was none other than to train future Oficiales de oficio (apprentices who had completed their apprenticeship but were not Masters) ... Disciplined and compliant workers; this is explained, I believe, by the great influence of religion on the education provided. Although patronizing on occasion, and rigid to the point of disproportion at times, it wasn't devoid of the quality sought that was necessary if the goal pursued was to be achieved"*³⁴, explains a former student of *Escuela Obrera y de Aprendices de Bazán* (Navantia today).

²⁹ The concept of Universidad Laboral were educational centres geared towards the children of laborers and were part of a project started in 1955 and which lasted until 1989. These centres offered education from the Spanish equivalent of middle school up to vocational education and technical engineering degrees.

³⁰ Pedro Zapater Hernández, "La universidad Laboral de Zaragoza cumple 50 años en el olvido", *Heraldo*, 20th November 2017, <https://www.heraldo.es/noticias/aragon/zaragoza/2017/11/16/la-universidad-laboral-zaragoza-cumple-anos-olvido-1207953-2261126.html>

³¹ Literally, Vocational Training Union Activity

³² "Institución-Obra sindical de Formación Profesional", PARES. Archivos españoles.

³³ Accelerated Vocational Training Union Office

³⁴ Ignacio Fernández Toxo, *Escuela Obrera (1963-67) and Apprenticeship school (1967-70) at Escuela Naval de Bazán student. "Las raíces del movimiento sindical en la Escuela Obrera y la Escuela de Aprendices". 100 años. Escuela obrera de Ferrol, (2016): pp. 287-291*

Training in the company itself could be considered a direct legacy of the former guild system: companies needing skilled manpower whose knowledge was adapted to their production requirements created schools to that specific end.

This was the idea, one involving the creation of diverse training methods and formulas that Spanish companies began to put into practice at the beginning of the 20th century. From the 1940s onwards, the state took control over the country's largest companies; this would develop into a state-owned holding company known as INI³⁵, the goal of which was to bolster national industrial development.

According to the obligations these companies undertook, they had to create Apprenticeship schools in order to train the great professionals they sought to have in their staff, and "*the training of future workers was an important goal.*"³⁶ Although the courses complied with then-current legal educational provisions (set forth in 1956), companies were more practical in organizing their syllabus. Apprentices worked some hours in their quarters, received minimum remuneration, and training matched their needs... This set forth a certain range of "training formulas" depending on the company³⁷ and its needs.

These apprenticeship schools were to play a key role in the national and international VET competitions, since, initially, there was a prize for students from the formal school system and a prize for students from vocational training centres.

The Catholic Church

Throughout its history, the Catholic Church, as an institution, has had a clear indoctrinating drive, and, in the Francoist Regime, it took over the education of children and youth, so it is no surprise that it played a role in the training of professionals as well. Thus, some Catholic religious orders undertook the organization of some companies' apprenticeship schools. In the case of Navantia, it was the *De La Salle* Brothers. They also established their own schools, such as the Salesian Schools, the most relevant ones in the world of vocational training. Their roots can be traced back to the 19th century; their goal is the complete education and furtherance of youth as "*good Christians and honest citizens.*"³⁸

Among the many activities it puts in motion for this mission, we soon see two outliers: workshops and evening schools, which gave way to vocational training schools and centres. The first school in Spain is *Salesianos de Sarriá* (1885), where international champions like Lluís Fradera³⁹ studied.

³⁵ Instituto Nacional de Industria (the National Industry Institute) was a state-owned financing and industrial holding company

³⁶ Asunción López Arranz, "La regulación legal de la formación impartida en las escuelas de aprendices de la Empresa Nacional Bazán". *100 años. Escuela obrera de Ferrol*, (2016): pp. 111-147

³⁷ Visits to Navantia, which had an Apprenticeship school from 1928 to 1976 (the visit took place on November 4, 2019), SEAT's Apprenticeship school (November 18, 2019) and to Fundación Elizalde, along with other sources, such as Association of Airbus's retired workers, and Airbus' Apprenticeship school in Madrid, show this educational adaptation in each company.

³⁸ St. John Bosco, founder of the Salesian Order.

