

MARTYRS OF LIBERTY PARK- PROJECT DESCRIPTION

11th European Urban and Regional Planning Awards 2015-2016

"Don't ask if we are in full agreement,
but only if we are on the same path "

(Goethe)

The new park "Martyrs of Liberty" is **much more than a new green area with a sports circuit** in the small town of Huesca. This project, in which deprived area of the city has been restored for citizens, is an example of social integration, restoration of the historical memory and sustainable development. After several years of successful work of political and social consensus, the project has become a symbol for the city as a result of considerable effort of integration. It combines centuries of history, an interesting landscape and monumental architecture. The park confirms its commitment to the environment, recovering native flora and creating the first park with intelligent watering system for the town.

It is located in the city outskirts and **marginalized for years** by the existence of slums, with a population in extreme conditions of survival. The park has now become a magnificent high viewpoint which offers excellent views to the town and immersed in a natural surroundings of an unquestionable beauty.

It is indeed a **successful project**, intended as a leisure and sports facilities for all citizens, and commended for its excellent location and its special mountain's orography for athletes, sports clubs, and students. Opened in 2014, in 2015 it received a national award for its social and environmental regeneration, for its integration with the environment and sustainability in water management and for its cultural interconnection.

Once again, the human action demonstrates the humanization of the environment.

1. LOCATION

HUESCA

Huesca is a small provincial town of 52,000 inhabitants in the north of Spain, near the Pyrenees, in the autonomous community of Aragon. The town presents itself as the gateway to the Pyrenees close to the French border. Romans, Iberians, Visigoths and Arabs have left their mark on the culture, heritage and structure of the city.

Nowadays, it is a city that focuses its economy on the service sector, with a tourism turnover, and has a great tradition in the agricultural sector.

From an urban planning point of view, Huesca stands out for its recent pedestrianization of the city centre and it is worth stressing a unique feature: Huesca is the Spanish city that has more square meters of green area per inhabitants (23), with 125 hectares of gardens areas and more than 180 of green zones.

MARTYRS OF LIBERTY PARK

The Park's project, a set of 2.8 hectares, retrieves an emblematic area of the city that was degraded and had shanty towns, and has been profoundly transformed and regenerated for the use and enjoyment of its inhabitants. It has a central monument in the shape of a truncated pyramid, a tribute to the more than 500 Republicans shot in the area. It benefits from a sports circuit of 1,000 m with special orography and superb views of the city at one end, and to the sierra of Guara on the other.

The project includes the two hills on either side of the path which ascends to the Chapel of the Martyrs. Within the plan, the accesses to the Hermitage, its small square and the perimeter fence have been rehabilitated and renewed. It is a sustainable project, and the first park in Huesca that features an intelligent irrigation system.

This project promoted by the Town Hall of Huesca is part of a framework plan of recovery of the area, along with the industrial parks and the linking of the University Park area; whose existence was made possible thanks to the collaboration of the Government of Aragon and the European Union through the Urban Funds. The soil is classified in the General Urban Plan (PGOU) of Huesca as a green area, except the chapel and its immediate surroundings, which still belongs to the Church.

2. HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

The Martyrs of Liberty Park stands in an **historic place**. The building that survived in the heights of the northern part of the park is the **Chapel of the Martyrs** (XIII century), dedicated to the Christian martyrs St. Alodia and St. Nunilo, born from a Muslim father and a Christian mother, who were both beheaded.

It is also an **example of space of political consensus** and recovery of historical memory, because in this area the executions of more than 500 Republicans occurred during the Spanish Civil War. At the top of the park stands the **monument** designed by the city architect Pedro Lafuente and the architect Rafael Beneytez as a tribute to the deceased. It is located in the highest part with spectacular views of the Sierra de Guara and Gratal in one hand, and to the Cathedral of Huesca and the city on the other. The monumental complex, shaped like a truncated pyramid as symbol of the "broken lives", was structured in collaboration with the Republican Circle "Manolín Abad" and has engraved upon it the documented names of the 545 people who died in the vicinity for their Republican ideals. The **cemetery**, located next to the chapel, has also been restored in this project. This is the first civilian cemetery that existed in the city.

It also highlights the **important work of social integration** that has been developing in parallel with the urbanistic project, as this area was deteriorated and marginally inhabited by slums since the 60s. The social services of the City Hall of Huesca undertook a plan to relocate six families consisting of 24 people in the town center. In this way, ethnic Gypsy families who lived at the bottom of the hill in twelve shacks -constituting the oldest shanty town of the city- were moved into houses in the center of Huesca. The space they left has been recovered and restored for use by all citizens, as the Huesca society demanded.

