

INSERTION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OVIEDO IN THE URBAN LAYOUT OF ASTURIAN CITIES

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The original headquarters of the University of Oviedo, situated between the streets currently called San Francisco and Ramon y Cajal, has played since its inauguration in 1608 an outstanding role in the vicissitudes and evolution of Oviedo's urban layout. In the city plan devised by Francisco Ritter (1777) it is easy to notice the urban perimeter marked by the city wall and the outskirts which were not included in the city's urban layout, as the lining up of the intramural streets extended along extramural dwellings.

In the mid 19th century, the demolition of the city wall and the opening of the Arms Factory (1857) led to a surge of industrial activities which in turn favoured business development. The resulting urban growth placed the former suburb of San Francisco inside the urban core, thanks to the inauguration of the streets of Uria (1874) and Fruela (1880), where the head offices of the Asturiano, Herrero and Oviedo Banks were set up, followed by those of the Provincial Palace (1910) and the Bank of Spain (1916).

Until 1910 the students only used the facilities of the original old building which was permanently overcrowded. The situation worsened even more with the opening of the Faculty of Sciences, which logically required additional classrooms, laboratories and offices. Therefore, since 1905 there was an insistent demand for an enlargement, which was finally achieved when a Sciences Hall was built in a plot adjacent to the school facade and oriented towards the Cueto Square (currently known as Riego Square).

At the end of the Civil War the Universidad reopened its doors in a materially devastated city, with more than 60% of its living quarters destroyed. However, the priorities set by the Administration of the new regime focused on the reconstruction of monumental buildings housing national and local government offices, as well as religious institutions. The San Francisco building was among the first to be rebuilt thanks to its inclusion in this sort of preferential usage catalogue.

Immersed in such deep crisis, and from the spatial perspective that this article analyses, in the 1940's the University had to deal with two crucial challenges: finding new sites for the Faculties of Sciences and Arts and conforming to the new Law regulating Spanish Universities issued in 1943, whose preamble made the construction of Halls of Residence compulsory.

Although the first plans to construct a venue for the Faculty of Sciences dated from before the Civil War, the final projects were approved in 1941, but its inauguration was postponed till 1958. The same delay applied to the construction of a building for the Faculty of Arts.

It is worth pointing out that the National Ministry of Education disregarded educational centres, channelling most material efforts towards the construction of halls of residence. In our case, this led to the further extension of the University of Oviedo: an ambitious project involving the construction of a sports-residential campus called «Ciudad Universitaria Franco» was set in an area which at the time was practically rural, a privileged high and sunny location then known as «Los Catalanes meadow». In 1943, after much reckoning, approval was granted to a project authored by the Somolinos brothers for the construction of two Halls of Residence, the San Gregorio —for boys—, and the Santa Catalina —for girls—, including sport facilities like track and fields, swimming pools and tennis courts, as well as semi-detached houses for professors.

To sum up, by the end of the 1940's the configuration of a new university ensemble was further strengthening the elitist and classist character of Universities at the time, since the high costs of higher studies were far beyond the means of the majority of the population.

In 1958 the inauguration of the Faculty of Sciences in the Manoeuvre Field, on Calvo Sotelo street, was supposed to paved the way to what could have easily become a university campus, in plots adjacent to the urban centre. The School of Teaching had started to be built around the same date, also in a plot belonging to the municipality and in the field occupied by the former site of the Business School. However, this privileged area of the city was soon targeted by private real estate interests and state-led initiatives channelled through the National Institute of Housing (INV). The official city planning turned the Manoeuvre Field and Buenavista into a large residential area, a morphological unit called Big Oviedo, earmarked to become a high class neighbourhood, a sort of bourgeois enlargement with ample spaces to accommodate the monumental buildings that would become the symbols of civilian and military power, as well as a war memorial square, in line with the megalomaniac style of the times. Only 7,000 m² were set aside for the university, where one of the most remarkable samples of the city's contemporary architecture was finally built following a project by architect Castelao. The building would eventually house the Faculties of Biology and Geology.

In the 1960's all possibilities for expansion were halted, and in the 1970's the centres were further scattered throughout Oviedo's urban layout, due to the steady increase of university enrolment which made matters worst, since massive access to education genuinely boomed over a period of scarcely 6 years.

Following this trend, in 1959 a building for the Mining Technical Engineering School, subservient to the School of Madrid until 1961, was constructed on a plot owned by the City Council in the rear part of the former Provincial Orphanage, far away from all other university sites. In 1968 the Faculty of Arts was transferred to the former headquarters of the Local Tax Office, and the Convent of San Vicente had been fitted out a year before. Additionally, the introduction of new university studies without buildings available to provide accommodation for the new students, as was the case with Economics, led to a further deterioration of the deplorable situation of the University of Oviedo.

Moreover, the dispersion was not limited to the city of Oviedo, since there were also isolated centres in Gijón and Mieres, where under the educational reforms promoted by Minister Villar Palasí the former studies of Business, Mining Experts and Overseers became studies of Business Sciences, Industrial Technical Engineering and Mining Technical Engineering, respectively.

