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Times and rythms of landscape. Del Prado-Recoletos-Castellana boulevards, in Madrid

Boulevards *del Prado*, *Recoletos* and *Castellana* constitute the more representative axis of power in Madrid. Its connotation in the city has been decisive throughout history by orienting northwards the urban growth with the highest economic significance. The extension of this axis in the second half of the 20th Century so proves it.

The goal of this work is a double one. On one hand, to think the concept of boulevards as unique spaces, supported by a recognizable environment of a peculiar significance, as well as the urban configuration acquired as a result of the political, urban and social attributions that have been assigned to them. On the other hand, to evidence the constant transformation of the built environment in order to maintain and reinforce the role of the most relevant axis of the city. To that effect, we have addressed the role played by urban agents responsible for the landscape that boulevards acquired over the years since their creation until the present time; the formal elements of their landscape, the free space and the built environment are analyzed, and the dynamics of the latter one mentioned is quantified over the years.

Public agents will be the high society and the economic elite, who will be responsible for the outline and modifications of boulevards, acknowledging in landscape the values that urban leaders attribute to it and, in a way, patrimonialize it as an expression of the ruling society, which possesses it and perpetuates it through its economic authority. And the conjunction of both powers, the political and the socio-economic power, furnish landscape with an identity and meaning that feeds back over the years.

On the other hand, the dynamic condition of the urban landscape forces to explore the times that determine the landscape continuity and changes, and also to discover, if the rhythms are the same in all boulevards. It will be seen, that there will be landscapes with a long rhythm, where permanencies impose themselves and keep their image for a longer period of time, and landscapes with a short rhythm, in which transformations reflect a forced collage that is interesting to decipher.

Given the present extension of the axis and our goal to go back to the beginning of its urbanization and occupancy four Centuries ago, we have decided to delimit the study to the section identified with Boulevards *del Prado*, *Recoletos* and with the area of the *Castellana* that goes all along the city's *Ensanche*.

I. METHODOLOGY

The work calls for a qualitative methodology, being in the limelight the cartographic document, which constitutes the best objective evidence to delimit the times of landscape. Cartography synthetizes the formal features of the urban landscape and allows to infer others, and its comparison across time identifies the permanencies and changes of the material elements it reflects. The documentary sources examined concurrently to the times of cartography will help outline the rhythms of landscape.

The analysis of historical cartography is mandatory. Out of this cartographic assembly, we have selected large scale blueprints that incorporate a higher level of detail

of the free and built space. We have examined Marcellino DeWit's blueprint, dated 1635 (scale 1/6.000) and compared it with the one that follows across time, that of Pedro Teixeira, dated 1656 (scale 1/1.629), with a rigorously geometric plant that uses blocks as a frame to draw a version of the buildings' volume. Tomás López's blueprint, dated 1785 (scale 1/5.600) attracts the attention due to the boulevard drawings and due to the identification of the blocks of the city's land registry, the *Visita General*, that allows to identify the estate owners. The plot plan of 1872-1874 (scale 1:2.000) allows to analyze with full detail and precision the boulevards' outline and the design and heights of the constructions. Already in the 20th Century, Madrid's City Council would publish an abundant series of plot plans (scale 1:2.000). Out of the cartographic documents herein reviewed, those with higher scale allow to quantify the dynamics of the built environment, and the consecutive comparison of the construction detail, enables to detect the permanencies and transformations across time. In this way, the exploitation of cartography becomes essential for the goal of this work.

Another set of informative material that is useful to corroborate the cartography and enrich the knowledge of the boulevards' landscapes is the images contributed by paintings and by the descriptions of those who go through them. They are representations that fix the perception of their authors and provide the subjective component that the landscape incorporates. Also taken into account is the official documentation of the government, who gives legitimacy to their performance and facilitates the intervention of private agents. Finally, the bibliography of professionals in different fields is reviewed (history, art history, architecture, urbanism and geography), which address directly or indirectly the scope of study.

In short, the times and rhythms of the outlined landscapes are presented in six stages, once the cartography, other materials and documents of interest have been reviewed. During the description of each stage, we will highlight the role of the main agents involved in the production and reproduction of the landscape's formal elements, and in the features and identity they acquire. The study ends with the analysis of the built landscape in the present time, which synthesizes the process dynamics.

II. THE BEGINNINGS OF URBANIZATION AND OCCUPATION OF LOS PRADOS

The natural characteristics of the soil and the economic advantage of what used to be a thalweg running

North-South, located on the Eastern side of Madrid, are the protagonists of the formal elements of landscape in early times. The code of 1202 describes a thalweg occupied by wastelands, barren lands and crop soils of the village's community territories.

