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RECOMPOSITION OF THE AVENIDA PIEDAD COLÓN BOROX, TOLEDO

Borox has been chosen for its efforts to restore the local character to a strategic point of its urban layout that is today, however, degraded. The strategy proposed for the achievement of this objective has been singularly valued: the transformation of the two main public buildings that preside over this area, the Senior Day Center and the Municipal Library, today, they are completely alien to the forms and materials of the place, as well as the reorganising of the public spaces that surround them. These specific interventions could serve as a reference and trigger for subsequent public and private initiatives that were gradually returning to the urban landscape of the municipality, and part of the attraction that has been stolen in recent dates.

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BOROX

The municipality of Borox, 60.33 km², is within Toledo's Comarca de la Sagra Alta. It sits between three thalwegs located at the top of a valley that descends from the high Sagra plain towards the banks of the Tagus river.

The urban core has an irregular layout, with more or less narrow streets that adapt to the topography and give rise to equally irregular blocks of very different sizes.

The way of the Alhóndiga is the one that in its origin gave rise to the urban centre. Land occupation occurred historically along this road, which since medieval times seems to have been well transitted by travellers from the south of the Tagus to Illescas.

The urban development consolidated this built area, being extended to the north by the lower part of the valley. The lowlands that extend towards the south of the urban centre, where the Borox stream ebbs and flows, accommodate the main cultivational zones.

History of the Place

The term "Borox" seems to come from the Arabic *burug*, which means "the towers".

It was founded by the Arabs at the end of the 8th century, when the Castle of Mahul was built within its domain.

In Borox there used to be an inn known as "La Alhóndiga", built for travellers who were heading to Toledo from the lands of La Alcarria. The importance of Toledo was increasing in Muslim Spain and with it the movement of people who were heading to the city to trade, or in search of fortune. The inn stayed small, and in its surroundings lodges, an outdoor market and the first houses arose. This is the reason why, little by little, a town was formed that later, due to the floods that occurred for it being next to the river, moved to the highest part of the valley, the area where it currently sits.

Its location gave Borox enormous prosperity in the Middle Ages. At this time, it had already surpassed five thousand inhabitants.

After the consolidation of the Castilian conquest of the region around the Tagus, the military officials were entrusted with the management and protection of various strategic points. In 1179 Alfonso VIII granted half of the municipality to his steward Rodrigo Gutiérrez, and the other half to the Order of Calatrava. Borox remained under the Calatrava power, integrated within the Otos governorate, until the year 1378, when it was separated from it.

In 1796 the town hall was built, a building of great interest, standing over some maybe pre-existing timber vaults, since the building also served as a bridge over a seasonal stream that traversed it. In it was also the public granary and the prison. The balcony of the town hall was used since its



construction, as is usual in the area, as the presidential box for the bullfighting celebrations held in the square.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the industry of Borox was made up of two soap factories, two tanneries and nine oil mills. Despite the major transformations suffered by its urban landscape during the last decades, its urban layout of medieval origin, adapted to the rugged terrain on which it sits, has preserved its essence to this day.

Tradición Arquitectónica Local

In Borox there are very different traditional housing types that can be grouped into:

- The stately homes, normally of two heights. They are usually located in the main streets of the historic centre. The main house is built around a large patio, usually central and surrounded by wooden galleries. It is composed of both domestic areas as well as work or industrial zones. La Sagra has stood out historically in the elaboration of wine and oil, for this reason the houses used to have a mill, a winery and a wine cellar, generally in caves embedded in the land. They also usually tend to have cattle pens, pigeon houses and the space under the roof was dedicated to the storage of grain. To the streets, they show large façades, without many openings to the outside and covered with lime mortars, often whitewashed later on. Some of these houses have a tower in one of its corners. Many of the ironworks on the ground floor as well as on the balconies of the upper floor, are made in wrought iron. The main door provides access to the patio through the hallway. They also usually have large gates providing access to the area of animal pens. Regarding the climatic functioning of the house, the summer quarters are commonly located on the ground floor and often oriented to the north, while winter quarters are usually found on the top floor and orientated to catch the noon sun, often along the wall adjacent to the main façade.

