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*The private initiative as a promoter of bourgeois city.
Private parceling in Llanes (1850-1960)*

Since the mid-19th century, the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the growing role of the new liberal institutions and the emergence of a new social class, the bourgeoisie, changed the way in which the city had been built in previous centuries. From that moment, the building of the cities started to be made through some planning operations and not mainly based on the spontaneous growth outside the urban planning that dominated through the Former Regime. This new period of urbanism lasted until the late 1950s, when the “bourgeois city” model started to show its exhaustion and the consequences of the Building Code of 1956 began to surface.

Some of the new changes consisted in the extension of the towns, in order to absorb the increasing population. While the city councils were the main agents of the development of the incorporation of the soils near the cities, the private sector also took part of this process, mainly through the subdivision of the lands they owned.

All this changes and transformations were not exclusive of the bigger cities and other smaller towns also suffered similar transformations. This article aims at showing how the Asturian town of Llanes was not outside of the main urban processes of development during that stage, processes that contribute to build the known as “bourgeois city”. It was our intention to point out how the role of the private sector as an urban extension promoter has left a bigger legacy in Llanes than the projects promoted by the municipality.

The election of the topic is justified by the fact that, although the building of the bourgeois city is a well-known process in the case of the main cities, the features and

consequences of that process in the smaller town have been less studied. This not an exclusive situation of the Asturias: it is shared with the rest of the Cantabrian regions. The election of the specific example of Llanes was based on the abundance of available sources and the absence of a monographic study which explains, globally, how important the role of the private sector as promoter of the extension of the town was and its contribution to the building of the bourgeois city.

This article is part of a more extensive investigation that is dedicated to the study of the urban development of the coastal towns of Llanes and Ribadesella between 1850 and 1960. Therefore, the methodology fits within a more ambitious work plan. However, we consider that it is relevant to mention the main sources, only explaining here the ones that have been used exclusively for this article.

The documents from the archives were essential to have first-hand information about the inner-city reforms and extension plans, the building permits and the books of minutes of the city council. This information has allowed us to know in detail the urban history of Llanes. The study of the monographies has given us information about the economy, the history, etc. that has complemented the one obtained from primary sources. The use of terrestrial photographs, for its part, was a useful complement for both text and cartography, as it represents quite clearly certain aspects of the town. In addition, the local press has allowed us to complement the archival documents, particularly as regards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Last, the use of the

cartography and the aerial photography has been crucial to comprehend and explain the urban morphology. Based on them, we have drawn maps that represent different urban processes and phenomena.

The study of the projects of land plotting by the private sector in Llanes requires, firstly, a general view of the process of building of the bourgeois city in that town. That process followed a similar chronology to that of other Spanish cities. The urban projects, on the one hand, aimed at adapting the inherited city to the likings and needs of the bourgeoisie and the new traffics; on the other hand, the intention was to conduct future expansion of urban soils that could assimilate the demographic impulse.

This process was developed in two different stages. The first one started in the middle of the 19th century and came to an end around the decade of 1880; the earliest urban adaptations and projects took place in this stage and they are an indicator of the beginning of the building of a new urban model opposed to the one that defined Llanes during the Middle Ages and the early modern period. During this stage, the main urban alterations focused on the adaptation, still limited, of the town to the likings and needs of the moment. The urban extension, for its part, did not follow, in almost any case, the projects promoted by the local council and used the roads to Oviedo and Torrelavega as central axis.

The second stage lasted from the middle of the decade of 1880 till the Spanish Civil war. During these years, an important transformation aimed at adapting the urban structures of the town took place. This modernization consisted in the construction of new and complete basic services networks and the building of many urban facilities, both public and private.

But the transformation was also expressed in the promotion of actions such as inner-city reforms or urban expansion projects through the opening of new streets and the building of houses. The first type of plans did not have a major impact in the town; the second type materialized in the writing of three urban expansion projects between 1886 and 1940; their legacy has been almost symbolic. In effect, the majority of the new buildings were constructed on the sides of the roads of Torrelavega and Oviedo, occupying empty spaces on the consolidated soil or on the soil outside the city center and connected through rural roads. The opening of new streets was promoted, in most cases, by the private sector and not following any previous municipal planning.

So, the expansion of the town of Llanes was made, mainly, by the impulse of the private sector, which was

the main agent who bought extensive lands and opened new streets aimed at and sold the resulting plots. The heritage left by this type of projects at the end of the 50s was much bigger than the one that result of the municipal planning.

As opposed to other towns, where the urban plots promoted by the private sector were directed, majority, towards the lower or middle class (like in Gijón) or their objective was the production of urban soil for the bourgeoisie (like in Ribadesella), in Llanes this type of plans were characterized by the heterogeneity of the recipients and the wide variety of their forms. In this town, examples of the land plotting made with the objective of build new houses to the lower class can be found, but also others in which the landowners sold the resulting parcels to other people of their same social class who were interested in erected a building. Finally, some of these parceling projects aimed at the renewal of the street network of certain areas of the town.

The forms adopted by the parceling projects were, as well, very heterogenic. In some cases, the urban pattern was similar to the ones of the urban extension projects: straight streets with the same width that formed 90-degree angles. In other cases, however, the size of this parceling projects was very small (reduced to the building of a single block of houses) and therefore, the access was made through preexisting streets or it just required the opening of short lanes.

To sum up, the building of the bourgeois city in Llanes has been made, in general and despite its lower dynamism, following the general process that defined the Spanish urbanism between the middle of the 19th century and the coming into force of the Building Code of 1956. The construction of the new urban model resulted in the promotion of actions such as inner-city reforms, urban expansion projects or the plot of land, as well as the new basic services networks and urban facilities.

In the case of the town of Llanes, the expansion of the urban soil was not made through the opening of many streets, because the roads of Oviedo and Torrelavega acted as the main axes for the construction of the new buildings. When it required the opening of new streets, in the majority of the cases it did not follow the municipality plans, but they were the result of the action of the private sector, which was the responsible for plotting the lands next to the town. The legacy left by this parceling projects is still relevant in the present town of Llanes and they were characterized by its heterogeneity, both the forms and the dimensions, as well as their objective.