³⁹ "Lluís Fradera", Oral history (Barcelona, 2019). (WSI_0882)

First VET Competitions

Will to re-emerge: the first national VET competitions

In the 1940s, several meetings and councils were held to discuss the need to establish and develop a strong, organized, and deep-rooted education structure:

*"It is up to Obra Sindical de Formación Profesional to organize, back, and manage initiatives, and, especially, to create professional leaders, training plans, as well as the means of instruction, after due counselling and research."*⁴⁰

In addition, throughout this same decade, and also linked to *Obra Sindical de Formación Profesional*, many Vocational Training centres were built all over Spain. The media was in charge of advertising the building of these new centres⁴¹.

It was thus that Vocational Training national competitions first appeared in Spain, with the idea of encouraging youths to learn a trade and to spur them on with a competition and prizes. There was an eagerness for them to benefit from professional training that would match Spain's industrial and economic renaissance, which had been planned at the government level: the country was keen to bolster its workers' skills⁴² and this was a sporting and challenging way of doing so. At the same time, it intended to "raise awareness" among said youths to improve their professional know-how⁴³. The slogan itself of one of the first national competitions is telling: *"The will to re-emerge"*.

In 1947, the first national competition took place with the participation of *"young students from Vocational Training Centres and apprentices from public and private Companies, all under 21 years of age. A total of 400 youths took part in the first competition..."*⁴⁴

The competitions were encouraging and offered positive messages about the political regime to general public. Throughout the first few years of national competitions, several pieces of news touching on them surfaced in the regime's broadcasting apparatus, extolling the initiative and the young participants⁴⁵.

*"I have myself seen three thousand young men prepare for the struggle for life at a Work Institution. We know that a high standard of living, that sought-after dream, will only be achieved by our own hand..."*⁴⁶

Organizers

The national vocational training competition was spearheaded by the National Delegation of the Youth Front⁴⁷, a body that depended on the *Secretaría General del Movimiento*, which took over its management until 1974. At that time, it fell under the jurisdiction of *Dirección General de la Juventud*.

⁴⁰ "III Consejo Sindical industrial de la Falange", *ABC*, 23rd January 1945. "Próxima Asamblea de Formación Profesional Obrera", *ABC*, 10th April 1947.

⁴¹ "Aranjuez... acto inaugural de las obras del edificio de las Escuelas de Loyola de Formación Profesional". *ABC*, 21st March 1945. "Labor de las escuelas de formación profesional. NOT N 302 B", Hemeroteca RTVE (1948), (WSI_0069).

⁴² "The advantages this Vocational Training Competition offers are many. On the one hand, better skills for operators were bolstered, which was reflected in the volume and improvement of production and, on the other hand, the best participants are rewarded with trophies and significant cash prizes for the best participants as a stimulus for their improvement." "El mejor aprendiz de España", *ABC*, 14th December 1948

⁴³ Juan Ángel Gato, "Historia de las competiciones" Report (Madrid, 2019). Juan Ángel Gato was Spain's official representative for OIPCPE (70's – 80's).

⁴⁴ Francisco Albert Vidal, "Antecedentes referidos a los concursos nacionales y a los internacionales de formación profesional", Report (1988). (WSI_0879)

⁴⁵ "Olimpiada del Trabajo. NOT 570 A", Hemeroteca de RTVE, 7th December 1953. (WSI_0073). "Franco entrega los trofeos del VI concurso internacional de formación profesional. NOT 775 A", Hemeroteca de RTVE, 11th November 1957. (WSI_0080)

⁴⁶ "La juventud sonríe", *ABC*, 30th March 1952.

⁴⁷ The National Delegation of the Youth Front was a political-administrative body created in 1940 for the indoctrination of the Spanish youth into the regime's ideology.

Frequency

National Vocational Training Competitions were organized on a yearly basis every single year from 1947 to 1975.

Competitors

The competitors in National VET Competitions were both industry apprentices as well as apprentice craftsmen, all under 21 years of age, from apprenticeship schools from companies and Vocational Training teaching centres. Both groups competed simultaneously, but there were different prizes: one for apprentices and another one for students. The inclusion of apprentices in these competitions showcased the importance accorded by the regime to continuous industrial training.

Competitors were drafted into two categories: Category "A", from 18 to 21 years of age⁴⁸, and "Category B", for younger apprentices, from 14 to 17 years of age.