- The more vernacular houses are smaller than the stately homes, with one or two floors. They are commonly grouped forming the dense blocks of the urban centre, composing large neighbourhoods around the main streets. They usually also have a central patio or a patio at the back, and often they also have animal pens and storage space under the roof, though of smaller dimensions than in the previous case. The façades, also generally whitewashed, are sober looking and with scarce details, that originally did not used to be barred in wrought iron nor boasted the balconies characteristic of the more noble houses.

- There are also houses with run-down balconies or half-timbered galleries on the top floor of the main façade. This typology is characteristic of the main public spaces in La Sagra, and in Borox good examples are preserved in the Plaza de la Constitución. These balconies and galleries were used to spectate the festivities that took place in the square.

- The houses of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century often feature more colourful lime paintings and more ornamental elements: cornices, mouldings in the openings, ironworks with more complex decorative motifs, etc., perhaps influenced by the houses of the nearby Aranjuez.

In all these types of traditional dwellings, the load-bearing walls are generally of very irregular masonry or of rammed earth with very characteristic lime reinforcements, although brick is also used



in some main buildings. The floors are made of wood beams with gypsum plaster vaults. The eaves are commonly of wooden corbels, although in the most modest houses they are usually solved with simple overhangs of tile and/or brick. The roof structures are made of wood, usually with a “par e hilera” type of structure. Above them, the roofs are made of wooden boards covered with earth and tiles. Pine is mainly the wood used, which reached the region from the mountain ranges of Cuenca, taking advantage of the Tajo River's current, and which can also be seen in the structures of the galleries that open onto the courtyards.

PROPOSAL OF INTERVENTION

The area of proposed intervention is located in the northeast part of the urban centre of Borox. The area develops along a north-south axis of orientation called Avenida Piedad Colón. The approximate surface of the proposed area is 8300 m², its length is about 290m and its width is variable, between 15 and 49 metres. The terrain descends from north to south, with a difference of about three and a half meters. The delimited area includes both free spaces and two public buildings.

Within this axis there are four main components: the public building known as the Senior Day Centre, the park or tree-lined square that opens out in front of the south façade of the same, the stretch of avenue that goes from the northern façade of the Day Centre to the Municipal Library, and this last building. The detailed area can be modified slightly if it is considered necessary for the new proposal, provided it is duly justified.

As can be seen in historical photographs from photographic recording flights from 1945 onwards, the current avenue at that time was only a large empty space arranged along one of the thalwegs around which the town extended and was limited by poorly built areas and by the farmlands that then extended from its southern tip. In fact, before its paving, the water of the Borox stream surfaced and ran superficially along the avenue. The hamlet stretched both to the east and to the west of this space, occupying the slopes of the surrounding hills always avoiding to occupy the valuable irrigable lowland. It began already then to configure one of the central public spaces of the municipality.

The park and the avenue were already urbanized in the second half of the 20th century, when the trees were planted in what is now the park area, as well as in a row along the current avenue. The water was also channelled underground and later the stream was built over, to the south of this area. In the 80's it was determined for a public building to be built precisely on the axis of this trough, thus configuring the area in the existing style of today with two differentiated spaces to the north and south of the new building. This establishment was designed as a Rural Hygiene Centre and Home for the Elderly, now known as Senior Day Center.

The Senior Day Centre is a building of both design and construction alien to the tradition of the place. In addition, it has undergone successive transformations due to changes in its use that have dismantled its initial distribution. Consequently, it has ceased to perform well for the different uses it currently accommodates: the ground floor is a bar that is leased for public tender, and the upper part is dedicated to retirees, as a meeting place, for leisure activities, courses, workshops, etc. In Borox, a major part of



the population is over 65 years old, which gives increasing importance to these spaces. It is essential that the new proposals maintain the functions dedicated to the elderly which currently exist and that, if possible, also facilitate other new spaces dedicated to day centre.

