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The Sunset of Economic Geography Subject in the Business Administration Studies in Spain. A 20-year agony (1953-1973)

I. THE REFORM OF ECONOMIC-COMMERCIAL TEACHINGS IN THE 50S OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The creation of the Faculty of Political and Economic Sciences in the *Law of Ordination of the Spanish University* (1943) implied that the degree in Economics coexisted for a few years with the Higher Studies in Commerce.

The mercantile education in Spain was provided in the Schools of Commerce. There were three progressive titles (to obtain one, it was necessary to have obtained the previous one): Commercial Expert, Mercantile Professor and Commercial Intendant or Insurance Actuary. The latter was identified as Higher Studies in Commerce. The age of obtaining the degree is equal to that of a university degree. The generic name used to identify those who had obtained at least one degree from those taught in the Schools of Commerce was that of “Commercial Incumbent”. The name of the schools depended on the titles it imparted: Experts, only with the degree of Commercial Expert, Professionals, with those of Commercial Expert and Professor, and High Commercial Studies with the three commercial degrees.

When the first promotion of Graduates from the Economics Section is incorporated into the labour market in 1947, the first problems arose regarding the functional competencies of graduates of the Faculty and those of the Commercial Incumbents. In the Faculty, the speciality had been created (initially it was not foreseen) of “Business Economy” that overlapped with what was tra-

ditionally the training of the graduate in the School of Commerce.

The Ministry of National Education tried to solve the conflict with the *Law for the Organization of Economic and Commercial Studies* (1953). The arguments used to justify the Law were the evolution of the national economy and the advances “in commercial technique, the further improvement of which results in general benefit”. The solution provided by the Law was to consider that Commerce studies be divided into two periods, one technical and the other university, so that “the traditional structure of Commerce Studies” was maintained. For this purpose, the teachings of Business Administration and Insurance Actuary were integrated into the Faculty.

The academic orientation of the Schools of Commerce was adapted to the generic functions of the degrees it imparted. “The title of Commercial Expert will empower the functions of the Administrative and Accounting Assistant ... The title of Mercantile Professor represents the highest degree in the technical order of accounting and business administration...”

The one who most correctly explained the differences between the Schools and the Faculties was, without a doubt, Pedro Gual Villalbí in 1961, professor of Economic Policy at the School of Higher Mercantile Studies in Barcelona, President of the National Economy Council and Minister without portfolio between 1957 and 1965: “The technical schools must teach the how of things and the universities the why”, although between both, the Faculty of Economics and the Schools of Commerce, there

must be “a harmony that results benefited the social mission that concerns”.

II. THE ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY IN SCHOOLS OF COMMERCE

The modification of the *Law for the Organization of Economic and Commercial Education* gave rise to a new study plan approved in 1956 that had direct effects on geographical subjects. Thus, in the 1956 plan, in Commercial Expertise, “Economic Geography 1” was taken in the first year and “Economic Geography 2 (especially of America)” in the second. The latter was understood as regional Economic Geography because it maintained the tradition of explaining in detail the different countries, especially the American ones. In the second year of Commercial Teaching, the subject “Economic Geography of Spain”. This academic year could be equated to the second of the university.

Since their creation in 1850, the Schools of Commerce had ad hoc Economic Geography professors to teach geographic subjects. The name of the Chair varied over the years depending on the subjects assigned to it. Thus in 1887, it was from “Geography and Statistics” because it was considered that Statistics was the numerical information that Economic and Commercial Geography needed. As of 1915, the Chair was renamed “Economic Geography”, a name that was maintained until the transformation of the Professional Schools of Commerce into University Schools of Business Studies in the decade of the 1970s.

As of 1944, they could present themselves to the oppositions, in addition to the mercantile Intendants, Graduates in Philosophy and Letters. The arrival of Graduates changed the orientation of the discipline which, until then, were “summaries that invite memory”.

In the rank of professors at the Schools of Commerce of 1952, there were thirty of Economic Geography, of which five were women. Most had obtained the Chair from 1944, therefore, they were mostly university graduates.

Originally, Economic Geography in Schools of Commerce was utilitarian: knowing “how” the territory was and “where” economic activity takes place. The “why” of economic development corresponds to the Economic Structure (university period). Economic Geography was educated to the enumeration of the “resources of the territories”. However, a review of the manuals that were written for the Schools of Commerce does not respond to that idea.

All make a review of the products following a classic scheme, Agrarian, and Industrial activities with a brief reference to Communications and commercial flows, which in some are called “Traffic”. Regional Economic Geography maintains this structure, now individualized to different countries or geographic areas.

The absence of books on the Economic Geography of Spain, except for the one written by J. Bosque, for the Schools of Commerce in the 1960s, we consider being due to the appearance of those on Economic Structure. It was due to the transition in education from Economic Geography to Economic Structure.

III. ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY A SECONDARY ACTOR IN THE CONFLICT COME IN THE ECONOMIC FACULTIES AND THE COMMERCE SCHOOLS: THE VALIDATIONS

At the end of the 1950s, it was intended to equate Economic Geography with “Spanish Economic Structure and Institutions concerning to abroad studies”, a new name for the subject “Economic Structure”, to validate it to the Mercantile Professors who enrolled in the Section of Economic and Commercial Sciences. This involved recognizing that subjects are similar.

In 1954, the professors of Economic Geography said that “the maturity” reached by Economic Geography had “reached the extreme of giving birth to a new complementary branch, Economic Structure”.

In 1959 they said that modern Economic Geography was conceptually oriented towards Structure, in such a way that the disparate denomination of both subjects, “Economic Geography” and “Structure and Spanish economic institutions in relation to foreign”, not “determine the content”: “A powerful trend that is firmer every day, reaffirms its development [Economic Geography] as configured today in the Faculty of Economic and Commercial Sciences”.

In 1960, the Madrid Faculty Board of Professors agreed that subjects that had not been attended in university centres could not be validated, even if they had the same name and even a similar program.

All this debate led to a strike by students from the Faculties of Political, Economic and Commercial Sciences. The Rector’s office closed the Faculty of Madrid due to the “imminent alteration of the good university order”.

Finally, the Economic Geography was not validated by the “Economic Structure” because different subjects were considered.

IV. AN ATTEMPT FOR ECONOMIC SCIENCE TO RECOGNIZE ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY: THE GEO-ECONOMY

An epistemological attempt to recognize Economic Geography as an academic value equivalent to that of Economic Structure among economists was made by Abelardo de Unzueta y Yuste, Professor of Economic Geography at the Sabadell School of Commerce. He introduced the term “Geo-economics”.

For Unzueta, Geography, Sociology and Economics are social science, and “man (*homo economicus*, *geographicus* and *socialis*)” interrelates the three through space. Unzueta looks for the nexus that relates autonomous Economic Geography –independent of Human Geography- and Economic Structure.

He refers to a “New Economic Geography” that has an explanatory character compared to the old merely descriptive and enumerative one. The “new” explains how the natural landscape has been modified by man to turn it into a “geographical or human landscape”. The difference between Economic Geography and Economic Structure is that “while Geographical Sciences always need the soil or space for the explanation of the cause-effect relationships of economic-natural phenomena, Economic Structure does not necessarily have that terrestrial or spatial connection for all its problems of economic interdependence”. Economic Geography is “geographical” by its method and economic by its purpose, while Economic Structure is fundamentally “economic,” adopting geographical methods in some of its manifestations.

But the “Economic Structure must be broad enough to demand the help and complement of non-economic disciplines called framing structures, extra-economic structures”. Raymond Barre had defined “framing structures” as those that constitute the framework of economic activity. However, his study belongs to other disciplines, such as demography, sociology, law, or psychology.

The “space factor”, through spatial-location theory (prices, costs, and distribution), is for Unzueta the link between Economic Geography and Economic Structure. The same space is “space-extension” which is geographical and “space-distance” which is economic. José Luis Sampedro had already pointed out this differentiation of space.

All this induces Unzueta to conclude definitively in his latest contributions that Economic Geography is not Economic Structure. They are different things. The point of view of both is different. Depends on whether the focus is from the point of view of the geoeconomics or

economic structure. The common characteristic of Geography and Structure is that both are “Applied Sciences” due to their intimate relationship with daily events and because they are descriptive explanatory of economic reality, arising from these common objectives an interrelation and, to a certain extent, an imprecise marking out of the content or specific and concrete purposes of each discipline.

V. WHY DID THE ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY OF THE ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS STUDIES DISAPPEAR?

Mercantile education had been in academic limbo since 1953. The subject “Economic Geography,” with a great tradition in the Schools of Commerce, acquired a residual character from 1956 when the “Economic Structure” was consolidated in the academic training of Graduates in the Economic and Commercial Sciences Section of the Faculty of Political and Economic and Commercial Sciences. At the university level, except for the academic year 1943-1944, at the Faculty of Political and Economic Sciences, “Economic Geography” had not existed as a subject with such a title. His study was diluted in the geographical subjects of the Faculties of Philosophy and Letters.

It was truly considered conceptually and academically integrated into Human Geography. It did not, therefore, have the autonomous, independent character to be a subject. Although in the 1940s, the geographer José Manuel Casas Torres saw it as a “proper subject [of special studies] detached from the trunk of geography”. It was the “mission” of the university chair “to counteract this pernicious derivation”. That mission consisted of integrating its contents into Human Geography taught in the Faculties of Letters. In a small book published in 1953 by Casas on how to conduct studies of local geography, he included the economic activities.