VET competitions were, initially, a matter for men. We need to remember that women, in Spain, were the prey of Francoist repression: the role "crafted" for women was that of wife, at home: *"Women must return to their homes,"* they said, *"We must free married women from the workshops and factories where they toil."*⁴⁹

Because of this line of thought, women's access to education and work was restricted. However, all the measures put forth in favour of "retiring" women from "public" life were not enough to stop all women from working, for the obvious reason that many had to help their families make ends meet, even while they always were paid less than men and had less-qualified jobs.

The situation for women evolved from the 1950s onwards and, especially, in the 1960s there was break, as a consequence of the economic and social changes taking place. These changes entailed *"a progressive increase of women's legal, paid work, as well as better access to middle and higher education. All of this resulted in changes to family structures, an increase of women's presence in the public sphere and a higher dissemination of alternate models of femininity, which marked a stark contrast with the values espoused by Francoist official speech."*⁵⁰ In 1961, the law on the Political, Professional and Labour Rights of Women (*Ley sobre Derechos Políticos, Profesionales y Laborales de la Mujer*⁵¹) was passed, which eased women's entry to the work sphere, although the husband's permission was a requisite that remained in force until 1976.

Women started to take part in vocational training competitions in specialties that were closely related to caregiving and services: hairdressing and dressmaking. As we shall see later, women's participation was also due to the fact that competitions were open to other European countries.

In 1964, the Organizer Committee agreed to include the women participation in the competition rules.

"Feminine participation. *After Mr. Ditlman, who had proposed feminine participation in our competitions, had declared the desirability of allowing women to take part in the competitions, and had carefully studied the matter, with the intervention of the majority of counsellors, the Council agrees that an article should appear in the Rules in which the possibility of women taking part is made clear, competing with young men in those trades deemed desirable by the Council and published in the announcement of the competitions"*⁵²

In 1966, the 15th Competition was the first to be held in the Netherlands, but also the first in which women took part. Hairdressing was included as a DEMO, with the participation out of competition of 7 young women

⁴⁸ The ages here shown are an approximate average, since these bands could change from one year to the next and were set by the Organization. During international competitions, it was the host country the one who set the contestant's ages and the Organizing Board ratified them.

⁴⁹ Fuero del Trabajo, 1938

⁵⁰ Borja de Riquert, "La dictadura de Franco", Vol. 9 of *Historia de España*, directed by Josep Fontana y Ramón Villares, (Barcelona: Crítica/Marcial Pons, 2010), 295-296

⁵¹ Literally, Law on Women's Political, Professional, and Labour Rights

⁵² Meeting held by the organizing council" Minutes 16th October 1964 (NL Archives: WSI_archives_19641016_Madrid_organizing_council)

(F.W. Janssen-NL, B.B.Naremaker-NL, H. Uisser-NL and J.Schlicher-NL, J.C.Duez-BE, P.Ottman -DE, and M.J.Deschamps-BE)⁵³.

It was in the 1967 International Competition, which took place in Madrid's Centro de Formación Profesional Acelerada nº 1, when, for the first time ever, women competed in the specialities of Technical drawing, Shoemaking and Lady's hairdressing, thanks to the presence of young German, Belgian, Dutch, Swiss, and Spanish women.

At that moment, Encarnación Molina, from Spain, became the first woman winning a gold medal, sharing the podium with Antonia Van Haltem, from The Netherlands, (Silver) and Gabrielle Van Neuss, from Belgium, (Bronze). Also, Ingridt Vogt, from Germany, got the Bronze in Technical drawing

Stages

Competitions were also divided into stages: the provincial, sectorial (which usually encompassed the regional area, but which could also encompass areas from different regions, depending on the time and the area), and national stages. The first two were used to select the students that would participate in the national competitions, whereas the latter one was to choose a "*Campeón Nacional*"⁵⁴ in the trade, industry or craft speciality they had undertaken, all the while showing a "sporting spirit"⁵⁵.

Skills

The specialties for the competitions changed over time as they adapted to the economy and needs of the times.

