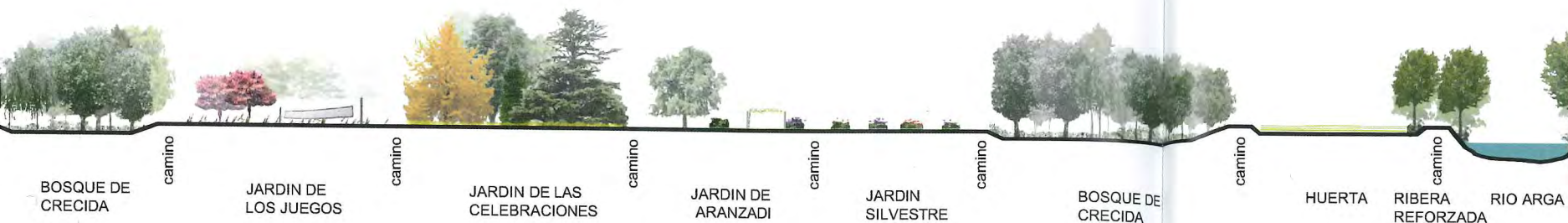


AldayJover links public space with ecological aims. The landscape architects pre-  
 ed on the fertile land in a meander slope of the Abra River. During high water,  
 park.



Elizabeth K. Meyer

# River Park

## as a Place of Movement

The design of Aranzadi Park in Pamplona, Spain interrogates its function as both green infrastructure and socio-ecological, rhythmic public space.

Aranzadi Park, the third riverscape designed by AldayJover, is predicated on criteria for urban public space and ecological design that were unheard of a few decades ago. Public space in Spain was still firmly rooted in the *placa dura*, or hybrid park-plaza, created on the marginal, vague terrain of abandoned post-industrial sites or transportation right-of-ways. Ecological performance criteria dictated that designers return as much of the floodplain as possible to a flood-prone river, bound tightly by walls and channelization. Both the formal type and performance criteria associated with these conceptions of public space and ecology, respectively, have been challenged and critiqued recently. Few projects, however, have suggested how contemporary debates about public space – from writings by Hannah Arendt, Richard Sennett, David Harvey, and Henri Lefebvre to Michael Sorkin, Rosalyn Deutsche, Nancy Frasier, Don Mitchell, and Nicholas Purcell – are entangled with these changing conceptions of the bio-physical world and its inextricability from human agency and action. Aranzadi Park is a modest yet rigorous exploration of the difference between designing a park as green infrastructure and as a public space that allows both citizens and the river to

appear together in a realm that is always contested, negotiated, and subject to appropriation. Aranzadi Park's flooded forest and concrete bridge abutments/picnic event spaces prompt us to consider the possibility that the public realm is a lived space that is socio-ecological, not just social and political. The river as well as the gardener exist for one another within the park as urban characters, as citizens.

Aranzadi Park is the most recent in the series of these river parks (Zuera, 2001, see *Topos* 44; Zaragoza, 2008; and Pamplona, 2013) designed by AldayJover. It extends their understanding of the material, spatial, political, and social aspects of public space that are appreciated by citizens and deployed by architects of post-Franco Spain to a new polity, the socio-ecological realm. In Pamplona, the visual experience of the Abra River was absent from the experience of the parcel that was to become Aranzadi Park except during floods, because of its channelization. Some designers might have responded to this by widening the floodplain and lowering the raised river embankment along the meander that was to become a new park. But AldayJover recognized that the raised strip of land along the inner curve of the meander was the most fertile land in the floodplain and already functioned as a socio-ecological



ARANZADI PARK, PAMPLONA, SPAIN

Client: Pamplona Municipality

Landscape architects: AldayJover; Iñaki Alday, Margarita Jover with a interdisciplinary team of architects, landscape architects, agricultural and hydraulic engineers, civil and construction engineers, biologists and local farmers

