

## Architecture, education and city: towards the optimisation of communities of learning through the *educational campus* paradigm in the 21st Century

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**ABSTRACT:** The excellence of any university is inextricably tied to the excellence of its architecture and its relations with the city. This implies both its internal areas and community, and the social and spatial synergies with the city. Human integral formation is a process that requires a physical dimension, where the community can share and foster knowledge, inside and beyond the campus limits. According to the third mission of universities, the connections with the urban context become a critical issue, as it hosts the social context. Today, universities are required to plan creativity and innovate in teaching methodologies and space. It is time to rethink the spatial archetypes of the university. For such a transcendental goal, the conceptual paradigm of the *educational campus* provides an effective methodological tool for the planning of university areas that match its institutional principles. This paradigm can inspire any university in planning the future of its physical corpus, including the crystallisation of sound communities of learning, as well as the academic, research and social links with the city.

**Keywords:** University, education, community, city, innovation, educational campus, communities of learning

### INTRODUCTION

Universities must accomplish their three missions: teaching, research and social commitment. Through history, it has been demonstrated that institutional models have run in parallel with urban and architectural patterns used by universities; from the medieval *colleges* (inspired by the monastic cloisters) to the North American campus (as a model which flourished in the 18th and 19th Centuries) [1]. Education is a transcendental task, the guidelines and concretions of which go hand in hand with social evolution. Therefore, human formation is subject to change, as shown historically. In the present context, innovation is an unavoidable attitude that universities must face with energy and determination. It is an essential ingredient for its optimisation, which leads to social progress: *...To open paths to the metamorphosis of humanity, we need to reinvent education* [2].

There are different meanings of innovation, affecting the way faculties apply those creative thoughts to practice [3]. Within the connections between education and physical space, innovative attitudes determine that universities consider strategies to undertake spatial requalification, to reinforce modern teaching/learning modalities. A look at the past shows that innovation in pedagogy traditionally has been ahead of the architectural response. But nowadays, it must be argued that spatial innovation is capable of inducing pedagogical alternatives, thus architecture acting as a trigger.

A holistic look at pedagogical evolution would serve to value a deep-seated feature: learning is much bigger than teaching. Such an important issue inexorably leads to a paradigm shift: learning must be student-centred. Innovation implies, in parallel, changing already old behaviours [4]. Placing students at the centre of gravity of the training process means progress according to past formulas. This implies a paradigm shift: from an individual conception of knowledge to another that assigns to knowledge a role as a catalyst for more creative learning.

### INNOVATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESSES

#### Space versus Place

The term, *space*, is often used when describing the physical areas where universities carry out activities. It should be noted from the outset that *space* is an exclusive factor of architecture, which is added to the third dimension of this art (which it shares with sculpture). But architecture is the only artistic work that includes *space* among its qualities.

Now, when speaking about architecture of human formation, it is convenient to differentiate *space* from *place* [5]. The first would be related only to the material, quantitative configuration of what has been built. In contrast, the second incorporates into the previous one the affective component: thus, it refers to the areas that a human being uses and over which they generate a kind of feeling of belonging, a common identity that turns *space* into *place*, as a domain of personal use and built sphere on which experience is projected. The importance of establishing this kind of dichotomy between *space* and *place* has been reflected by the fact that some international organisations have spearheaded this motto: (*spaces and places*) *your events and congresses*. As an example, it is worth mentioning the OECD Congresses (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), as the one held in Finland in 2008: *Higher Education. Spaces and places for learning, innovation and knowledge transfer*.

#### Place and Innovative Teaching in Creative Disciplines

A set of theoretical arguments about the relationship between teaching innovation and the spatial response has been exposed before. Place is a critical concept regarding teaching innovation. Although this is a general argument, it becomes more evident in some specific training processes, especially when dynamics of pedagogical avant-garde have been promoted throughout the centuries in some disciplines which foster creativity. It is interesting to emphasise those disciplines that are characterised by having a notoriously creative profile. As will be discussed below, the profitable fusion between teaching innovation and architecture reaches even higher levels when it is put into practice in the pedagogies used for the training of future professionals in some specific disciplines of applied creativity: architecture, fashion and art [6].