In the beginning, competitions focused more on the industrial specialties. Historian María Jesús Martínez concludes that over half the male students were in the metalworking branch, perhaps out of a sense of tradition. Participation in the fields of electricity and metal was some 83% in the 1950s. In second place were electricity and draftsmanship. The other fields (construction, mining, electronics, the textile industry, and the graphic arts, among others) had a lower participation rate⁵⁶.

As time passed, more technological specialties were added, making space as well for the service sector. From the 1960s onwards, there were some 40 specialties or trades per competition, depending on the year and the organizers' criteria.

Organization and jury

A National Organization including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Industry provided the stewardship and made up the jury of these Competitions. The names of the ministries changed every so often.

Prizes

The prizes presented differed each year. During the first editions of the competitions, the first prizes were diplomas and trophies that were presented to the winners by eminent representatives of the national government. Together with these accolades, companies offered special internships for the most outstanding youths, guaranteeing continuity for their medium- and high-level studies. There were also awards in kind (such as books, tools or machinery) for the more outstanding centres participating in the Competitions.

⁵³ 1964-1967 Competition Reports Compilation (WSI_2612), list of participants in the hairdressing demonstration, page 88 of the 1966 Competition Report

⁵⁴ Literally, National Champion

⁵⁵ Albert, "Antecedentes referidos a los concursos nacionales ...". (WSI_0879)

⁵⁶ Martínez-Usarralde, "Consideraciones a una ley paradigmática..." pp. 108- 113

The business community excelled in its participation; they offered important material means and made the competitions' core values well known to their apprentices. Some of the more relevant contributors were Altos Hornos de Vizcaya y Sagunto, General Eléctrica Española, Siemens, Empresa Nacional Bazán, Renfe, C.A.S.A, Marconi, Standard Eléctrica and Elizalde, among others.

The competitions were possible thanks to the enthusiasm and selfless help teachers and instructors provided. The teachers prepared hundreds of students – and accompanied them more than once – in their teaching centres and companies⁵⁷.

The Ministry of Education considered these Competitions a “National activity of Public Interest” in the 1955 *Ley de Reforma de las Enseñanzas de FP*.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*

The VET competitions' internationalization

The slight "liberalization"⁵⁸ of the country at the end of the 1940s led the National Delegation of the Youth Front to avail themselves of these competitions to reach out to the rest of the world⁵⁹. So, for the first time, in 1949, the Council in charge of the National competitions invited officials from other countries to see the competitions. The objective was to encourage these visitors to have their countries join in the competition, and it seems reasonable to suppose that additionally there may have been a vested interest: to project an image of a new Spain, a Spain immersed in political change, a Spain that showed an image of progress, of a country with a bright future.

During 1949 and 1950, attempts to catch the eye of officials from Latin America were made, but the results were negative because of the expenses involved and the difference in the youths' training levels⁶⁰.

In 1950, attempts were made to include another European country.

The first country to take part in an international competition along with Spain would be Portugal⁶¹, a country with which Spain shared a close and convenient relationship in institutional terms. Both countries were ruled by dictators who, despite having different political outlooks, kept relationships rooted in mutual interest and respect. So, on December 1950, on an experimental basis, the First International Competition was organized with Spanish and Portuguese participants, along with a youth delegation from the Spanish protectorate in Morocco, which at the time was part of Spain.

From that moment onwards, Spain endeavoured to raise awareness about the competitions beyond its borders, and, without fault, invited every ambassador in Madrid to the events in order to showcase these very attractive competitive proceedings⁶².

In 1953, these invitations bore fruit, and the competition was opened to Europe⁶³. France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Portugal, and Spain participated. In the following years, other countries, now members of the Organization, added their names to the roster. The "complete" internationalization happened in 1953 and, five years later, in 1958, it was working at full capacity and in an evidently organized fashion: it was an exact copy of national Spanish competitions in matters of organization, specialties, and categories among others.

The spirit of communication and mutual understanding among peoples that the Spanish government was demonstrating led it to look beyond its borders. In 1958, for the first time ever, international competitions were held in Brussels and, in 1959, in Modena. However, the Secretariat remained in Spain until 1975.

From 1960 onwards, another landmark for international competitions was reached when Asian countries – Japan, South Korea and China (Taiwan) – joined the group. By 1975, the USA had joined. In 1981, Australia, and, later, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea did so as well. Latin America, represented by Brazil and Venezuela, joined in 1983, and, in 1988, so did Bermuda⁶⁴.