The causes that led to the disappearance of Economic Geography in economic-mercantile teachings in favour of Economic Structure were:

1. Economic Science and therefore Economic Structure had conceptually evolved more than Economic Geography. Paul Krugman attributes this delay to the inability to express his ideas in a way adaptable to the models’ techniques used in economic analysis.

The conceptual and methodological development of the “Economic Structure” in Spain was due to the need

to create the theoretical corpus of the new subject. The subject had been born without academic tradition in the Spanish University. It was necessary to promote its relationship with other economic subjects to consolidate it in the academic field of Economics. Though the economist Perpiñá in opposition to the conjuncture had already used the term “economic structure”.

The “Economic Geography” disappeared from the Spanish economic-business education, but from the 1973-1974 academic year formed part of the subjects of the Geography section in some faculties of Philosophy and Letters. He did it from the Humanities, but with the connotation of Social Science.

2. The Law General of Education (1970) integrated the Professional Schools of Commerce in the University as University Schools of Business Studies to impart the Diploma in Business Sciences. The peculiarity of the integration was that the studies were identical to those of the first cycle of the Faculty of Economics and Business Science, to which some specialization subjects were added. Graduates who wanted to continue their studies did so directly. The subject Economic Structure prevailed over Economic Geography: The problem of validation went missing.

I believe that the distancing between Economic Structure and Economic Geography occurred because traditional Geography reduced its object to the study of “landscape”. The landscape has been associated with the description and therefore its study lacks scientific value. However, in Geography an effort had been made to pass before the Second World War from a “qualitative and descriptive” state to a “quantitative and causal” one, as René Clozier recalls. Modern geography has gone beyond mere description, although the description itself entails a certain degree of explanation by having to order and classify the elements of reality. For Vicente Bileza, the “New Economic Geography” uses hypothetical-deductive procedures, “which means following in the footsteps of economists, who start from the simplest and most abstract possible and progressively complicate it. They proceed from the general to the particular and finally address a specific case”.

Other less descriptive terms, with more analytical force, would have contributed to giving a “scientific” image to Geography, overcoming the prejudices rooted from the early years of the Baccalaureate on Geography. Replace the term “landscape” as a central object of study of Geography for another that would limit this ideographic character. The terminology that Leoncio Urabayen used

in 1934, “the geographical precipitates”, had a less informative character.

His work was unknown at the University, possibly because he was a *normalista* (a former student of the Teacher Training School in Madrid) His geographical analysis starts from the existence of a transformation process that gives rise to a new element, “the precipitate”. Human action on the territory concludes in its transformation, in a new reality, which invites us to consider that there are successive processes of transformation. He incorporates the time factor, History, to explain the transformations up to the present moment: “The Geography of humanized landscapes must pursue as its objectives those that refer to the investigation of geographical precipitates in relation to the environment and considered at present time. Thus, the respective fields are well delimited. The Geography of humanized landscapes: geographical precipitates in the present as an object of study. The History of humanized landscapes: geographical precipitates in their genesis and evolution through time, that is, in the past”. A similar argument is that of his contemporary Román Perpiñá for whom the economic structure at a given moment is the consequence of the action of a set of forces that modify the pre-existing structure. For Urabayen, the basis of the geographer’s research is the “geographical precipitates,” which give rise to “humanized landscapes” and the science that studies them, the Geography of Humanized Landscapes. The Geography of Humanized Landscapes is housed in Sociology, as general science, because it has an eminently social character.

“The geographer must work on works and not on phenomena”. Those that meet “the requirements of geographic precipitates [permanence and fixity] will form the body from which we can derive consequences and obtain valid principles for our human geography”. We must not forget that the Economic Structure has as its objective “the study of interdependence relations that are endowed with a certain permanence and that link the main components of a globally considered reality”.

And, finally, the “Theory of location” was not incorporated into the contents of the “Economic Geography” that was taught in commercial education, although it was part of the geographic education in the Faculties of Letters.

Economic Geography was thus alien to Economic Theory and its derivatives, which made it NOT economic. Thus, it was excluded from the academic field of economic-business education that began to grow in Spanish universities in the 1960s and 1970s.

The appearance of the “Economic Structure” represented modernity in applied economics teachings. The attempts for the academic recognition of Economic Geography did not have the support of university students, not even that of Geography. Finally, with the transformation of the Professional Schools of Commerce into University Schools of Business Studies, the “Economic Geography” disappeared in favour of the “Economic Structure”. And later, in the nineties, this one disappeared in favour of the subjects of “Spanish Economy,” “World Economy,”...

At the end of the 20th century, Economic Geography has re-emerged, but as a field of research in the Faculties of Economic Sciences. It is what has been called “New Economic Geography” that aims to study the relationships between space and economic processes. The novelty consists of giving “an analytical-mathematical support” to the economic geography that has been developed since the 1950s. According to Juan Ramón Cuadrado, he has accommodated itself to the mainstream of Economic Analysis “by providing it with greater academic respectability”.