The first testimony that identifies with the name of "Prado" the site is given in 1548 by Pedro de Medina, who talks about the humidity in the soil, the plantation of trees and the luxurious Monastery of *San Gerónimo*, where Court Sessions and Oaths for Princes were taken, which gives the name to the meadow, and favors it as a place visited by the high society. After the royal decision to establish the official and representative entrance of the village at the *Puerta de Alcalá*, to the North, followed the interventions to standardize the soil and provide it with more trees, as proven by the frequent travelers at the end of the Century (Enrique Cock, Diego Cuelvis or Camilo Borghese), by including the *Prado* among the most famous places in Madrid.

Continuing with the restoration plan for the village under a Decree dated 1610, one project is conceived: the widening of the *Prado de San Gerónimo* and its extension northwards, which will be the *Prado de los Agustinos Recoletos*, name given by the convent located in the site. Part of the estates that interrupt the new outlines are confiscated, the soils are leveled up and evened out, roads are standardized and limited by grove, and the irrigation channel that drives the water for garden beds and for fountains supply installed in both meadows is covered. And it is already given away the presence of the dependencies of the *Buen Retiro* in lands of the Monastery of *San Gerónimo*, and estates acquired by the Crown to the nobility.

III. STANDSTILL OF URBANIZATION AND CHANGES IN THE OWNERSHIP OF BUILT ENVIRONMENT (1656-1762)

The lack of big scale cartography that enables the visualization in detail the characteristics of the public space takes us to resort to pictorial images and travelers' descriptions visiting the city. The *Prado de San Gerónimo* is represented around 1680 by Jan van Kessel, as a strolling place flanked by lines of trees, and the descriptions of travelers (François Bertaut, Antoine Brunel, Madame d'Aulnoy, Albert Jouvin) add interesting aspects. They describe the meadows as "boulevards" and highlight the fountains, the *Buen Retiro* Palace, the beautiful country-houses and the quality of the strollers. The comparison between 1656 and 1762 contributes with interesting re-

sults of what happened in the lots and in the estates. The nobility and the individuals have less prominence whereas the Church is reinforced in both boulevards.

IV. THE DEFINITIVE URBANIZATION OF LOS PRADOS, THE FIRST TRANSFORMATION OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND THE BEGINNING OF THE CASTELLANA (1762-1874)

The illustrated reform, entrusted to José de Hermsilla in 1764 to honor and dignify the sector will reaffirm in the future its condition of boulevard. The project confers special emphasis to the *Prado de San Gerónimo*, which as entrance hall to the *Buen Retiro* Palace will receive the name of *Salón del Prado*. It is widened thanks to the palace lands and the ornamental fountains of *Cibeles*, *Apolo* and *Neptune* are put in place. The *Prado de Atocha* is also widened, continuing southwards, confiscating private estates and the brook is standardized, canalized and hidden; sewage and cobblestone works are carried out, trees are planted and the Botanic Garden and the Cabinet of Natural Sciences is installed, which would go all along the Eastern façade. Testimonies of travelers of the second half of the 18th Century (William Dalrymple, François Peyron, Jean François de Bourgoing, Joseph Townsend, Christian August Fischer) and first half of the 19th Century (Richard Ford, Théophile Gautier, Alexandre Dumas, Jean-Charles Davillier) agree on the quality of the refurbishments and the success and fame that these meadows acquired as a strolling place. This can also be seen in the art works of Fernando Brambilla in 1830 and José María Avrial y Flores in 1836.

Throughout the 19th Century the built environment will bear a huge transformation as an answer to the upcoming political, urban and social changes. The consolidation of the liberal, fascist State, the process, and the new social and economic elites burst in the construction business. On the left flank, the alignment plan outlined in 1846 enables to open streets inside the blocks, favoring the construction of new buildings, some of them of an urban nature, with six storeys. The new landscape is highlighted by mentioning the long chain of small palaces, mansions, theaters and new buildings. On the Eastern flank, in public, dis-endowed lands, streets are outlined and lots are sold to the emerging ennobled bourgeoisie, that builds palaces surrounded by wide gardens. Also the State will build emblematic buildings, such as the *Casa de la Moneda*, the *Biblioteca Nacional* and the *Museo Arqueológico*.

When the urban widening plan called *Plan de Ensanche* became effective in 1860, more urbanized space is added to the city; the old boulevards are extended northwards, calling the new sector *Paseo de la Castellana*. In 1874 the outline and planting of trees can be seen, and the constructions, although scarce, are palaces with gardens and small-sized hotels for single families. For Jean-Charles Davillier, who walked the boulevard through in 1862, it is the fashion boulevard and its constructions will make it become an elegant neighborhood, such as the *Champs-Élysées* or the West-End in London.