⁵⁸ "Aperturista" in Francoist terms, here translated as "liberalizing", refers to opening the country to outside influence, and not necessarily to liberalization in the economic or social sense of the word.

⁵⁹ "Mr. Elola [...] introduced the Head of State to the members of the Tribunal Nacional [...] and the Portuguese and Argentinian representatives who have studied its development and the possibility of introducing it to their countries, which would allow the contest to achieve international status". "El Caudillo entrega los premios del concurso de aprendices", *ABC*, 8th December 1949.

⁶⁰ Albert, "Antecedentes referidos a los concursos nacionales ...". (WSI_0879)

⁶¹ "Ayer comenzó la conferencia Ibérica de Trabajo", *ABC*, 28th November 1950.

⁶² Representatives from Argentine, Chile, Peru, and Mexico took part as observers in 1950.

⁶³ "The Ecuadorian ambassador lauded the international work Olympiads celebrated, and said that he hopes [his country can] take part in subsequent editions of these kinds of competitions... The German, English, and Swiss representatives in the competition also spoke kind words about the Spanish effort". "Representantes de la prensa madrileña y extranjera presenciaron ayer las pruebas del Concurso Internacional de formación obrera", *ABC*, 27th November 1953.

⁶⁴ Albert, "Antecedentes referidos a los concursos nacionales ...". (WSI_0879)

In a way, the internationalization of the competition became “logical” once the goal became to show the rest of the world the changes in the country’s structure and outlook⁶⁵. The government provided the means to enable this expansion and shouldered, for example, the contestants’ housing expenses, their in-country travel expenses, and per diem during those first competitions, including visits to workshops and so on.

The Organization

The organizational structure of the competitions had, since 1953, a clear structure: Organizing Council, an Assessment Jury, and a Secretariat.⁶⁶

The Organizing Council

The Organizing Council consisted of a President, a Vice President, a Secretary, and two representatives per participating country: an official representative and a technical representative.

The Council drafted the competition’s rules and settled on the date and location for the competition. Decisions were taken unanimously, and in the event of a tie, the president had a casting vote. They met at least twice a year, as well as during the competition.

The Council appointed the Jury, which included the technical representatives, and it was allowed to request the assistance of the workshop’s technical staff. The Council was also in charge of approving the Jury’s bylaws.

The Assessment Jury

The Assessment Jury was in charge of setting the exercises the contestants were to tackle. It consisted of the technical representatives of each country, who were also part of the Organizing Council. They could also rely on the help of workshop staff (1 per country and industrial specialty).

Each technical representative would send the sketches or blueprints for 3 exercises for each competing specialty (matching the competitors’ ages) to the Secretariat, and the Secretariat sent it to all the members for their information and for study purposes. After that, they met (prior to the Competition) in order to choose the exercises and pitch them to the Council, who had final say.

They were also in charge of setting the evaluation criteria and systems. The points awarded to each exercise had to be unanimously agreed on; if unanimity was not achieved, then by majority.

Additionally, they were in charge of deciding on the machinery, tools, and materials to use, and of overseeing the competitions to ensure they took place suitably.

The Secretary

The Secretariat’s role was to coordinate the activities, proposals and suggestions the members offered, organizing whatever was necessary to carry out the competitions.

⁶⁵ “Spain, fresh out of an unfair and anomalous international political situation – added Mr. Elola –, has managed to prove to foreign technicians, diplomatic representatives and young workers that even with few means and starting at an industrial disadvantage we have much been condemned for, that it has risen and is preparing its future by training the men of the future so that they can be cunning craftsmen and intelligent specialists, that will meet their own personal fates while helping the Homeland fulfil its superior destiny”. “España resurge y prepara su porvenir”, *ABC*, 6th December 1953.

⁶⁶ *Memoria de los Concursos de Formación Profesional Obrera 1954*, ed. Delegación Nacional del Frente de Juventudes (NL Archive: WSI_archives_1954_Madrid_competition_information.pdf)

International VET Competitions in Spain

It makes sense that most of the international competitions were organized in Spain in those first few years. The Secretariat was in Spain and this, furthermore, proved to be excellent, as Spain was very generous: it covered all expenses, as well as all outlays resulting from the organizational meetings and the competitions proper.

