



A NEW PLAZA INSIDE THE HEART OF JACA, HUESCA

Having already been chosen in the previous selection, the proposal of the City of Jaca has been exceptionally accepted to again participate in the competition, as unfortunately it had to be discounted as none the design proposals received for this site could be considered appropriate. Jaca was chosen and has been chosen again for proposing the creation of a singular public space in the heart of its historical centre that could contribute to its revitalization. The traditional architectural and urban design could thus be erected today as a tool of change that, withstanding, does not renounce the values that have made up the group in which it would be classed. In this case, we also took into account the historical and symbolic importance of the municipality, linked both to the origins of the Kingdom of Aragon and the Camino de Santiago, as well as its ability to demonstrate that a new traditional architecture can be equally valuable in intervening with more urban environments.

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JACA

Jaca is the capital city of the Jacetania Pyrenees County, situated in the northeast of the Huesca province, inside the Aragon region. The city is located within the river terrace formed by the Aragon River on the left side and by its tributary, the Gas River, on the right side. From the west side until the city centre the ground is not particularly uneven, but from the city centre to the bottom of Rapitan Mountain, in the north part of the city, there is a gentle slope. However, neighbourhoods situated in the south and east parts have less altitude than the city centre.

Jaca is a small city with a population of 13.088 people in 2015. Nevertheless, it provides a large range of activities and services just like in bigger cities. This fact is due to an elevated number of visitors and seasonal residents that can stay there thanks to its reception capacity of more than 50.000 people and to its 16.000 houses and 2.350 hotel rooms. Temporary population grows in different periods during the whole year. Its historical importance and its touristic attractions give a structural role to the city within the Pyrenees area which is considered a special territory for different reasons (its borderline location, its landscape and orography, its environmental value, its weather, etc.)

Jaca municipality is a large rural area where the historic city plays the role of administrative centre of a 32 disseminated towns. Its large municipal district extends across 420 km² where different environments can be found; from landscape units within mountain areas, such as the wide Sudoroel, to alpine zones, such as Astun valley where the sky resort is located, or for example protected natural landscapes with a high ecological importance such as San Juan de la Peña and Oroel mountain or natural reserves such as the Garcipollera valley.

History of the site

Jaca was the primitive capital of the *Iacetani* and in the Roman period it played an important role in the control of the routes that crossed the Pyrenees. It achieved the title of city and capital city of the newly formed Kingdom of Aragon in 1706 and at the same time the construction of St. Peter's Cathedral started. Its position on the border with France and the Way of St. James gave Jaca a strategic, military and also commercial importance in the Middle Ages. This importance grew in the XVI Century with the construction of the Ciudadela (the Citadel) and the Casa Consistorial (the Consistorial House).

Since it was a military fortress until the early 20th Century, the city was constantly renovated within its walls without being able to spread beyond them. Perhaps this was the reason for not building a main square in the 18th and 19th Centuries, like the ones in cities such as Salamanca, Madrid, Barcelona or the three capital cities of the Basque Country.

In 1915, the walls were demolished and a process of urban expansion began, following a grid pattern. Since the 1970s, with the rise of mountain tourism (skiing, hiking, natural parks...), large-scale urban development began, completing the expansion of urban fabric and building open-block neighbourhoods in the suburbs, mainly for second homes use.



More recently, due to the economic recession, activity has re-focused on the rehabilitation of the historic centre and a Special Plan for Improvement and Conservation is in place. The area incorporates buildings with high residential occupancy densities and of commercial uses and services on the ground floors, which preserves the original historical morphology and the architectural and environmental values of Jaca traditional typology. This is mainly thanks to the application of the Special Plan and this area is, without any doubt, the authentic living centre of the city.

Local Architectural Tradition

Jaca is characterised by having a very compact urban core of large blocks and buildings, most of them being three to five floors high.

The buildings are built with stone load-bearing walls and interior wood frames. The stone is only seen occasionally in the lower parts of the building closest to the ground, as well as on the corners and at the base of bays and steps. The arcade typology of the area is always done with stone in the form of very extended arches. The walls are always plastered with lime mortars and local sand, which gives them the natural colours of the site.

In the façades the massif dominates instead of openings and are characterized by measured holes, generally with vertical rectangular proportions and always surrounded with lintels and jambs of stone or mortar.