Completion: 2013

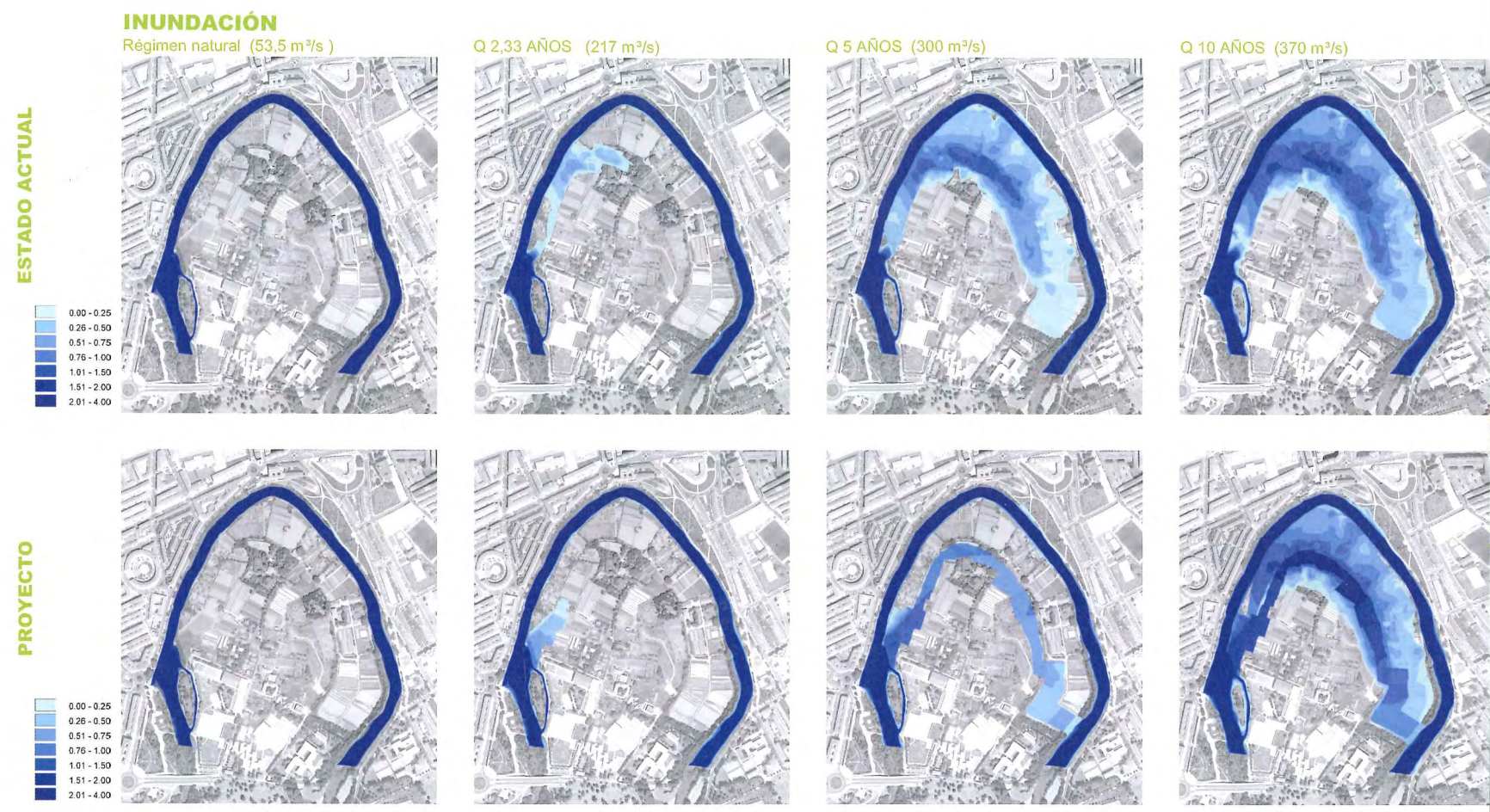
Area: 20 hectares

Cost: 6.6 million euros

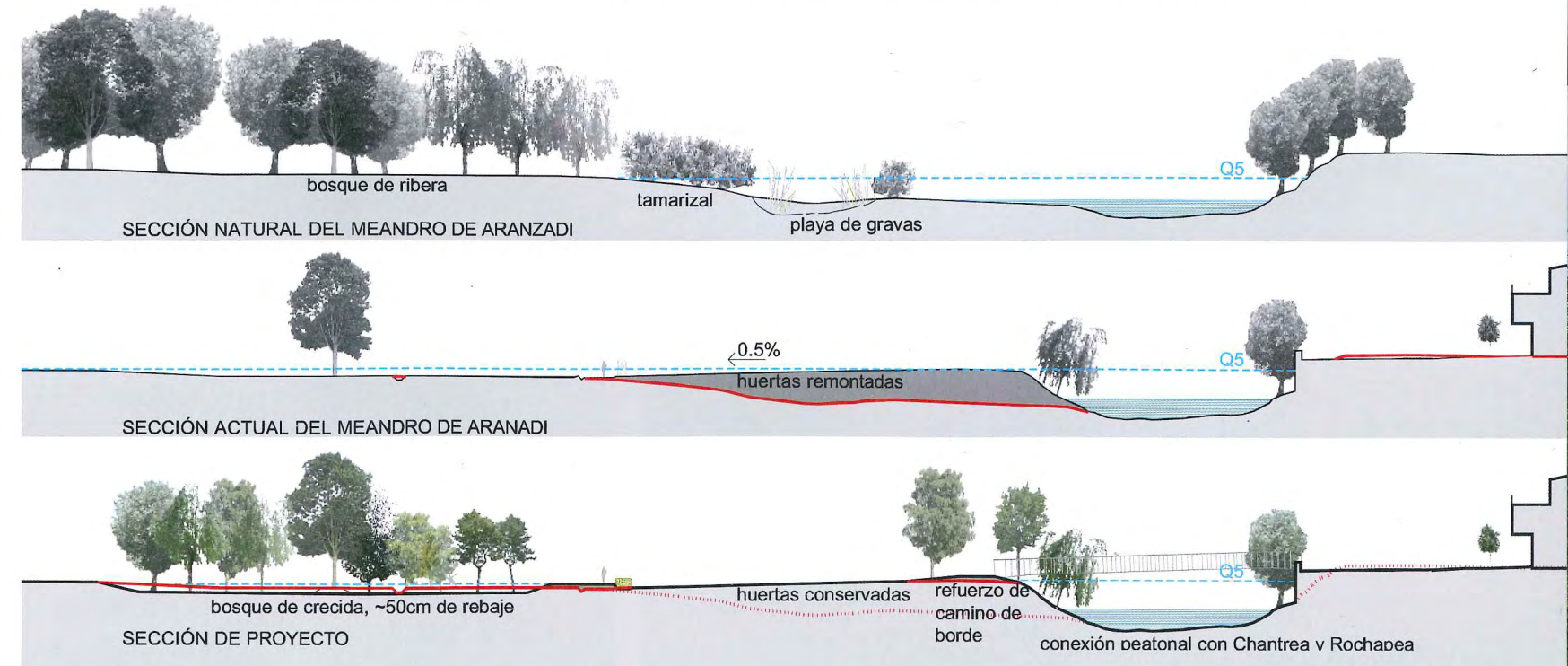




Alfonsi Alday, Margarita Jover with a interdisciplinary team of architects, hydraulic engineers, civil and construction engineers, biologists and local farmers



AldayJover incorporated different flood scenarios as basic parameters for the park design, assuming the natural dynamics of the river are also part of the dynamics of public space. The flood is understood as material for creation of space.





The meander of Aranzadi Park is a place outside the walls of medieval Pamplona in the contemporary city. Over centuries, the agricultural tradition has been preserved. For the new park, the lower parts of the meander have been transformed into a floodable forest.

space. It has long supported a series of small production gardens, leased and used by community members. The fertility of this zone from years of topsoil transported downstream and deposited on the slower-moving banks of the river has historically attracted gardeners and farmers from the outskirts of the city. To give this space over to the river would have erased centuries of negotiation between river and city, and between the processes of erosion, deposition, cultivation, and propagation.