Back to a global discussion, the connections between places and teaching innovation is of high importance. The genesis of *places* is of high interest, since they enrich the global training process with greater power. If the ultimate objective of universities is the integral formation of human beings, it is necessary to endow everything that surrounds the teaching/learning processes with the appropriate features of quality and innovation, as well as generating environments prone to the generation of a sense of belonging. By acting in this way, students will enjoy spatial conditions that will contribute to increasing their appetite and motivation for education. And in all this, the scale and human dimension of the university must be considered, so it contributes to achieving the ultimate mission of the institutions addressed to develop higher education.

### THE EDUCATIONAL CAMPUS AS A PARADIGM FOR COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING

#### Basic Concepts

University architecture must reach levels of quality that are in accordance with the importance of the function it hosts. Consequently, it must be resolved as keys of excellence, to add to the values of the human integral formation those emanating from its worth as a work of art where people live. But the role that architecture must play does not end there. It is the responsibility of the architectural space to enrich the student's training process by transmitting the qualities inherent in its artistic nature, behaving as a *...three-dimensional textbook* [7]. In other words, the first lesson that a student should receive when entering a campus would have to be - precisely - that provided by the urban-architectural body of the institution.

University architecture must be a subject in itself, and not a mere context; it has cultural contents to transmit [8]. From such theoretical foundations, it becomes necessary to design a tool that, combining theory and praxis, is useful to universities that wish to formulate strategies for their precincts towards excellence. Such a tool was devised in 2005, on the occasion of the design of the master plan for the Villamayor campus, carried out for the University of Salamanca: the *educational campus*. As a complex organism, a university campus resolved in qualitative terms must acquire vast potential as a transmitter of values. As the main characteristic that justifies its proposal, the *educational campus* constitutes a resource through which innovation processes can be promoted.

After the initial stage in 2005, the next research phases came to determine that it was understood that a university campus would reach the status of *educational*, if it incorporated the values contained in 18 principles. It was easy to understand that none of the 18 principles were intrinsically innovative in themselves, but that what was truly innovative resided in the combined understanding of all of them, as participants of a unitary order of thought and project. Assumed in this way, the *educational campus* would become a place dedicated to higher education in which physical space plays an active role as a means and end of teaching and research activities. It can be applied with greater universal projection to the set of higher education institutions.

#### The 18 Principles of the *Educational Campus*

A description of the 18 principles of the *educational campus* is presented now. All of them share the goal of quality in university premises, as the best strategy to optimise their basic missions, and reinforce specifically the third mission, as a way to renew all the activities to be promoted [9].

1. *Foundation in utopia* - utopia in the university has always been present as an energy of genesis and transformation. Utopia is promoted by competition, ideals, teaching methodologies and urban-architectural solutions.

