

The background features a complex, abstract geometric pattern of bright red shapes on a solid black background. The shapes include various rectangles, triangles, and chevrons, some of which are nested or overlapping to create a sense of depth and movement. The overall composition is dynamic and modern.

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Complutense and Politécnica
Madrid



Brief History

The University city in Madrid: a brief history of the Moncloa Campus

University City has played a fundamental role in the development of the Northeast section of Madrid. Its origins date back to a Royal Decree from 1927 when King Alfonso XIII took the initiative to launch the project. He formed an independent group to manage the undertaking and Modesto López Otero was placed in charge of the technical aspects. They chose plots in Moncloa for the project because the land was high quality and was owned by the monarchy which ceded its rights to make the project possible.

The venture first began to take shape in 1911 when a commission was named to study the construction of a Clinical Hospital for Madrid, although it was not until 1927 when this project began to come to fruition.

The first stage of the process which forms part of the history of University City runs parallel to the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, when not only the first proposals to manage the economic aspects of the project were laid out, but also several buildings were constructed including the one to house the Amo Foundation. During this first phase, architects were also put in charge of the faculties and schools for the so-called Sciences and Medical Group complexes in 1928. In 1930, architects were named for the construction of the last three schools of the Medical Group: Agustín Aguirre and Mariano Garrigues were selected for the School of Pharmacy and Miguel Santos was selected for the Schools of Medicine and Dentistry. Funds to finance this large project were raised from a special drawing of the lottery on July 25, 1928 which was commissioned for that purpose, grants from King Alfonso XIII, as well as contributions from several private donors, including Doctor Gregorio del Amo who was the promoter of the foundation which bears his name.

The plan for the complex was finalized in 1929 and its director was the architect Modesto López Otero who conceived University City as single unit, organically structured around distinct disciplines which would define the City, including others which would manage it and make it an independent urban area. There are three large areas that make up the university project: the purely academic area or the faculties that form independent groups structured around their specialty, such as the scientific-medical faculties or those of Fine Arts; the political-administrative area of management and representation including, the Chancellor's office, auditorium and library and the residential space including residences for professors, dormitories and sports areas.

The execution of this plan involved many phases and began with the basic groundwork. An important innovation in this work was the system established for heating and hot water. In order to provide these resources to the area and maintain their operating independence, a central thermal power station was designed where all of the processes related to heating and hot water were concentrated. This unit was commended to the architect Manuel Sánchez Arcas and the engineer Eduardo Torroja in 1932. Thus, the group called the "University City of Madrid Construction Board" was created to spearhead and

manage the construction of the area. This board operated from a pavilion which was planned by the same group that created the Central Power Station in 1930.

The second phase of University City coincides with the Second Republic and is considered the most fruitful period in the actual development of the plan that was envisioned. While the project itself was not conceived during this period, it was when the majority of the buildings that comprise University City were constructed. Thus, in 1932, work on the medical complex continued when the Clinical Hospital was undertaken according to the plans of Sánchez Arcas and Torroja and in the same year, work on the Faculty of Philosophy and Liberal Arts began under the direction of Agustín Aguirre. The following year, work began on the Science complex under the direction of De los Santos y Torroja as did work on the School of Architecture under the supervision of Pascual Bravo. Finally, in 1935, the group of Student Residences, under the direction of Luis Lacasa, constitutes the last project during the Republic since the Faculty of Law, designed in 1931 and signed by Aguirre, did not come to fruition until after the Civil War.

The third phase of University City coincides with the Post- Civil War period and is associated more with "reconstruction" or revision of pending work than with the development of new projects.

In 1940 a law was published with the intent of forming the new University City Committee and López Otero and Pedro Muguruza were named directing architects of the work to be carried out. In a way, López Otero's presence assured that the original guidelines were followed regarding the general plan of the area, even though there would be changes considering the new political system. As an example of the first steps which tended toward the "reconstruction" of University City, a scale model was presented that included not only the buildings that had been designed, but also others which were expected to be built in the future.

One of the new buildings planned and that appeared in the model mentioned above was the main auditorium (Paraninfo). Its location coincides with the running track situated at the end of the main avenue, in the space enclosed by the Science complex and the Liberal Arts complex. The building which, ultimately, was not constructed had been conceived by López Otero in 1943 "as a classic temple with modern lines." The temple closed off a large space that included an arch with allegorical paintings related to Spanish science and whose front was designed "in the form of a large atrium with portico which was conceived as a place for parties or student gatherings."