The building housing the studies of Business Science in Gijón dated from 1915, and remained unchanged until the school year 1989-90, except for the addition of the studies of Computer Science in 1982. In 1991 the School was moved to the Viesques Campus, temporarily distributing its branches between the Superior Civil Naval School and the Superior Technical School of Industrial Engineers. Meanwhile the Superior Technical School of Industrial Engineers was relocated in another educational centre of the city located between the streets presently named Manuel Llana, Colón, and Avenida de la Constitución, in a building dating from 1949, which had been constructed in a municipal area covering 14.000 m² to house the Experts School. In 1972 the Technical School of Mining Engineering was founded, operating on an experimental basis during the school year 1972-73, and domiciled in a building from the previous decade constructed in a 6,500 m² plot which had been donated by the City Council of Mieres, and used by the Ministry of Education and Science until 1969.

Thus, in the mid 1970's the educational centres of the District were widely scattered. That is to say, in only fifteen years the University of Oviedo went from being concentrated in a single building (the big rambling house of San Francisco), to splitting into nine sites: six of them in Oviedo, two in Gijón, and one in Mieres, with the addition of the Campus of León which also belongs to the District. Consequently, it became increasingly impossible to deal with the problems derived from lack of space in the university as a whole, since only individual solutions for each situation were applicable.

In 1971, four years after the approval of Oviedo's General Urban Layout Plan a draft of the Partial Layout Plan for the *Cristo de las Cadenas-Monte Cerrao Complex* envisaged the future placement of a University campus. The Plan featured a number of urban actions to be undertaken in consecutive stages over an area of 290 hectares. The first university building finished in the area was the Faculty of Medicine, established under the Law of 27th of July, 1968, which also granted the teaching of medicine to the Universities of Murcia and La Laguna. As the construction of the building progressed, the educational authorities pondered over the desirability of erecting more university centres in the vicinity.

By *Royal Decree of 30th of December, 1977* the surrounding fields were summarily expropriated in order to construct a building for the Faculty of Law and Economics, as well as sports facilities and other teaching areas, over a total surface of 59.191 m². The construction of the building started in January of 1979 and in 1984 it was inaugurated. The building of the Faculty of Chemistry, for which the investment had been approved by the Ministry of Education and Science in April of 1979, was inaugurated in 1989, after a decade of endless efforts to overcome countless obstacles. Those days also witnessed the approval of the budgets for the School of Stomatology (though it was not inaugurated until 1987) and for the new Faculty of Biology (which opened its doors in the 1990's).

The El Cristo Campus faced serious problems of accessibility and instead of solving the lack of space generated more problems, since very soon there were more than 1000 students per hectare while in other European Universities there were no more than 300 students per hectare.

Whereas in Oviedo the relationships between the Council and the University remained as cold as usual, the arrival of democrats to the City Council of Gijón allowed for closer links with the University centres. In 1980, Gijón's Council agreed to develop a field of 30 hectares next to the Universidad Laboral, thus starting what eventually became the Viesques Campus. Thanks to its privileged location it was really possible for the University, for the first time in its history, to have a campus with the best possible conditions: closeness to the city, great sports facilities and residential halls as well as a topography and landscape which made the place uniquely suited to play its role.

In January of 1991 the Departments of the Faculties of Geography and History, Philology, Philosophy and Teaching Sciences were transferred to the building formerly housing the Oviedo's Diocesan Seminary, thus putting an end to the process of academic and spatial relocation that had taken place throughout the 1980's. Besides the repairs and adaptations of the old building to accommodate several departments, seminar halls and sixteen classrooms, the construction of a new building was undertaken in order to provide lecture halls for the first cycle and a central library coupled with other common service areas. In 1986 the PGOU reserved the fields surrounding the main building to be used as green areas. This was a logical decision to make in view of the high concentration of buildings and inhabitants and the lack of other green areas in the vicinity.

Nonetheless, the first attempt to reorganize the District took place in 1986, when pursuant to the new *Law for the Reform of the University* (LRU), the team led by Rector Alberto Marcos Vallauré made public its managerial report, which stated the need to promote the renewal of the University as a priority goal.

In July of 1987, after grouping all study areas into 28 departments, the *Plan for the Layout of Oviedo University Campus* was approved. Its main aim was to «rationalize» the distribution «by defining cores of homogenous fields linked to scientific areas». To that end it envisaged the creation of a Technological Campus in Gijón, the delimitation of two cores in El Cristo (Law-Economics and Experimental and Health Sciences), and the establishment of a new Campus for Humanities in El Milan. In this way, with Viesques as an alternative, the University submitted for the first time a decentralized spatial model, centred on the two main cities in Asturias.

Coinciding with the issuance of *Royal Decree 2020/1997, of 26th of December, establishing a system of supportive actions for coal mining and for the alternative development of mining zones* (the so called «Mining Funds»), the delivery of the latest project for a University Campus definitely confirmed its decentralization thanks to the construction of the Pozo Barredo Campus which is made up by a unique Scientific and Technical Building worth 55 million Euros, to house the studies of Cartography and Geodesy, Environmental Sciences and Topography, which is already under way. The building's foundation stone was laid in 1998.