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## **Fossilized urban spaces in Oviedo**

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## **Fossilized urban spaces in Oviedo**

In the context of urban processes in medium-sized Spanish cities after the 2008 crisis, this research approaches the consequences that the paralysis of the urbanisation process has on the urban landscape. For this purpose, we take as a case study the city of Oviedo, where several processes converge that may be of interest for the rest of the cities and for future synthesis research on contemporary urban processes. On the one hand, we observe the existence of enclaves within the urban fabric which, after the loss of their function, have not found alternatives and are affected by abandonment. On the other hand, the consequences of urban planning closely linked to the upward cycles of the economy have meant that the planned expansion through the classification of areas of land for development has not been effective. As a result, both in the consolidated city and in its periphery, there are situations of paralysis, lack of expectations or unfinished projects that in some cases exceed a decade. Thus, these fossilised urban spaces seem to be enclaves alien to their surroundings, and while future regeneration takes place, they are exposed to an intense process of degradation.

*Keywords:* medium-sized cities, urban studies, urban planning, post-crisis, fossilisation

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## IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

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| <p>1. Los espacios urbanos fosilizados son aquellos enclaves caracterizados por los efectos de una prolongada degradación del paisaje urbano a causa de la pérdida de sus funciones primigenias.</p> <p>2. La fosilización de ciertos espacios urbanos responde tanto a los efectos de la crisis financiera mundial del 2008 como a la crisis del planeamiento.</p> <p>3. En la trama urbana estos espacios se localizan en la Fábrica de Armas de La Vega, el antiguo Hospital Central de Asturias, la vieja Fábrica de Gas y otros edificios sin uso.</p> <p>4. La acumulación de ámbitos de suelo urbanizable no ejecutados en la periferia revela las consecuencias paisajísticas del urbanismo expansivo.</p> <p>5. La falta de planes o la inejecución de estos pone de manifiesto las disfuncionalidades del urbanismo neoliberal.</p> | <p>1. Fossilised urban spaces are those enclaves characterised by the effects of prolonged degradation of the urban landscape due to the loss of its original functions.</p> <p>2. The fossilisation of certain urban spaces responds both to the effects of the global financial crisis of 2008 and to the planning crisis.</p> <p>3. In the urban fabric these spaces are located in the Arms Factory of La Vega, the old Central Hospital of Asturias, the old Gas Factory and other unused buildings.</p> <p>4. The accumulation of undeveloped land for development on the outskirts of the city highlights the landscape consequences of expansive urban development.</p> <p>5. The lack of plans or the non-execution of these plans highlights the dysfunctionalities of neoliberal urban planning.</p> | <p>1. Els espais urbans fossilitzats són aquells enclavaments caracteritzats pels efectes d'una prolongada degradació del paisatge urbà a causa de la pèrdua de les seues funcions primigènies.</p> <p>2. La fossilització de certs espais urbans respon tant als efectes de la crisi financera mundial del 2008 com a la crisi del planejament.</p> <p>3. A la trama urbana aquests espais es localitzen a la Fàbrica d'Armes de la Vega, l'antic Hospital Central d'Astúries, la vella Fàbrica de Gas i altres edificis sense ús.</p> <p>4. L'acumulació d'àmbits de sòl urbanitzable no executats a la perifèria revela les conseqüències paisatgístiques de l'urbanisme expansiu.</p> <p>5. La manca de plans o la inexecució d'aquests posa de manifest les disfuncionalitats de l'urbanisme neoliberal.</p> |
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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

In the context of urban processes in medium-sized Spanish cities after the 2008 crisis, this research approaches the consequences that the paralysis of the urbanisation process has on the urban landscape. In this vein, this paper addresses fossilized urban spaces, which are places where seemingly nothing is happening but are characterised by the effects of a prolonged degradation of the urban landscape due to the loss of their original functions. This is due either to the lack of plans for their future or to their non-implementation. Sometimes they respond to a clear vocation of social following while waiting for uses that offer higher returns, in other cases they respond to the spatial pattern characteristic of the dysfunctionalities of neo-liberal urbanism that views land exclusively as an economic resource.

For this purpose, we take as a case study the city of Oviedo, where several processes converge that may be of interest for the rest of the cities and for future synthesis research on contemporary urban processes. On the one hand, we observe the existence of enclaves within the urban fabric which, after the loss of their function, have not found alternatives and are affected by abandonment. On the other hand, the consequences of urban planning closely linked to the upward cycles of the economy have meant that the planned expansion through the classification of areas of land for development has not been effective. For all these reasons, the main objective of this article is to analyse the fossilized urban spaces in the city of Oviedo. To achieve this, a series of questions are posed to guide the research. What are the spaces of this type in Oviedo? In what condition do each of the fossilized urban spaces exist? And what transformation expectations are associated with them?

Mention is made of places like the La Vega Weapons Factory, the Gas Factory, the Former Central University Hospital of Asturias (HUCA), the Bullring, and the Buenavista Congress Centre. Furthermore, there are references to developable areas that have not been developed and projects that lack the support of the public. As a result, both in the consolidated city and in its periphery, there are situations of paralysis, lack of expectations or unfinished projects that in some cases exceed a decade. From a temporal point of view, the results of the research show that many of the cases analysed have been paralysed for more than a decade, with the result that the state of degradation of the elements that make up the urban landscape and of the urban landscape itself is at an advanced stage. Thus, these fossilised urban spaces seem to be enclaves alien to their surroundings, and while future regeneration takes place, they are exposed to an intense process of degradation.

Among these pieces, two stand out for their extension, La Vega and the old HUCA. In the weapons factory site, the recent protocol signed in July 2022 opens the doors to its urban regeneration, although the urban planning agreement that will lead to the definition of the appropriate instrument for its transformation has yet to be finalised. On the site of the former hospital, the development of the special planning should lead to a forthcoming intervention. However, the doubts offered by the public administrations that own part of the land in the area compromise the development in the short term. In the meantime, both areas are degenerating over the years and the state of the public space and the built-up area require urgent action.

Other spaces of smaller surface area but which are also destined for regeneration are the Gas factory, where an investment fund promoted its own special plan after the municipal initiative was unsuccessful. In addition, other small spaces also share characteristics with those defined above, so that fossilisation takes on different magnitudes and is spread both throughout the city and its periphery. Moreover, the effects of the 2008 crisis are also felt in the periphery, where

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<sup>1</sup> Authors' exclusive translation.

the classification of numerous areas of land for development does not seem justified after more than a decade of paralysis. Thus, the urban edge of Oviedo is dotted with pockets of land earmarked in the planning for the construction of housing and which, given the scant interest shown by private initiative in their development, live in a latent state that is transmitted in a fossilised landscape halfway between rural abandonment and an embryonic urbanisation process.

Thus, in recent decades it has become clear how difficult it is to transform fossilised urban spaces. Especially in those enclaves where there are different owners or where the profitability expected in previous decades does not match the current socio-economic context. Conversely, the fossilisation of certain spaces in Oviedo can also be blamed on the nefarious planning of the public administrations which, although they are the promoters of the cessation of certain activities, have not been able to define the instruments that the planning contemplates until it has been demanded by the neighbourhood and associative movements.