

## Obituary.

### Dr. Emilia Currás



DOI:10.5771/0943-7444-2020-6-436

Born in Madrid on 8 October 1927, Emilia Currás died in the capital city on 29 March 2020 at the age of ninety-two. Her parents came from Galicia; her father, Bernardo Currás, was a jeweller, and her mother, Emilia Puente, was one of her first teachers and the influence for her scientific, innovative, travelling and polyglot spirit. She was the eldest of two sisters who, after graduating, went to Germany to study.

Emilia Currás spent her childhood, impacted by the Spanish Civil War (1931 to 1939), in the Valencian village of Alberique in the Republican zone, where the fighting was not as fierce as in other towns on the front. At the end of the war, her mother left for Tetuán in Morocco, which, in 1912, had become a protectorate under Franco-Spanish jurisdiction. In the years of the Spanish Republic, from 1931 to 1936, an attempt was made to introduce reforms and many Spanish schools were created. Girls were schooled separately and the schooling rate was low.

Emilia's mother had ranked in first place in the public teachers' examination and was able to select her destination, choosing Tetuán. She settled there with her daughters as a teacher in the No. 1 Muslim Girls' School. Emilia landed there in 1939 at the age of twelve. Her mother was to be her teacher and she took her first year high school exams on her own initiative in Ceuta. She continued her studies at a Spanish school, immersed in a colonial setting where Arabic, French and Spanish were used. It was here that Emilia began to forge her restless spirit, learning languages, travelling, becoming familiar with diverse ways of living and other cultures, all enhanced by her mother's excellent teaching.

She returned to Madrid at the age of fifteen, having come from a context that was highly unusual for girls. Whereas

Spain was immersed in one of the harshest periods of the dictatorship, she came from a more expansive world and arrived in an environment that was more limited in all respects. She finished her high school in the Lope de Vega High School in Madrid and then graduated in chemistry from the Complutense University of Madrid (the former Central University), completing a subject at the University of Santiago de Compostela in 1953.

On finishing her studies, she worked in the Veterinary School as an intern researcher in the field of Chemistry and in the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) until 1955, the year when she left for Berlin to do her doctoral studies. She was admitted to the Technische Universität of Berlin and attained her PhD in chemistry from Berlin University in 1959. In 1961, she returned to Spain and received a doctorate from Madrid University with her thesis *New research on the tribromide antimony dissolved as an ionising solvent*, describing five new compounds, registered in the Index Chemicus, and directed by Angel Vian Ortuño at the Complutense University of Madrid.

In 1961, she returned to Madrid and entered private business, founding the Chemistry and Technical Translation Section of Hanomag-Barreiros in Madrid. She told us, "When I left Berlin with a PhD in my pocket, my father told me I had to look for a job. As I could speak several languages, it was easy to find work related to foreign bibliography and literature, so I found a job at Hanomag Barreiros, a tractor manufacturer, translating documents from Germany. This was how I began working with documents and it was my first contact with Documentation" (Interview 2013).

In 1962, she went to work for the company Spanish Auxini-Piritas, in the position of Director of Document Negotiation, until 1964. She told us, “After a few months, I transferred to Spanish Piritas, a company pertaining to the National Institute of Industry (INI), to fill, precisely, the role of ‘documentalist,’ with all its ‘documentation’ load, reviewing journals and documents relating to the exploitation of pyrite mines in Huelva. There we did everything: translations, filing, summaries, writing short articles. In a nutshell, everything covered by ‘Documentation and Information’” (Interview, 2013).

In 1965, she returned to Germany to become Head of the Materials Analysis Laboratory of Linde AG (Köln-Suhn). There, she continued her professional development and enrolled in the Institute for Documentation of Frankfurt am Main, obtaining her qualification as a Scientific Documentalist in 1966. She remained in Germany until 1968 in the role of Head of the Patents Documentation Division of Dynamit Nobel (Troisdorf).

In 1969, she returned to Spain to found and manage the Documentation Department of Hispanoil (Madrid). In 1970, she left private enterprise to join the Science Faculty of the Autónoma University of Madrid and to run the Scientific Documentation Office in the Department of Applied Physical Chemistry.

A pioneer in the responsibility of the professional status of documentalists in Spain, she told us, “I had returned from Germany and had once again become immersed in Spanish documentation tasks, first at Hispanoil and later in the Science Faculty of the Autónoma University of Madrid. At that time, there were very few of us who considered ourselves to be documentalists and we were scattered, here and there, around different institutions. I missed the corporatism I had experienced in Germany and thought that we could also join forces in Spain. If we were united, it would be easier to practise our profession and to achieve improvements in all kinds of things” (Interview 1992).

In 1972, a short time after returning from Germany, she made an attempt to drive the creation of associations in the profession. She began developing a collective of documentalists that would work together and promote proper training, that would defend the profession, organise congresses and disseminate their work in publications. She told us, “As the profession of ‘documentalist’ was established as an independent, steadfast profession, it needed a professional organisation, that is why the idea of creating an association people could become a member of came to me. This is how the SEDIC, the Spanish Association of Documentation and Scientific Information, arose. We included the term ‘Scientific’ because the work done requires methodical, seriously thought-out organisation, with methods proper to the case in question” (Interview 2013).