2. *Genesis and evolution of integral planning* - planning is a guarantee of conceptual and compositional unity in university establishments.
3. *Crystallisation of an experiential community of learning and research* - consolidating experiential learning communities is a strategy that contributes to prevalence on the human scale.
4. *Unitary global configuration, compatible with individual diversity* - the benefits of a morphologically unitary arrangement must be achieved, but where simultaneously a harmonious integration of individual diversity takes place.
5. *Achievement of an urban-architectural aesthetic dimension* - architectural beauty, twinned with harmony, consists of a quality of nature close to the spiritual, but which is materialised in space.
6. *Incorporation of areas at human scale* - the human dimension is a determining ingredient for a university campus to generate the desirable environment of interpersonal relationships and welcoming that corresponds to its transcendental mission.
7. *Active and multiple presence of nature* - in university establishments, nature must actively participate as an actor who plays a role as part of learning. Compositionally with architecture should be aesthetically combined.
8. *Integration and promotion of art* - when art becomes integrated into a university campus, it can become a hallmark. By actively participating in the community and its spaces, it adds its full potential as a transversal training load.
9. *Projection of symbolic features* - architectural compositions, as artistic manifestations, have the power to articulate concepts, as well as to transmit cultural potentialities.
10. *Openness to the environment and accessibility for learning* - openness to context, in its various meanings, must be an attitude inherent in every university. Unlike other institutions, it has the obligation to transmit signs of accessibility, as a quality intrinsically linked to its mission.
11. *Formal and conceptual harmonisation with the pre-existing place* - university architecture, as a product of society in every age and geography, must respond sensitively to the features that make up its environment.
12. *Application of criteria and strategies related to sustainability* - criteria and actions should relate to issues, such as urban-architectural adaptation to geographic-climatic conditions, efficient environmental solutions, and the promotion of the use of renewable energy, among other applications.
13. *Consideration of the typological memory in the key to interpretation* - using typological heritage as a source of inspiration should not be understood as a limitation on the expressive freedom of architecture, but - in the opposite sense - as an extraordinary stimulus to undertake contemporary versions of yesterday's paradigms.
14. *Patrimonial and functional requalification* - in their capacity as promoters of innovation, higher education institutions trigger through their dynamic facilities functional and heritage regeneration.
15. *Promoting induced development and innovation* - universities are entities capable of generating important development and innovation processes around themselves. It is defensible that the benefit derived from the presence of an enclosure dedicated to higher education is as beneficial beyond its strict limits as within them.
16. *Commitment to the urban-architectural avant-garde* - the ideation of university implantations must seek a balance between the avant-garde and history, since there is no incompatibility between yesterday's legacy and tomorrow's expectation.
17. *Optimisation of synergies between university and city* - integration in the city, both social and compositional, must preside over any university project that pursues academic excellence, but without neglecting social commitment.
18. *Activation of spaces for the incorporation of innovative teaching/learning modalities* - universities must activate spaces where training activities did not take place before, and implement innovative teaching and learning modalities.

## UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY

### Identity, Group and Sense of Place in a Campus

It must be remarked that real coexistence in a campus stimulates progress, being itself a carrier of didactic values. With such a principle, it becomes useful to review the list of 18 principles of the *educational campus*. There is one especially relevant for the main core of the present text: 3. *Crystallisation of an experiential community of learning and research*. The true mission of educational institutions is the integral formation of the human being, which can only be achieved through personal interaction in a collective and direct way, via the configuration of groups of students.

From this comes the inescapable relevance of consolidating experiential learning communities, since their existence results in the human dimension prevailing. The consolidation of such communities implies a collective understanding of education. Learning in a group brings significant advantages added to mere individual achievement and also a research community. Humboldt founded in Berlin at the beginning of the 19th Century a university distinguished by the search for knowledge, carried out as a result of co-operation between teachers and students. This gave full meaning to what is now understood as a university, which is based on personal co-ordination between researchers. By creating a community reality, it gradually builds a feeling of *belonging* between students and institutions. This occurs because human beings tend to set up affective and symbolic connections with the environment, where meanings emerge.

There is a further meaning for *place*, when analysing a university campus or its urban environment. It refers to the sensitive adaptation of a design to its geographical and cultural context. Such attitude is a quality that injects a powerful dose of creativity, especially in architecture. If art aspires to fulfil its mission of transferring values in society, it should not abstract from the faculty of being sensitive to the environment in which it is born. Expressing it in other terms, it could be said that the shapes of the works that bet on the delicate adjustment to the environment, transmit formative

values. By using a correct methodology, pre-existing elements provide the creative process with elements that will be integrated into the global order of the future university project.

