

Joan Arsequell

Champion of “Wood pattern making” in the I International Competition, Madrid 1950

Background

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 first Iberian competition in 1950, followed this model.

One of the apprenticeship schools from companies participating at the 1950 competition was the one from the Elizalde Company.

From 1908, the company Elizalde, founded by Arturo ELIZALDE for the construction of automobiles, manufactured spare parts and accessories for automobile engines, and it was in 1917 when the factory began the project for the construction of aircraft engines.

During the Spanish Civil War, the Elizalde factory was collectivised under the name SAF 8 and dedicated to the manufacture of war material, especially aircraft bombs. Construction began on the Russian M25 engine, copied from the American Wright-Cyclone. The factory was bombed on two occasions by sea and by air, which caused its offices and workshops to be scattered throughout the province of Barcelona.

Once the civil war was over, industrial work was resumed and a period of industrial recovery began, which led to the need to invest in technical and professional training.

And it was here, in 1940, when the manufacture of engines for aviation replaced the automotive industry that had been developing until then, that the logical change of direction towards a more refined technique gave rise to the interest in vocational training that was required at the time, and the Elizalde Aviation Engine Factory created the Elizalde Apprentices School (E.A.E.), a driving force for technicians and professionals who would later take on management and industrial development roles in the country's industries, mainly in Catalonia.

This school, in operation until 1960, was characterised by technical excellence and the training and academic development of hundreds of professionals who passed through its classrooms, combining theoretical training with practical work experience in the company itself under the institution's motto and hallmark: "STUDY, ACTION, DISCIPLINE".

Joan Arsequell was one of the apprentices at that school when he participated in the first ever international VET competition in 1950.

One year later, in 1951, the company was nationalised and integrated into the INI, the National Institute of Industry.

Biography

Joan was born in 1930. He remembers a hard childhood. It was a time of war and famine. His father had to go into exile in France, leaving the family in Poble Sec (Barcelona) and he and his three siblings (2 brothers and 1 sister) had to work as children to bring food home.

He started at very young age at the Elizalde Apprentices School, and it was by working how he learned a trade, as well as allowing him to bring home some money. That, he recalls, was the reality for most young people at the time, only a minority could afford to go to private schools. He chose the wood modelling speciality because it was new and seemed to have more opportunities than others.

His participation in the VET competitions began in the 1950 sectorial competitions. He remembers the brotherly atmosphere. Somehow, he says, the difficult war and post-war situation that they lived through brought them closer together and, rather than seeing each other as rivals in the competition, it brought them together.

The school supported them during their participation, covering the necessary travel and accommodation expenses, but did not organise any specific training or coaching.

"We did our work to the best of our ability and when we had the opportunity to take part in a competition, we did it for the prize (which was always welcome, given the scarcity) and to feel a sense of achievement for a job well done."

Wood patter making, Joan's skill, was one of those chosen to compete for the first time ever at international level in 1950, when Portugal took part with 12 competitors.

"The fact that I was passing tests and winning them made me feel sure of myself: to see that I had learnt and improved. I didn't feel nervous because each event was just a job for me, a job I had to do well. I didn't look around me: I was completely focused on what I was asked to do. I didn't even think about the prize: I concentrated on doing my best."

For example: the model that won me the most important prize was an industrial piece of wood, which I spent a lot of time to execute and specially to polish and clean to the maximum. I waited until the last moment to hand it in, as the wood itself darkens from handling. The others didn't spend enough time cleaning the piece and delivered it so quickly that when I presented mine it looked brand new compared to the others (which had darkened and degraded). That's the nature of wood and I'm proud to know it so well".

Of that experience, Joan recalls being impressed by the variety of people and work and, most particularly, the timing of the prize-giving. He had been given new clothes to present himself to the authorities, his nerves were on edge. When his name was called out as national champion of the 4th national championship and international champion of the 1st international championship, there was a standing ovation, but all he could think about was going home to show the prize to his family.

"My family was very proud of me: we all cried. When I returned to Elizalde School, the headmaster congratulated me personally. "We are very happy and proud that you have won these awards and the good name you give to our company, but now get back to work!" he said"

Joan tells us that in addition to the trophy and certificate, he received 10,000 pesetas (60 € nowadays), which is a high prize due to the diary salary for a not specialised worker at the time was around 20 pesetas (around 600 pesetas monthly which is around 3.6 €).

"My dream was to get my own raincoat: the one I had was a heritage from my brother, who in turn had inherited it from my uncle. So, I was able to get it! I gave the rest of the money to my mother so she could buy some food."




He states that this experience opened professional doors for him and gave him the self-confidence to do what he loved. He then worked in well-known companies, creating different models and industrial parts, until he set up his own company, where his children and grandchildren continue to work.

"Juquell, my first company, manufactured industrial parts and models. By creating moulds for thermoformed plastics, the company grew and became Arviplast. In addition to creating moulds, I set out to manufacture plastic parts for the main private labels in the sector.

Finally, after years of evolution, the latter company was transformed into Escaure Ibèrica, S.A., where we extrude plastic, vacuum thermoforming and machining of plastic parts and countless other materials that we never stop researching (well, now my colleagues, children and grandchildren do it!)"

Joan believes that vocational training has come a long way since his time as an apprentice, and that we need more young people to be trained with strength and conviction, not only in a trade, but also as a dedicated, constant person and defender of a job well done.

Related assets

Image	Asset
	<p>WSI_3057</p> <p>Trophy won by Joan Arsequell, Champion of "Wood pattern making" in the I International Competition, Madrid 1950</p>
	<p>WSI_3058</p> <p>Certificate given to Joan Arsequell, Champion of "Wood pattern making" in the I International Competition, Madrid 1950</p>
	<p>WSI_2557</p> <p>1st International Competition, in the Magazine of the Elizalde Apprentices School</p>