
History, Urbanism, and the Albertov Campus



The founding of the New Town of Prague by Charles IV in mid-14th century started with the construction of town walls leading from the old Vyšehrad Castle to Poříčí. This dates the beginning of urbanistic history of the Albertov Valley. At this point, however, it was not just a construction of a traditional medieval town that was being undertaken but rather a new urbanistic phenomenon which defied the then common development of urban centres. In addition to the construction of the town wall, the crucial stage in the development of the New Town falls to the two decades of 1347–1367, during which almost the entire ambitious construction plan of Charles IV was carried out. In 1351, after the completion of many of the residential houses, the area of New Town was divided in parishes and a construction of new monasteries began as soon as the parish system was finalised.

In early 20th century, the construction of Albertov as a university quarter according to a plan from 1901–1904 became one of the most radical changes to the New Town in its post-medieval form. At this point, buildings were constructed in the so far little developed area between Apolinářská and Horská streets. The design was inspired by the purpose-built and relatively self-contained research and education campuses of some West European and American universities. After the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, it was necessary to re-think the urbanistic plan of Albertov in connection with the reorganisation and completion of the General Hospital and in relation to the Czech and German Faculty of Medicine and their buildings. Nonetheless, the only developments which took place in the interwar period were an enlargement of the building of the Institute of Hygiene, which received a new western wing, and a new construction of Purkyně Institute for the Czech Medical Faculty.

The first truly urbanistic development of an academic campus came after the WWII. A remarkable aspect of this undertaking is that it was most likely planned during the Nazi occupation in 1943–1945, when Czech universities were closed. The author of this design viewed his proposal as being just preliminary outline of a possible future academic centre which should respond to particular rules of urban transformation in the spirit of constructivist principles, thus taking no heed of existing, historically valuable buildings.

An important milestone in the further development of the campus came in 1999, when an amended plan of urban development was elaborated and presented for public discussion. In this plan, the areas of interest to individual users are not allotted directly but generally, meaning that in the new plan, the entire complex of academic campus is treated as an area of public facilities. Within the structure of the Czech capital city, this amendment thus to some degree simplifies and limits changes to the plan of urban development. On the other hand, it also carries certain risks regarding building permissions for constructions not directly related to the Albertov Campus.



In the spring of 2006, preparations started for the completion of Albertov. The project received a provisory name 'Albertov Campus'. First of all, preliminary spatial possibilities for the addition of two new buildings were identified in the location of the existing canteen and an undeveloped lot between the Hlavova and Horská streets. The main artery of the compound is the Albertov Street, which passes approximately through the centre of the area defined by the rock formations and hills. University buildings, constructed mainly in early 20th century, are mostly robust, freestanding structures with internal courtyards, approximately 4 to 5 floors high. The new buildings of the Globcentrum and Biocentrum should follow the orthogonal street grid and complement the historical site with structures of similar height, linked to the existing street line formed by the compact mass of building facades.

Several years of preliminary discussions about the concept of the Albertov Campus and its Biocentrum and Globcentrum assumed a more concrete outline in 2008 when an impact study was completed. This study presented a general outline of the two centres in their maximal envisioned form while taking into account their placement among existing buildings and other relevant factors connected with it, such as heritage protection, geological survey, the mains supplies, etc. The total floor area of the two buildings considered in this impact study was 47,000 m² including underground parking and technical services.

In 2011, the Albertov Campus project was included in the Ministry of Education investment project No. 133210 (MŠMT 133 210). The Albertov Campus should offer not only top-level for education and research related to teaching, but also create an attractive environment for students, their study and communal life.

In 2013–2014, the concept and plan of both centres was updated and elaborated in detail through repeated revisions by the Science Council of the Albertov Campus and other bodies of the three participating Charles University faculties. Key parts of these documents include a proposal of fields of study but also a concept of the layout of teaching and social facilities, which are a natural part of this kind of modern buildings.

During this period, the organisation structure of the project was also discussed and clarified and its individual parts formally established. Rector of the Charles University and deans of the participating faculties signed an agreement about partnership during the preparatory phase and implementation of the project. It was decided on the procedure that will lead to obtaining the project documentation, and also that the architectural design will be obtained through the architectural design competition, which was officially announced in September 2015, and in which the architectural studio znamení čtyř - architekti s.r.o. won with its design. Construction work on the Biocentre building began in April 2024, and the current version of the timetable for the entire project foresees the building's approval in 2026.