### Relevance of Residence for Communities

In a global educational perspective, to correctly crystallise an experiential community, dedicated to learning or research, the site must enjoy functional integrity. To achieve such, it is necessary to *configure* multifunctional complexes, clad in vitality, where residences are called to play a critical role (as shall be explained later). Inside a campus, the student dorms replace (although in a relative way) the distant family environment. Tony Birks opined: *...Without residence, for university personnel of all kinds, as well as for students, there can be no university* [10]. The relevance of residential use within a teaching complex justifies its planning with the aim of providing all the equipment and resources necessary to carry out diverse activities: study, leisure, relationship, sport, and - essentially- residence. This simple foundation has been underlined by prominent contemporary authors, such as the Enrico Tedeschi, who understood the university as a *habitat*: *...The University is characterized by being a place of organized co-existence, populated by different people in terms of age, sex, social and cultural characteristics, who maintain different activities and yet interact. This is why it can be said that the university is a habitat* [11].

The experiential learning and research community, to which residential use contributes decisively, brings as a direct consequence that human scale prevails in its spaces. The architect Maryan Álvarez-Builla pointed out: *...The University of the coming decades, of course, needs to have a certain endowment of equipment, so that a sufficient life framework can be configured to make permanence attractive beyond teaching activities* [12]. However, these learning communities may present alternative routes. The university community can see its limits dissolved, expanding its scope towards the urban fabric. University/city synergies encourage the residential facilities in the environment to complete those located within the campus. In such circumstances, there are added benefits, such as the citizen population building a holistic community. This pairing is in the European tradition, where the university-urban overlap has been the hallmark of secular identity.

Overall, the construction of a true community of learning in universities is based on the need of personal contact. Thus, it becomes convenient to warn about the danger of abuse of the *virtual campus*.

### Risk of Virtuality

A true problem of today, as a threat to the comprehensive excellence of university education and especially detrimental to the human component, is the one labelled *virtual campus*. *On-line* teaching can never truly shape education. In the last years, there has been a progressive irruption of the so-called *on-line university* or the mere general virtuality, as formats that have sought to assign themselves an imprint of modernity. It is fair to recognise the unquestionable advances that modern technologies (ICTs) have brought to learning. As has been demonstrated by countless pedagogues, it is positive that they continue contributing, since it would be unthinkable to eradicate them from the social and university dynamics. But those same pedagogues have expressed the view that ICTs must be present as tools that must accompany personal contact, which becomes irreplaceable. In the case of campuses, it must be recognised as a virtue that technologies have enabled mobility within the teaching complex, since all students can connect to the Internet from any point (inside or outside the buildings), using Wi-Fi networks.

As a final opinion, it is appropriate to cite authors who, from a broad perspective, have warned about the abuses of virtuality. From a holistic point of view, an approach can focus on the link between space and time in architecture (as both components of university education). The Swiss architect Peter Zumthor added a few years ago the following, which can be applied to the places where human formation activities are hosted: *...We move within architecture. Without a doubt, architecture is a spatial art, as it is said, but also a temporary art. It is not experienced in just a second* [13].

### City as a Source: Physical Spaces, Human Formation and Lifelong Learning

In fact, cities are an outstanding source of education. The physical proximity between a university and society (with the urban reality as the built representative of the latter), favours the exchange-prone areas. Opposite, when a campus chooses a location segregated from the city, it can generate a strange situation, both in functional terms and in terms of symbolism, as it projects an image of dislocation contrary to the essence of its true missions and values. Over the past decades, because of a misaligned and incomplete import of foreign models (e.g. the North American campus), a good part of the hallmark of the European university, which historically has been based on the integration between university and city, turned into alienation: *...In general, the university space has been disappearing from the old centres and moving to the periphery of the cities* [14]. Rebecchini expressed a similar concern of: *...The already unanimous and generalized rejection of a university isolated from its context* [15].

Making a good use of the existence of cities, universities can foster innovative teaching. Such a trend implies a progressive strategy of going beyond the strict limits of the building or the global campus. In this way, the city becomes a place with the capacity to accept alternative pedagogical patterns. Therefore, it must be remarked that when university complexes are inserted within urban fabrics, the existential dynamism that arises is highly positive.