Thanks to her decision, her persistent work and her vision, after several setbacks, she succeeded in constituting an association, something she put her heart and soul into. She said, “At such difficult times, with no money, with all the librarians in opposition and the apathy of the members ... a good deal of enthusiasm and a lot of determination was needed so as not to falter” (Interview 1992). She worked with perseverance and from 1981 until 1987 served as the Chairwoman. Her term of office also saw the creation of the FESEABIC, the predecessor to the current FESABID, the Spanish Federation of Archives, Libraries, Documentation and Museum Associations.

In 1985, she obtained a post as full professor at the Autónoma University of Madrid as a Scientific Documentalist, until 1996, the year of her formal retirement. Nevertheless, in practice she did not retire and continued working until 2015 when a hip fracture led to her effective retirement.

She was a member from the outset of ISKO—International Society for Knowledge Organization—and a founder of the ISKO Spain Chapter, later Spain and Portugal. She met Ingetraut Dahlberg while she was doing a course in Scientific Documentation in Frankfurt am Main. This professional and social relationship gave rise to her membership, from the beginning, of the International Classification Society, attending congresses and meetings. In 1989, she became a member of the new International Society for Knowledge Organization (ISKO), in whose founding meeting the decision was taken, among other matters, to create national chapters in the different European countries. This conference was extremely successful and, as a consequence, a large number of professionals joined ISKO. She was appointed Coordinator for Spain as she was the only Spanish member and had, among others, the mission of founding the Spanish Chapter.

The year 1992 saw the staging in Madrid of the grand Congress of the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID), a circumstance that the different specialised committees took advantage of to hold their meetings. One of them was the FID/CR Committee on Classification, which Emilia Currás had been a member of for some years together with Ingetraut Dahlberg. The FID/CR meeting was arranged in conjunction with ISKO. ISKO Spain already had five members, including myself, following in the wake of Emilia Currás. In 1994, the by-laws were passed and the Constituent Assembly took place, in which Emilia Currás was elected chairwoman and I the secretary, consolidating my professional life by her side. In 1998, she was elected Honourable Chairwoman of ISKO-Spain (since 2012 ISKO Spain-Portugal). Tribute was paid to her contribution to ISKO-Spain in a commemorative book published in 2003 and titled *A Life: Profession and Passion*.



Her methodology validates the construction and use of thesauri, with the help of IT programmes. It is rounded off with a study of the application of classical systems to the ordering of knowledge, insofar as they are the most fitting for this purpose. Her proposal for knowledge organisation concludes by formulating her epistemological theory—informationism—taking information as her main paradigm. It does not advocate the perception of a horizontal vision of things, but the attainment of a higher level of abstraction, where everything is related to everything else, without hermetic compartments; where systemic science—the theory of systems—shapes the ordering of knowledge. It concludes that the classical systems, which seek to group and classify by evolutionary relationships, are the ones that offer the closest similarities to classificatory languages.

She had multiple professional concerns yet her personality was not limited to the field of the scientific but penetrated the poetic. Her poetry is a “literary expression of emotion. A basically amorous emotion, which she feels as a presence, even in its absence.” In her poetry, she captures “a vital and poetic process that leaves us the bitter sweet taste of sadness, immersed in beauty, of poems filled with musicality and sincerity, but not exempt from analysis and thought.” She leaves us her poetic work in the books *Del pasar y correr amo* (1999), *Fugitiva del tiempo* (2001) and (2010), *En el Rincón de mis pensamientos* (2011), *En una tarde tibia* (2013) and *A la sombra del árbol perdido* (2018).

Emilia Currás was a scientist and writer. Her prolific activity conveys the image of a tireless woman and leaves us with an extraordinary legacy and a considerable scientific output. She contributed to the internationalisation of science, to the creation of scientific organisations and the training of information professionals. The woman who, for years, was our chairwoman and our honorary president died in Madrid from COVID-19. For us, at ISKO Spain-Portugal, she was the main founder, the main inspiration and an innovative personality. Those of us who knew her, shared her work, longings and concerns, and trained with her theoretical and non-theoretical teachings, are left with a sadness that not even her poetry can manage to describe.