V. THE SECOND TRANSFORMATION OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF OLD BOULEVARDS AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE CASTELLANA (1874-1955)

The country will endure in this stage important changes in the political, economic, social and cultural environment, which will determine the scenario of operations for urban agents and will make possible the second transformation of the built environment of old boulevards, and the culmination of the *Castellana*. Public agents build buildings according to the State's new functions, interested in eliminating their 19th-century past and show an air of progress. Private agents, a social reinforced elite in the real estate business, build up high quality residential buildings for rental, and equipment for the new urban bourgeoisie.

In 1955 the *Castellana* appears already divided in lots and to a great extent built up. The demand of high quality estates finds here its best place. It will be big palaces with gardens, small palaces and small-sized hotels for single families, as well as buildings for many families of up to eight storeys with luxury apartments. Also buildings for public service and for the administration are built. Since the beginning of the century, the *Castellana* is promoted in magazines of that time as a place for strolling for the wealthy society.

VI. THE THIRD TRANSFORMATION OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF OLD BOULEVARDS AND THE FIRST ONE OF THE CASTELLANA (1955-1983)

In the thirty years between 1955 and 1983, the renewal of the built environment of all boulevards will be intense. The impact of the "demolish operation" of the

1960s and 1970s as a consequence of the economic “developmentalism”, made an impression all over the city and in boulevards as well. Most lasting heritage buildings are demolished and are replaced by others for public service. The *Paseo de la Castellana* boulevard is the one suffering the biggest transformation. The Spanish urban planning, known as the *Planes Generales de Ordenación* of 1943 and 1963 promote the extension of the *Castellana* beyond the *Ensanche*, the so called *Avenida del Generalísimo*, to convert it in the future business and financial axis of the city, fostering the transformation of the *Castellana* boulevard. Building demolition becomes easier, even if of good quality and with little antiquity, to adapt its built environment to the new uses that imposes the developmentalism. In this way, palaces and hotels that made the boulevard famous disappear. The use of the boulevard for public services made the free space dependent on the motorized traffic and the quality of city life is lost.

VII. THE PROTECTION OF BUILT HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPE OF BOULEVARDS IN 2016 (1983-2016)

The renewed interventions of the previous period proved the irreparable loss of notable architectures. At the end of the 70's, in the past century, cultural institutions started to speak up to safeguard the heritage, which became effective with the urban planning known as *Plan General de Ordenación* of 1983. This plan stops the demolition of buildings indiscriminately, and favors the rehabilitation, refurbishing and maintenance of facades, forcing the new constructions on existing plots to be respectful of the environment, in height as well as in style. As a consequence, the built landscape of boulevards in 2016 is almost the same as the one of 1983.

At the end of the last century, the City Council intends to act on the public space of the *Recoletos* and the *Prado* boulevards, extremely altered by the damaging effects of the excessive motorized circulation. The *Plan General de Ordenación* of Madrid in 1997 promoted a special urban planning for the *Recoletos-Prado* boulevard. The idea was to reinforce its present urban profile as a cultural core by means of a set of operations aimed at improv-

ing the environmental conditions and the requalification of the existing degraded areas. The project, pending of approval, won't be accepted by some groups of citizens who, although they acknowledge the need to act to reconvert it in a space to enjoy strolling, they sustain that it destroys the historic boulevard, and at the same time, they denounce the cut down of trees.

VIII A FINAL REFLECTION

It can be affirmed that the axis *Prado-Recoletos-Castellana* has been until 1975 the urban area that more transformations it has had in the four hundred years of the history of the city. Many have been the circumstances that have incurred in boulevards since the very beginning to strengthen their role as the most representative power axis of the city. But, if the functional dynamics was unavoidable, the way they did it was not. The indiscriminate destruction of a built heritage, that far from showing decline, presented robustness and architectonic quality, shows how the economic interests prevailed on the protection of heritage values in the behavior of the responsible agents, when it has been demonstrated that both of them can be compatible.

Urban agents responsible for the disappearance of boulevards' built heritage, the administration and urban elites acted with an interested, short-term, unwise vision when deciding to substitute it by another one dull and repetitive, common to those times, and whose result was only to take away its identity. Only the public space, the most lasting element of urban landscape resisted the aggressions, and today, although diminished the function of an entertaining boulevard due to the massive presence of motorized traffic, continues to be the biggest exponent of the identity and singularity of landscape.

The dynamic analysis of the built environment has brought to light that although the same times have been set forth for all boulevards, the rhythm detail of each one shows dissimilarities in intensity and results. This confirms that there are landscapes with a long rhythm, where permanencies impose themselves, keep their image for a longer time, and exhibit easily their history, and landscapes with a short rhythm, of violent mutations that rapidly alter their image and reduce their memory.