For the Spanish government, this was a way of investing in the country's image while maintaining control of the organization. So, between the first and the last international competitions in Spain (in 1975), Spain held 11 editions of the international vocational training competition: eight in Madrid (1950, 1951, 1953, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1967 and 1975), one in Barcelona (1960) and two in Gijón (1962 and 1971).⁶⁷

The time allowed to prepare this report has been limited and there are still many documents to read, archives to consult, protagonists to listen to... all of this would allow us to illustrate the reasons behind the choice for each of the competition's venues in greater detail. For the time being, we could say that this choice was fundamentally due to the following reasons.

Madrid and the “Escuela Sindical Virgen de la Paloma”

Ever since the decision was taken in 1942 to expand the old school and transform it into *Institución Sindical Virgen de la Paloma*, this centre became the blueprint for the new political regime's vocational training model, dependent on *Obra Sindical de Formación Profesional*, although internal student discipline was initially entrusted to the Salesian Congregation. Until the end of the 1970s, *Institución Sindical Virgen de la Paloma* was the flagship of *Sindicato Vertical's* network of vocational training centres, with yearly registrations of over 4,000 students and a close relationship with some of the leading companies in the industrial sector.

At the time, deciding that the capital and this model vocational training centre would be showcased seemed to be the most logical choice. The positive response of the teaching and directing staff and, especially, the very warm welcome extended by its secretary, Francisco Albert Vidal, may have helped ensure that the competition take place here as often as it did.

Madrid and the “Escuela de Formación Profesional Acelerada nº1”

The current *IES Barajas* was inaugurated in 1965 as the first “accelerated vocational training school.” At the time, it was one of Spain's most forward-thinking centres, with large, new facilities. There, they taught a specialized vocational training curriculum that was “concentrated” into a short timeframe, six months long, as part of a plan to respond to and satisfy the labour specialization companies needed.

The idea to organize the 1967 international competition in this centre instead of in *Virgen de la Paloma* probably answered to the idea of showcasing the novelty of its facilities and to project a modern image of Spain.

Barcelona and the “Escuela de Maestría Industrial” and “La Mercé”

Towards the end of the 1950s, several infrastructure development plans were launched in Barcelona, especially related to the industrial development of relevant companies in the area. The decision to hold the 1960 international competition in Barcelona may have its roots in these circumstances, together with the drive to show the world the importance of Spain's cities.

⁶⁷ See annexes with more detailed information about every one of the international competitions hosted by Spain from 1950 to 1975

Gijón and the “Universidad Laboral”

Coal, and, specifically, coal from Asturias, was the only source of energy Spain had in the first years of Francoism. Poorly paid, terribly unhealthy work in the Asturian mining sector was abundant. The sector registered its highest employment level, 53,000 employees, at the beginning of the 1950s, when the crisis in the energy sector was brewing. It was here that Spain found the fuel she needed to feed her economic furnace in times of scarcity and autarchy⁶⁸.

Steel working was another significant source of employment, with plants in La Felguera, Mieres and Gijón. Whereas the lack of capital in mining activities could be made up for by intensive labour, in steel working, modernization required investments that private capital did not undertake. The State saw that new construction steel works were necessary and, after studying several options, it chose Avilés as the place these factories would be built in. This entailed a deep and hurried transformation of the area.

Beginning in 1955 and until 1989, the “Universidad Laboral” was an educational institution for children of workers. Nearly half a million students studied at the 21 centres located in different parts of Spain. The institution was managed by the Ministry of Labour, as Social Welfare Entities, financial supported by the social insurances that the Ministry established for workers and companies. The educational program covered Secondary Education, VET and Technical Engineering.

Showcasing both the area’s industrial development as well as Universidad Laboral de Gijón’s outstanding facilities were a sufficiently enticing incentive and the 1962 and 1971 international competitions were held in Gijón⁶⁹, although we know that, in 1971, the organizing committee considered Seville⁷⁰ as a potential venue.

Madrid 1975, the great farewell

The previous international competition had taken place in Munich (Germany) in 1973, and Portugal was preparing for its celebration in 1974. Everything was ready in Lisbon: housing for the attendees, the venue, signage, programs... however, it had to be suddenly cancelled after the military uprising against the Estado Novo government on April 21, 1974.