3. OBJECTIVES

- **To highlight an historical and degraded strategic space** rescuing it from its suburban condition. It is a way to create a city for all, after releasing an old neighborhood reclamation.
- **Achieving a political and social consensus** where all the parties concerned feel satisfied and rewarded. The central monument was erected in honor of the 545 Republicans executed.
- **To retrieve an exceptional viewpoint to the Pre-Pyrenees for the town.** For years, it has been an abandoned space and recently rated as a green area and framed in an area surrounded by homes, the university and an industrial estate.
- **To take advantage of the special topography of the area** in order to get a place for sports and leisure area. It is located next to the Faculty of Health and Sport, and the Campus of Huesca.
- **Small-scale interventions to craft the city's economy with public expenditure restraint,** compared to planning large investments without provided results.
- **The landscape as the backbone of the city.** Huesca is the Spanish city with more square meters of green area per inhabitant. It is important to help maintain these positive statistics and serve as an example to other cities that are committed to the importance of parks and gardens and protecting the environment.

4. SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE PARK

- Prior the rehabilitation of the environment:

Rehabilitation works of the **cemetery** situated next to the chapel have previously been carried out; consolidation of burials, sanitation of the area, cleaning and clearing of the surface, etc.

- Monument Martyrs of Liberty:

The concept of the park revolves around the central monument, which stands on the East of the hilltop. It has the shape of a truncated pyramid and consists of 545 prism stones from a village called Fiscal, in tribute to every Republican person shot in this place until 1945.

- Landscape design- Recovering of native flora:

The landscaping project is the work of the city forest engineer Francisco Bergua. At the beginning the hills were the subject of an important work with the cleaning and clearing of vegetation in order to restore and reproduce the natural landscape environment. Some of the existing flora has been maintained and other representative species as holm oaks, gall oaks, over a hundred almond trees, eight hundred year old olives trees, walnut, ash and native shrubs have been incorporated, all typical of the ecosystem of the Hoya de Huesca. Aromatic bushes and colourful meadows stand out in this specially designed landscape. The project has included measures to prevent soil erosion and water resource use of rainwater in the land, highlighting complete drainage and use of bioengineering techniques to strengthen and stabilise existing slopes.

- In-house environmental management for sports and leisure:

The mountainous orography has been exploited to create a **natural sports circuit of 1,000 meters** which has been combining paths with multipurpose GYM devices. The park has been designed including space for athletes, walkers and students as it is close to the gardens and sports areas of the Park University. And it is not far to the facilities of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport and to the Campus of Huesca. In addition, two areas of stairways have been built, made of reinforced concrete, to save significant unevenness of a different network of access roads to the park. The park is also presented as a promenade with benches, fountains and a viewpoint on top of the west hill, resembling a wall with "windows", which offers a glimpse towards the mountains and the town. Regarding pavements and roads, a network of infrastructure has been built so that the entire surface of the park is accessible and allows different combinations in the attempt of respecting the topography of the area at its best. The park offers bicycle parking as well.

- Participation:

The project involved the collaboration of various citizen groups and local entities of the town of Huesca. A related highlight is the contribution of members of the Republican Circle "Manolín Abad" in the cemetery's recovery and the transformation of the hill in general. With the help of family's members and under the supervision of historians from the University of Zaragoza it has been researched and documented the killing of 545 Republicans in the area.

With regard to the sports circuit, it is important to stress the advice and cooperation of the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Sports of Huesca, the Board of Sports of the Town Hall and various sports clubs of Huesca.

- Sustainability:

This project is a turning point for the city thanks to the joint efforts of the city areas of environment and the new technologies: the first park of Huesca with an intelligent watering system. It has served to gradually start the remote management of irrigation in all the green areas of the town, helping to optimize the use of water for irrigation and sprinkling and to adjust to the actual needs of each plant species in the park. It is a **sustainable project** that has included an 8,500-liters water tank inside the monumental pyramid and a drip irrigation system has been installed. Thanks to the remote management of irrigation located inside the monument and directly connected to the central services of the City Council, of the radio repeaters placed near the Park University, and the support of two rain sensors, the centralized management to the nearby parks expands. Also contributed to the project's sustainability is the respect of the existing vegetation, the use of the removed vegetation by grinding and the restitution to the soil as an improvement, adding the careful selection of the species of trees, shrubs and native grasses.

- Viability: budget, economic support and governance

The works on the park have been financed by European Urban funds. The design and execution of works have been performed at a very low cost, 29 euros / m², in relation with a very positive repercussion for the town and its citizens.

- Results:

With its few months of life, the park has already become a symbol of the historical memories and a living space with people from all ages enjoying the park's corners: elders, students, families, athletes... It is a versatile, sustainable and accessible park for all citizens.