Opposite, when it is segregated, achieving completeness in use and the consequent consolidation of a learning community will depend on devising strategies intentionally aimed at making the complex itself a functionally autonomous entity. Residence and equipment of all kinds must come together. The dissolution of the boundaries of a university campus implies a more vertical understanding of the community. With this policy, the groups participating in the teaching activities are enriched. As a direct projection, the Third Age, giving fulfilment to *lifelong learning*, brings as a sound benefit the sustainability of human formation for all ages.

### Community, City and Creativity

Recently, the negative phenomenon of campuses abandoning the historic city centres is experiencing a coherent recovery of the lost identity, *university-city*. Therefore, the city is recuperating its role as a creative resource. In traditional teaching, the cultural and functional environment has been inspiring, in its various meanings: chronological, social, cultural, etc. Cities should be assumed to be organisms with a strong potential as inducers of people relationship for universities. Beyond their strict functions, they perform a more humanistic role, which is the construction of a human environment that fosters interpersonal closeness, which undoubtedly induces group creativity. This use of urban contexts is a pedagogical strategy that has generated prolific teaching results in creative disciplines (such as architecture, fashion or art) guiding the future designer in validating the environment as a project stimulus [16]. This validation especially affects the space where pedagogical dynamics are activated: ...*A class without context is like a word outside the sentence* [17].

At this point, it is justified to refer to a creative initiative that arose in North American universities, the so-called *learning communities*. Linked to the idea of *personal tutoring*, they have achieved remarkable success in helping students. It is recommended to mention some examples of excellence, as explored within the university international scenario. On the mentioned North American panorama, Cornell University has made a firm commitment. In its headquarters, students are encouraged to reside within the campus, since it contributes most effectively to their integration. There are many others historic institutions where the consolidation of communities of learning is strongly fostered. That would be the case of the College of William and Mary (founded in 1693); University of Virginia (designed in 1819 by Thomas Jefferson as an Academical Village); the University of California Los Angeles - UCLA; or Stanford University (designed by Olmsted at the end of the 19th Century). In Spain, some have tried to consolidate a learning community: Autonomous University of Barcelona (the Bellaterra campus of which has been undergoing a process of transformation for years) or the University of Alicante, in the suggestive campus of San Vicente.

### CONCLUSIONS

Overall, it must be underlined that education adopts physical shapes. Those shapes go beyond a mere architectural construction, as they are in charge of organising people. Professor Pié underlined it as follows: ...*The campus could be the physical place where the university activity is carried out, but also a relationship space that generates knowledge and specificity* [18]. With these principles in mind, the revision of the historical legacy in universities is a solid base for any new campus planning: ...*In the key of stimulating creativity, can actively intervene in the ideation, since all artistic production of value acquires the ability to be reinterpreted in time* [19]. That becomes nowadays a transcendental strategy to increase student motivation and enrich the excellence of human formation; for such a purpose, the *educational campus* can be a valid paradigm. Through its 18 principles, every university can actually plan the progressive transformation of its human collective; one of the main conclusions regarding this conceptual and practical tool is that, although it is designed under a universal understanding, it must be applied locally, after studying the specific circumstances of each case.

As a summary, it must be underlined that functional integrity (within which the residential function stands out) is the most solid guarantee for the formation of the underlined learning and research communities. There is no doubt that university campuses, by virtue of their physical nature and the fact that they host groups of faculties or schools, must satisfy not only the strictly teaching and research needs and tasks, but must also promote social encounters.

The importance of the optimisation of communities of learning is critical. Universities can accomplish such a transcendental goal by proper planning [20]. But, as it is quite often that academic precincts are located within urban fabrics, it is highly recommended that the adjacent city is considered. All these considerations can optimise the training process of the future citizen. As a final conclusion, it can be highly useful to take advantage of the philosophy inherent to the *educational campus*. Such a universal paradigm, if properly applied in the urban-architectural field, can have a positive impact on the quality of the institution. Besides, it would contribute to students and faculty living daily a full human experience, with the contribution of physical spaces: not as mere places for *staying*, but as true places for *living*.

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