Balconies with wrought iron bars abound, and glazed viewpoints occasionally appear above them.

The roofs are inclined and always made with ceramic tiles. In regards to the eaves, it is common that they protrude a little over the line of the façade and are usually made of wooden boards supported on plain corbels of the same material, although there are also more elaborate models.

As for the buildings that configure the main public spaces, the stone arches are the most typical solution for their ground floor arcades in this area, consisting of round arches with different diameters, often with their centres located more or less at ground level. They therefore follow the model that can be observed in other Aragonese Pyrenean places, such as Aínsa.





PROPOSAL OF INTERVENTION

The high density of the historical city centre has meant that there is no large public space within it. However, that same density, together with the intense commercial activity in the area, could turn such a space into an important attraction.

To carry it out, the City Council of Jaca proposed in its Special Plan, to intervene in the interior space of the block that is defined by Mayor, Zocotín, Bellido and Gil y Berges streets, which are perfect for this purpose. It is a centre of large dimensions, located in the heart of the Historical District of Jaca. It has a simple square shape, with an area of more than 8,200 square metres, and the façades that exceed 100 metres in length.

The conditions of the interior space of this block, occupied by gardens and small private buildings, make the freeing of this space for public use possible, in this way expanding the network of pedestrian public spaces of the historical centre of Jaca.

Recently, the City Council of Jaca has drafted, subject to public participation process, corrected and approved the Special Plan of this block, which enables the progressive acquisition of all interior space, a good part of this floor already being of municipal ownership today. The Special Plan advances, with a non-binding nature, a detailed compensation programme that takes place in 14 management areas and handles different time frames. It is a viable program that demonstrates the real possibilities of developing the Plan, and presents a framework for the signing of agreements between the owners involved and the City of Jaca.

The intervention proposals must free up the interior area of the block for the execution of this square. This area is detailed in the attached alignment plan. On the same plan, it can be observed that it is necessary to design not only the new façades that will define this area, but to partially redesign the existing buildings, adapting them to the new proposed configuration. In addition, the public space freed by this activity must also be designed, placing special emphasis on the definition of its elevations, as well as the contact between these and the new plaza and its connection with the adjacent streets.

This interior square of the block will have access through the building on the perimeter through four pedestrian passages that will connect it with the adjacent streets. Three of these passages will be located in three new buildings, which are also featured in this competition, occupying the three plots that have already been acquired by the municipality: those that open onto Zocotín, Bellido and Gil Berges streets. It seeks to make such access points as attractive and bright as possible, while respecting the local character. The height of these passages can be fixed to one or two floors, while the width of them will be at least 4 metres. The projects must clearly define the characteristics and spatial qualities of the access passages to the square. At the three new buildings the new access points to the square can be opened using courtyards to provide additional lighting to the covered passage. The use of the three new buildings will be, whenever possible, mixed-use, in keeping with the buildings that surround the new square. In addition, it is necessary to include in these buildings the pedestrian access to the underground parking that will exist under the complex. In the case of the passage that connects with the Mayor street, it is located in an existing building and therefore its width and height are determined



by the constructive and structural requirements of the current building, as defined in the plans provided (SEE ACCESSES PLAN).

Taking advantage of the need to rebuild or expand the back parts of the building of the block to turn them into the new frontage facing towards the square, rehabilitation and revitalization of the building complex is sought. The new façades facing the plaza will have arcades of 3.5m deep on the ground floor, although it can be chosen to use arcades only in some of the elevations, being especially less needed in the elevation in the southern part of the square, for being oriented towards the north. These arcades will be undergone according to the tradition of squares in the Huescan Pyrenees. The upper floors of the buildings must conform to the exterior alignment of the arcades, and not be set back in respect to it (SEE ALIGNMENT PLAN). In certain exceptions, a different alignment for some buildings can be chosen if their correct conservation or the layout of the place dictates to do so, provided that this is duly justified.