No country wanted to take the baton, but Spain did after Francisco Albert-Vidal so recommended to the new Delegate of the National Delegation of the Youth Front, Manuel Valentín-Gamazo, who had recently taken over the position⁷¹.

That international VET competition of 1975 was the last held in Spain to this day. 293 participants from 17 countries competed. It had broad institutional backing although, at a time in which everything in Spain was about to change, the population’s main interest was, logically, focused elsewhere.

It was that year, 1975, that Manuel Valentín-Gamazo, chair of the Organizing Council, suggested to undertake all the necessary arrangements to establish the international organization as a legally established and organized entity. He reached out to international bodies that might take this organization under their wing, such as the United Nations⁷².

The establishment of the International Organization was passed in 1976. Until then, Spain bore all of the Organization’s expenses⁷³.

⁶⁸ “Asturias y el franquismo, la historia que nunca se contó,” *La Nueva España*, 9th May 2010

⁶⁹ “We were looking for a significant industrial area, with “Escuela de Maestría”, with “Universidad Laboral”, with factories... And there is Gijón, we said ourselves”. “Gabriel Cisneros: ¿tiene razón la juventud?”, *La Nueva España*, 11th September 1971.

⁷⁰ “Concurso Internacional de Formación Profesional”, *ABC Sevilla*, 22nd January 1971.

⁷¹ “Manuel Valentín-Gamazo”, Oral history, (Madrid, 2019). (WSL_1008)

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ “Concursos Internacionales de Formación Profesional”. Madrid: Organización Internacional para Promocionar la Formación Profesional para la Juventud, 1979. (WSL_0873)

Spain loses interest in VET competitions

Between 1976 and 1979, during the years of political transition, the Spanish Government showed no interest in organizing VET competitions... or even in participating in them. It continued to provide funding for the International Secretariat and the Spanish National Committee, which were incorporated into the Ministry of Culture, but it showed no further interest in these activities.

Francisco Albert-Vidal, then-chair of the International Organization, kept the activities alive and tried by all means to redirect the situation. A team of 15 competitors participated in the competition in Atlanta 1981⁷⁴. But these were times where Spain had many things to deal with, and the government did not deem it relevant to respond to his request.

At the end of 1982, the International Secretariat and the Spanish Committee officially requested the Ministry of Culture, through *Dirección General de la Juventud*, which they were a part of, to position itself with respect to the competitions and to confirm whether it was interested in these activities or not. The answer was negative and the International Secretariat, housed in Spain for 33 uninterrupted years, was, "much to the chagrin of the Members,"⁷⁵ moved to Switzerland.

As of 1983, National Competitions are not organized in Spain⁷⁶.

Despite that, with no institutional support but with a strong will, passion and motivation, Tjerk Dusseldorp⁷⁷ remembers how Albert Vidal (and his wife) of course came to preside over the "88 Skill Olympics" in Sydney, and they brought one or two competitor with them to have Spain represented in the Competition.

Also, Francisco Albert-Vidal got that a small Spanish team (specifically from Valencia), participated at the international competitions at 1989 (Birmingham) and 1991 (Amsterdam).

*"We were worried, well... But "Don Albert", who was twice my age and had twice my experience and knowledge, visited the Provincial Council, everywhere...He managed to double the money we needed to go to Birmingham, which for me was the point at which... Sometimes, when I've gone to competitions and I've felt a little down, I always think of him and say to myself "Think like Albert!" because you have to pull through. And it was wonderful to see how he solved it."*⁷⁸

⁷⁴ List of winners by skills, Atlanta 1981, sourced by Michael Casserly (WSI_2290)

⁷⁵ Albert, "Antecedentes referidos a los concursos nacionales ...". (WSI_0879)

⁷⁶ Gato, "Historia de las competiciones".

⁷⁷ Tjerk Dusseldorp's coments over a chat, December 2019

⁷⁸ "José Rubio, Oral History" (Madrid, 2019) (WSI_1085)

Conclusions

The concept of “competition” is part of our human essence. All civilizations and cultures known to man, at all historical moments, organize competitions. All manner of competitions: sports (individual and team), martial (jousting), and labour-related, from the guilds of the Middle Ages onwards, some for entertainment’s sake, others to secure positions of leadership ...