The same happens with the Municipal Library, a more recent building, inaugurated in 1999, and located further to the north. Today it also needs to be reconfigured to better adapt to its operation. The transfer of the Play Center, which occupies a part of its space, to a new location forces to reconfigure it to function entirely as a library again and therefore it is an ideal time to redesign it.

The projects presented must propose a new design for these two public buildings that respects the local architectural tradition and is at the same time appropriate for the civic character of both elements. The two can be completely redesigned in the same location they occupy today, or they can be simply embellished and reconfigured, reusing part of the existing elements. In any case, the alignments of both buildings with respect to the public free space may be slightly altered if deemed necessary and adequately justified. In the case of the Senior Day Centre, it is also essential to provide it with a more representative elevation on its north façade, creating a better relationship with the adjacent avenue. Today, when confronted by the avenue the appearance given is that of a practically residual space.

In addition to these two buildings, a new design must also be proposed for the public space next to them, the one defined in the attached documentation.

The avenue, including the park, was a unified space, a green axis that took advantage of this strip of fertile land. The Senior Day Centre building occupies an ideal location for a civic facility, as it presides over the two spaces in which this area has been divided. Unfortunately, compared to the success of the park, the avenue is a space that is barely used and of little attraction today.

The park, on the other hand, has been converted into a square that sees a lot of activity, as a place appreciated by the inhabitants of Borox. It is used as a regular meeting area, especially by retirees. The open space between the park and the bar is used as the terrace of the bar that occupies the ground floor of the building; due to its current successful functioning it would be convenient to maintain this in the proposed designs. Around this square there are also several establishments that give life to this place: a supermarket, several bars, a bakery, a grocery store, a bookstore, etc.

The avenue is today an axis of important connections to the town. The TO-2437 road passes through it and at number 22 there is the only bus stop in the urban centre. Therefore, in case of proposing pedestrianization, it must be partial and continue to allow the passage of road traffic. In any case, this requires only the space necessary for the existence of a lane in each direction. Another relevant fact about the avenue is the presence of a fountain in front of the bus stop, the Fuente de la Gitana.

As for the existing tree-lined square south of the Retirement Home, a new design for its paving, its accessibility, its urban furniture, etc. must be included in the proposal.

The trees within the whole space are of great value and public interest. Many are catalogued and protected. An inventory was created by the municipal's Department of Environment for those that due to their characteristics (species, size, symbolism, longevity, beauty, etc) were worthy of being endowed with complete protection. In the case of Avenida Piedad Colón, the protected specimens are: a centennial poplar located at number 41; eight Negundo maples placed in the numbers 12 (3), 18, 45



(2), 39 and 43; an elm, at number 32; and a laurel, in number 29. As for the existing ones in the municipal park of the Piedad Colón Avenue, a black poplar, nine elms and four maple trees are protected.

Basic Conditions for the Proposal Based on the Municipal Regulation of Application in the Area of Intervention

Dealing with public buildings, the free heights may be fixed for the floors that are considered opportune, and the number of floors may be of a maximum of the ground floor plus two.

The roofs will be done with traditional curved ceramic tiles, with a maximum slope of 30%. The maximum overhang of the eaves will be 60 centimetres and will be executed preferably with corbels and wooden boards. The maximum height of the roof ridge will be 4 metres measured from the upper face of the last slab.

In the façades massif volumes should prevail over the alcoves. The openings will be of eminently vertical proportions. The alcoves will be arranged in a uniform rhythm.

The coatings used will be those of the local tradition. The woods and windows will be made in wood and the ironwork in wrought iron, with simple profiles and preferably embedded in the alcove or protruding from the façade at a maximum of 30 cm.

Wooden galleries could be open onto the façade, as well as ground floor arcades, which might be arranged where it is considered appropriate.