

The Oroibidea Portal

A path between memory collections and technology

Gerard Corbella, Josemi Gastón, César Layana and Àlex Peña

1. Introduction: The Oroibidea portal and public policies on memory from the Regional Government of Navarre

Navarre is an autonomous community within the state of Spain that is defined as a *Comunidad Foral* (provincial region). Throughout its history, Navarre has maintained significant levels of self-government on numerous issues, including taxation. It is located in the north of the Iberian Peninsula, bordering France, with an area of a little over 10,000 km² and a population of 679,181 according to the 2024 electoral register.

Besides having a strong historical identity, which permeates throughout its collective memory, Navarre was also the setting for a military coup against the legitimate government of the second Spanish Republic in July 1936. Rebellious military forces, and the popular support they undoubtedly received from the traditionalist and conservative majority meant that Navarre, along with other Spanish provinces, remained under seditionist control from the outbreak of the Spanish Civil war. As a result, there was no war front in Navarre. There was, however, a terrible campaign of political oppression that led to the murder of almost 3,000 Navarrese men and women within a short space of time. This was accompanied by other acts of systematic repression, such as lootings, fines, confiscations, purges, captivity and forced labour. The sole reason for this wave of violence was the political and social background of those who suffered such reprisal. An impenetrable veil of silence fell over these events throughout the Francoist dictatorship, but also during the early decades of democracy following his death in 1975. This was despite the resistance from the defeated community, efforts by their friends and relatives, as well as support from certain political sectors and finally a commitment from Navarrese historiographers, which has shed light on this process in more recent decades¹.

In the immediate aftermath of Franco's death, a social movement arose to recover the bodies of those killed, which remained buried in the same burial pits and ditches where they had been left by their killers. With no institutional support, this social movement drove efforts to locate, exhume, dignify and inter the victims of Francoist repression in republican mausoleums. The movement was especially active between 1978 and 1980 and, years later, enabled the publication of a benchmark historiographic collective work entitled *Navarra 1936: de la esperanza al terror* (Altaffaylla Kultur Taldea 1986).

¹ There is no room in this article to mention the extensive historiographic production of recent decades. One of the most recent assessments can be found in the dossier *La represión franquista en Euskadi y Navarra* (2021).

Whilst the echoes had not yet faded entirely, the Navarrese memorialist movement underwent a revival at the turn of the century as part of a widespread process throughout the Spanish state.² New associations of relatives and memorialists emerged, and faced with institutional inaction, promoted political declarations (such as one by the Navarrese Parliament in 2003), encouraged exhumations, held events and organised tributes. The first places of remembrance were also created under this revival (the Sartaguda Memorial Park³ is a shining example) and historic research projects began to receive support.

This social movement trickled into politics and led to one of the most important results: the approval of Navarrese Provincial Law 33/2013 on the recognition and moral reparations for those men and women of Navarre killed, as well as victims of repression under the military coup of 1936. Nonetheless, resistance from the minority conservative government in the region at the time meant that the new law was not initially applied. A major political change stemming from regional elections in 2015 brought a coalition government to power made up by progressive parties that included the implementation of public policies on memory in their manifesto. The Directorate-General for Peace, Coexistence and Human Rights (now the Directorate-General for Memory and Coexistence) was thus created. One of its core areas for action was the implementation of policies on memory, such as institutional tributes, a programme of exhumations and the creation of a public DNA bank, the removal of Francoist symbols, the promotion of places of remembrance, the creation of a Document Centre and the development of a pioneering education programme: *Escuelas con Memoria* (Schools with Memory). The Navarrese Institute of Memory was created in 2018 within this administrative structure to lend greater institutional support to this work.

Within this context, the Document Centre of the Navarrese Institute of Memory stands as a response to the requests from relatives and researchers for information and documents. The centres goal is to establish contact with public and private archives and to create a digital archive that can provide public access to all the material available for publication. The two fundamental pillars of this centre are the library specialising in Memory and Human Rights, which currently holds a collection of almost 8,000 books and documents, and the Oroibidea-Path of Memory digital archive⁴, which is the project on which this article is focused.

Oroibidea is a modular project that has been in a process of development since 2020. Its goal is to gather and share the memorialist heritage that the Navarrese Institute of Memory has been collecting. One of the cornerstones of this project was the creation

2 This process began with the exhumation using scientific methods of Priaranza del Bierzo, which was the first major public project by the Association for the Recovery of Historic Memory. Other associations also began to grow, the Forum for Memory among them. Furthermore, the government led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero publicly enacted Spanish Law 52/2007, of 26 December, in 2007 to recognise and expand certain rights, establishing measures in defence of those who suffered persecution or violence during the Spanish Civil War and dictatorship, see: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2007-22296> (27.9.2025). This law enabled progress to be made but also fell short in some areas, regarding which corrective efforts were made under Spanish Law 20/2022, of 19 October, on Democratic Memory, see: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2022-17099> (27.9.2025).

3 Sartaguda is a town in southern Navarre that suffered heavily under the repression. In fact, it is known as the “Town of Widows” (this is the name given to the local association dedicated to memory) because it is the Navarrese town with the highest number of people killed per thousand inhabitants.

4 To access the portal: <https://oroibidea.es/en> (27.9.2025).