In the field of vocational training, Spain was not the only country in which competitions started to be organized in the 1940s.

We know that these were held in the German Democratic Republic⁷⁹ and the Soviet Union⁸⁰, we also know that Nazi Germany held these kinds of competitions⁸¹.

The youth politics set in motion by Franco was always under the responsibility of the Falangists, from the moment of their constitution in 1937 until the dismantling of the Falangist Movement’s General Secretariat in 1977.

Based on the well-founded premise that the Falange lacked experience in this particular area makes sense to think on the influence the exchanges and links established with friendly countries and political groups, particularly with German National Socialism and its youth organization: *Hitlerjugend* or Hitler Youth.

During the early forties, important contacts and exchanges between the Frente de Juventudes and its German counterpart took place, in which prominent political figures from both sides participated.

“A remarkable element in those contacts is the participation of an important Frente de Juventudes delegation, with Jose Antonio Elola-Olaso, its leader, in charge of it, at the First European Youth Congress, held in Vienna in September 1942, through the initiative of the Italian and German youth leaders. The Congress served to coordinate different aspects of youth politics in the dozen countries in the Axis orbit at that time. And if it did not have more continuity, it was because World War II prevented it. In spite of some later interpretations, interested in underlying the discrepancies between the Spanish and German delegations, the wide consensus that existed between both parties is sufficiently well documented and the influence of national socialism on the design of Franco’s youth politics is notable.”⁸²

Delegations from Germany, Italy, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Slovakia, Portugal, Bulgaria, Finland, Wallonia, Flanders, Denmark and Norway also participated at that European Youth Congress, organized by Hitler Jugend in Vienna in September 1942.⁸³

The main goal was the foundation of the European Youth Association and a point of its agenda was the creation of work commissions around different topics. The National Delegate of the “*Frente de Juventudes*”, heads the Commission for “Youth and Family” which first meeting in Madrid, December 1942, concluded with a series of initiatives aimed to the indoctrination of young people trough professional and political training.⁸⁴

So, yes, it’s pretty possible that the original idea of organizing VET competitions in Spain, came from its relationship with Germany, as fascist allied countries and from the fact that Spain took the German system as an example to follow.

⁷⁹ German lead research presentation: (WS Secretariat)/WS P115 WorldSkills Museum/Europe/DE Germany/Lead Researcher Reports/Presentation_Worldskills_Facst&Files_20190927-fd.pdf

⁸⁰ “Labor y deportividad”, *ABC*, 21st November 1953. (WSI_0552)

⁸¹ German lead research presentation: (WS Secretariat)/WS P115 WorldSkills Museum/Europe/DE Germany/Lead Researcher Reports/Presentation_Worldskills_Facst&Files_20190927-fd.pdf

⁸² José Antonio Cruz Orozco, “Falange, Frente de Juventudes y el nuevo orden europeo. Discrepancias y coincidencias en la política de juventud durante el primer franquismo”, *Revista de Educación*, n. 357, 2012

⁸³ “El Congreso de las juventudes europeas”, *La Nueva España*, 23rd March 1943

⁸⁴ “Función espiritual de España en el Congreso de las Juventudes Europeas”, *Falange*, 20th April 1943

To the question why was it that the VET competitions took shape and became the movement we now know as WorldSkills there is no clear-cut answer. It is not an idea that someone would have and put into action. Research seems to point, as well as the logic of the times, to the fact that this is the product of a historical context.

At a given time, all the necessary elements for the competition to be brought about in Spain arose, and they existed for long enough that that seed grew, until it matured and became an international reality.

It was a cluster of circumstances, as well as the active participation of certain people who took care of it and pushed it beyond the limits of politics and of borders alike. Starting with the least political members at the start, like Albert Vidal, secretary of Virgen de la Paloma. These first competitions were simply one of many activities in his centre; he could have just done his job and stopped there. But he did more and became passionate about this project. And also due to the support and motivation of all the first European delegates who, putting aside their quarrels and prejudices, got together, probably for different reasons given the institutions they represented. In any case, and in the end, they joined forces in favour of the future of youth of their respective countries.

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