Instead, the river was welcomed into the park on its interior – as opposed to urbanized – garden edge. The original river meander’s alignment remained the same and was paired with its double, a C-shaped subtractive earthwork planted with a gridded forest of mesic trees. When the river swells from intense rains, water spills and seeps into the sunken forest, protecting the gardens along the river’s edge as well as the existing greenhouses and other structures on higher ground. We might consider this introduction of the river into the heart of the park akin to Sennett’s recognition scene or Arendt’s space of appearance. But here it is both citizen and river that appear and are recognized. Our sense of who, and what, has a right to the city – in Lefebvre’s, Harvey’s, and Mitchell’s sense of the phrase – is extended from human beings to a new character, the non-human river. The ground is that which is shared, what is in common. It is a contested space, like all urban public spaces that have not been tamed by over-regulation and private interests. Sometimes wet, sometimes dry, Aranzadi Park is a place of movement and lingering for water and people in varying degrees and in contrapuntal rhythms of everyday social life, work routines, planting and harvesting schedules, and fluctuating river levels. The material insertions into the park, such as the bridge abutments that double function as picnic tables and benches, are key to understanding that the social and the ecological

are not dichotomies. These details translate a conceptual proposition into an entanglement, a lived space that includes social programming in the same zone as bio-physical programming; together they create a new typology of public space.

This acceptance of the publics that are accommodated through spatial negotiation in the meander park is expressed in both plan and section at a micro-topographical scale. The groundwork creates a social space for picnicking and walking under a grove, next to the productive gardens. The metrics for the cut are calibrated to several socio-ecological criteria – the gait of a person moving; the dimensions of a body sitting, eating, and lounging; and the capacity of the park to be part of the river during peak floods. The tectonic structure of the pedestrian bridges is scaled to the human body, as well as the hydraulic forces of water and detritus carried with floodwaters, such as fallen trees. The scalar and material concerns for the micro-topographic aspects of park design are also evident in the foundations of the new Agricultural Interpretation Center and its siting within a band of community gardens along the northern edge of the meander park. Sited near the center of the meander’s convex bend – its slip-off slope – and occupying one of the garden plots, this complex of four new structures clusters around a small historic building and stone wall. New and old exist in close proximity, evidence of the long history of occupying this edge between city and river. Alday Jover sited the new structures – classrooms, offices, and a room for assembly – on a terrace raised above the 25-year flood level. Yet they detailed the terrace walls to yield to, and accommodate, the flow of water and air. Deep circular perforations – truncated cone-shaped apertures – welcome water, air, and energy underneath the light, greenhouse-like enclosing structures. What should be solid and obdurate is a web of air, water, energy, and matter. Like the double-functioning flooded forest, the Agricultural Interpretation Center’s foundation and ventilation system entangles the





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Several paths lead through the park and the gardens. The park will be a permanent, changing landscape due to natural dynamics of the river. During dry periods, the fundament of a bridge that also contains concrete tables and benches can be used as a picnic area.



rhythms of social and hydrological flows, the pulses of socio-ecological events. Moreover, those rhythms inform details that confound expectation and afford clues to design intentions as well as socio-ecological performance.

The park's significance resides in the construction and perception of nature as a means to reconceive the public realm as more than social. Collectively, the parallel, striated concrete walls, varied in height relative to their function – structural support, plinth, table, and seat – offer new insights into what the public in public space might be. Our relationships to each other as citizens occur within specific environmental stresses – drought, flood, sea-level rise, or species decline, as well as within particular ecosystems and watersheds. Our relationships to one another as citizens are mediated by the practices of everyday life that affect our health and well-being – where we grow and buy our food; whether we are walkers, cyclists, or drivers; and how and what kind of interaction we have with the production and consumption of nature. Watersheds, riverscapes, and waterhoods are supplanting neighborhoods and cities as the territories that bind us together as a social polity. Hence our social relationships increasingly implicate the political and ecological at multiple scales. Aranzadi Park responds by speculating through design about new ways of construing, perceiving, and living in the public realm as a space of appearance for that which we share, the interdependent rhythms of human and non-human life within a contested, fluctuating realm of wetness along the margins of settlements and waterways. This inscription of social space into constructed nature – and this deployment of precise material and tectonic tactics in pursuit of a cultural solution to what others deem environmental problems, disturbances, and nuisances – is a testament to the value of the designer and the significance of Aranzadi Park.