The heights of the interior façades of the block must be the same as the ones each building shows facing the surrounding streets and will therefore be variable. This is intended to avoid the formation of a continuous cornice line, given the great diversity existing in the buildings that surround this space. In addition, in some cases, where it is indicated in the plan corresponding to the elevations, the compensation system agreed by the City Council with the owners allows for an increase in height of some buildings to add one more floor (SEE ELEVATIONS). In the facilitated elevations, the red line is representative of the new cornice line that the City Council has agreed with the neighbours to compensate them for the freeing of the interior space of the area, which has thus become public property. The proposed buildings can and should be modified, taking into account this height limit.

The construction of an underground parking for residents with a minimum of 20 places is also proposed, since it can serve to revalue the real estate of the block. A right-of-way is established in the Bellido plot No. 22 for the location of the access ramp to the underground parking, with a minimum width of 5 metres. The pedestrian access to this parking lot should be included in the ground floors of the municipal buildings that will allow access to the plaza, thus avoiding taking up the surface of the plaza. As for the underground parking, this does not have to occupy the entire floor under the square, recommending, in fact, to respect the existing trees and especially the specimen of Spanish fir that exists today and that is near its western limit.

The planned buildings must respect the architectural tradition of the historical centre of Jaca, as well as respecting the level of protection that pre-existing buildings have. The buildings or parts of buildings that must be preserved are those indicated in the level of protection plan (SEE LISTED BUILDING PLAN). In any case, it is reasonable to preserve as much as possible of them. The three buildings that must be necessarily demolished are the three municipal buildings in which three of the public passages will be located, marked on the plans. It will also be possible to demolish those buildings or parts of buildings that are not protected, when the correct solution of the project requires it.



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

On the inner façade of the square, the eaves of each one of the buildings will be at the same height as those of their exterior façade. The maximum height of the cornice line for each of the buildings that can be extended in height, as well as the heights of the cornice line of those buildings whose height must be maintained as it is at present, are collected in the plan of external elevations attached. Detailed in this plan are the new proposed maximum heights for each one of the buildings that surround the square, using a red line.

The minimum free height of the ground floor will be 2.5 meters, and its maximum free height, 3.5 meters. The catalogued buildings indicated in the attached documentation, will keep the existing heights in each of their floors. In new buildings, the free height of each the floors over the ground floor will be between 2.5 meters and 3.0 meters.

The number of floors of each building will be obtained by applying the fixed heights set for each of the floors, so that as a whole they are below the level fixed by the regulatory line of the maximum height of cornice set for each building.

The buildings roofs will have a minimum inclination of 30° and a maximum of 40°. The maximum height of the ridge beam or ridge line, at any point, shall not exceed, in any case, a distance of 4 metres measured between that point and the regulatory line of the maximum cornice height.

The installation of rain gutters and drainpipes on all roof slopes is mandatory, as it is their connection to the building's internal sanitation network. On the ground floor, the drainpipes cannot run outside the façade.

Lime mortars in local shades will be used as exterior finishings for the façades. In no circumstance will bright tones or pure white be used. The stone should be shown only in specific elements, such as in arcades or when framing the openings.

Vertical proportions will prevail in the façade openings. The composition of openings will show regular patterns in each building. The width of the openings will not exceed 1.30 meters. The openings will always be framed by their lintels and jambs.

Special care will be taken with the design of the exterior windows and doors, following the existing patterns in the local traditional buildings. For the carpentry works, the use of dark colours will be preferable.

The maximum projection of balcony overhangs will be 60 centimetres. The balcony slabs will be of a maximum width of 12 centimetres. The balconies should not be enclosed using masonry, wood lattices or other materials.

Elevators will be placed in the buildings whenever possible. The access stairs to houses in buildings with more than one dwelling cannot be less than 1 metre wide. The stairs must have natural light and ventilation. The access space to the entrance will not be less than 1.30 metres. Each home must have at least 65 usable square meters.

The stores on the ground floor must have direct access to the street, the new square or both.



Accessibility must be promoted, removing any architectural barriers both in the public space and in any access to buildings.

For the public space design, materials that are consistent with the urban identity to be promoted must be used. The Pyrenean climate will be taken into consideration. In the paving, materials natural stone slabs or cobbles will be used. It must be ensured all the height differences on ground level are resolved by linking spaces with a gentle slope (less than 4%). Special attention will be paid to the design of the textures, the curbs, the water evacuation system the lighting elements and the tree beds, so that they do not represent an inconsideration to people with reduced mobility.