Work on the schools of Forestry and Naval Engineering began in 1942. The following year, work began on housing for professors in Isaac Peral Street, the Government Pavillion, and the Museum of America complex which was designed by Luis Moya and Luis Martinez-Feduchi. In addition, construction of the Faculty of Law was begun which was a new project by Aguirre based on the model used in the Philosophy and Liberal Arts complex.

In this period a single criteria was still maintained regarding the development of the "idea" of University City and the scale model cited above set the guidelines to follow. A committee was responsible for managing these guidelines and although it was organized similarly to the one from prior periods, it hardly lasted more than a decade.

Beginning in the Sixties the entire unity of the group was broken and the idea of a collective scheme prepared on the basis of a single estate management unit was abandoned in favor of individualism, both in the professional and academic sense. Each educational building was conceived as an independent element, disconnected formally and linguistically from the rest, and only maintaining a relation imposed by the existing infrastructures. This may have been a reflection of the mindset that students were "confined" within the limits of their own scientific specialization.

In the following years, a large amount of land was ceded for buildings used for other than strictly university purposes, although they were linked in some way to research and teaching. In addition, land was ceded to build dormitories to house students who shared something in common such as where they were from or the institutions that sponsored them. From this point of view, University City, as with other privileged areas of Madrid, had to serve as a showcase for the most relevant architecture of the period as it was here where the most brilliant Spanish professionals had to leave their mark and where all of them created memorable buildings.

The most noteworthy architects and buildings from this period include Miguel Fisac's Training Center for Professors; José Maria Garcia de Paredes and Rafael de la Hoz' "Aquinas" dormitory that received the National Architecture Award, Alfonso D'Escragnolle's Brazil House, and Javier Carvajal's School of Engineering and Telecommunication which was designed with García de Paredes, and Carval's Library for the Faculty of Law. Other noteworthy buildings include Asís Cabrero's "San Agustín" dormitory, Luis Laorga and José López Zanón's Civil Engineering School; Antonio Fernández-Alba and José Luis Fernández del Amo's Library for the Institute of Spanish Culture; and Horacio Baliero and Carmen Córdova's dormitory for Argentinean students called "Nuestra Señora de Luján." This list also includes Fernando Moreno Barberá's Faculty for Biological and Geological Sciences and the complex for the Ministry of Education and Science, and Fernando Higuera and Antonio Miró's Center for Artistic Restoration which is currently the Spanish Heritage Institute. Furthermore, Alejandro de la Sota is noted for the "César Carlos" dormitory and with José Antonio López Candeira is also responsible for the expansion of CENIM. Finally, Juan de Haro designed the student residence "Siao-Sin" while the architects Jaime López Asiaín and Ángel Días are responsible for the Spanish Museum of Contemporary Art which is the Fashion Museum today, among many other buildings.

From 1980, several Special Reform Plans for the interior of University City were drafted in order to establish an urban design for the area and limit uncontrolled growth.

Several advances for planning and other documents that had not been executed were provisionally approved so as not to impede the continued growth of University City. From this period, the architects and their buildings which merit mention include José Santos' Humanities Library, José Ignacio Linazasoro's Animal Hospital and its library and the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business and the Faculty of Psychology for the UNED. In addition, Juan José Median constructed the High Performance Sports Swimming Complex which won the Architectural Award from the City of Madrid.

The works for the project culminated with two events: the Regional Government of Madrid declared University City as a Site of Cultural Interest in 1999 in the category of historical areas and the Madrid city government approved a Special Plan for University City in 2000. Since then, for the first time in many years, new buildings have been constructed and a unified project has been developed. Important buildings and their architects from this period include Javier Sáenz Guerra and Zacarías Gonzalez' expansion of the Faculties of Law and Philosophy and Javier Sanjuán and Javier Fresneda's expansion of the Faculty of Pharmacy. Yet to be built is the most significant and emblematic piece of University City since its inception, the Main Auditorium (Paraninfo), which when undertaken will eliminate a historic omission. After numerous proposals from the architectural director of the technical department of the Construction Commission, Modesto López Otero, the Special Plan includes the development of a building in the same place included in the original design that will integrate the activities of university life with those of the city, attract those living in the city to the university's premises and connect University City with Madrid.