Rosa San Segundo  
Professor  
Departamento Biblioteconomía y Documentación  
Universidad Carlos III de Madrid  
rosa.sansegundo@uc3m.es

## Selected Works

### Books

- Currás, Emilia. 1982. *Las Ciencias de la Documentación: Bibliotecología, Archivología, Documentación e Información*. Barcelona: Mitre.
- Currás, Emilia. 1985. *Documentación y Metodología de la Investigación Científica*. Madrid: Paraninfo
- Currás, Emilia. 1988. *La Información en sus Nuevos Aspectos: Ciencias de la Documentación*. Madrid: Paraninfo.
- Currás, Emilia. 1991. *Thesaurus: Lenguajes Terminológicos*. Madrid: Paraninfo
- Currás, Emilia. 1996. *Tratado Sobre Ciencia de la Información*. Rosario (Argentina): Universidad Nacional del Rosario
- Currás, Emilia. 2008. *Ciencia de la Información Sobre Postulados Sistemáticos y Sistemáticos*. Gecal, Edición personal
- Currás, Emilia. 2010. *Ontologies, Taxonomies and Thesauri in Systems Science and Systematics* Oxford: Chandos Publishing
- Currás, Emilia and Nuria Lloret Romero. 2011. *Systems Science and Collaborative Information Systems: Theories, Practices and New Research*. Hershey, Pa.: Information Science Reference.

### Articles

- Currás, Emilia. 1966. “La Documentación y la Información: Temas de Actualidad.” *Química e Industria: QeI* 6: 195-98.
- Currás, Emilia. 1979. “La Información Científica en el Campo de la Ingeniería Química en España.” *Ingeniería Química* 129: 99-105.
- Currás, Emilia. 1974. “Documentalista Científico: Una Profesión sin Formación.” *Química e Industria: QeI* 7-8: 507-11.
- Currás, Emilia. 1980. “Evaluación y Formación de unos Nuevos Profesionales: Los Químicos Documentalistas.” *Química e industria: QeI* 2: 123-5.
- Currás, Emilia. 1981. “Sistemas Mecanizados de Almacenamiento y Recuperación de Lenguajes Gráficos y Científicos: Su Aplicación en los Países de Habla Hispana.” *Revista Española de Documentación Científica* 4, no. 2: 91-112.
- Currás, Emilia. 1983. “Ciertos Principios Científico-Filosóficos de las Ciencias de la Documentación.” *Revista de la Universidad Complutense* 1-4: 83-8.
- Currás, Emilia. 1986. “La Información como Cuarto Elemento Vital y su Influencia en la Cultura de los Pueblos.” *Toletum: boletín de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes y Ciencias Históricas de Toledo* 20: 27-46.

- Currás, Emilia. 1989. "CosmOvisión de la Ecología y Calidad de Vida." *Beresit: Revista Interdisciplinar Científico-Humana* 3: 145-55.
- Currás, Emilia. 1994. "Influencia de la Ciencia Sistémica en el Concepto de Información." *Química e industria: Qel* 4: 49-51.
- Currás, Emilia. 1994. "Concepto de Información en el Contexto de Integración Científica." *Aabadom: Boletín de la Asociación Asturiana de Bibliotecarios, Archiveros, Documentalistas y Museólogos* 5, no. 1: 4-8.
- Currás, Emilia. 1995. "Teorías de Clasificación del Dr. Ranganathan bajo Postulados de Ciencia Sistemática." *Boletín de la ANABAD* 45, no. 4: 145-68. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=50985>
- Currás, Emilia. 1998. "Sistema de Experto Hipermedia para el Reconocimiento, Indización y Recuperación de Literatura Gris." *Scire: Representación y organización del conocimiento* 4, no. 1: 117-30. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2342443>
- Currás, Emilia. 2001. "Integración Vertical de las Ciencias: Una Aproximación Científica (Desde una Visión Sistémica)." *Anales de la Real Academia de Doctores* 5, no. 2: 233-50. <https://www.radoctores.es/doc/1V5N2-curras-integracionvertical.pdf>
- Currás, Emilia. 2002. "Aquellos Primeros Tiempos: Enseñanza de la Documentación en la Universidad Complutense de Madrid." *Documentación de las Ciencias de la Información* 25: 55-59. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/ejemplar/60156>
- Currás, Emilia. 2005. "La Biblioteca Alexandrina: Antecedentes, Origen, Historia y Resurgimiento." *Códices: Revista de Ciencias de la Información, Bibliotecología y Archivística* 1, no. 2: 49-59.
- Currás, Emilia. 2005. "Teoría, Historia y Política de la Información." *Boletín de la ANABAD* 55, nos. 1-2: 373-4.
- Currás, Emilia. 2006. "Historia de ISKO-España hasta 1998." *Revista General de Información y Documentación* 16, no. 2: 217-49. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2235623>
- Currás, Emilia. 2010. "Caos y Orden en ontraposición Dialéctica." *Beresit: Revista Interdisciplinar Científico-Humana* 9 (Ejemplar dedicado a: Actas del Congreso Beresit IV: la Sociedad del Siglo XXI, ¿Continuidad o Crisis?): 95-110.
- Currás, Emilia. 2011. "Inconvenientes de la Era Digital." *Mi Biblioteca: La Revista del Mundo Bibliotecario* 26: 16.
- Currás, Emilia. 2011. "Informacionismo en la Integración Vertical de los Archivos." *Documentación de las Ciencias de la Información* 34: 319-32. <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/DCIN/article/view/36461>