Six micro-interventions in the AMB Metropolitan Parks Network

41 parks in the metropolitan area of Barcelona

1. Condition prior to works

The metropolitan parks network (or XPM per its Catalan acronym) is comprised of 41 parks distributed in 28 municipalities of the region managed by the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB), with a total area of over 225 hectares. The AMB, made up of a multidisciplinary team of experts and in agreement with the metropolitan city councils, is in charge of its comprehensive management: plants and vegetation, furniture, facilities, pavements and constructed items, as well as promoting the parks by organising activities and educational events. In parallel, it also develops and executes an extremely varied range of projects to improve the parks, always with the purpose of increasing their quality as much as possible.

2. Purpose of the works

Metropolitan parks are excellent public spaces located in urban centres or adjacent to them, with an increasing use in recent years. Neighbours head to the parks to stroll, meet up with friends, rest, walk their dogs, exercise… in short, many different outdoor activities. A direct consequence of this increasing use is their greater deterioration and the need to constantly improve them. For all these reasons, we could describe parks as living and dynamic spaces that are subject to changes.

To decide which improvement projects should be carried out, the AMB experts use two main indicators as a guide:
– Incidents resulting from the strict quality controls conducted during park inspections.
– Municipal requests made by city councils in response to neighbours’ requirements.

3. Description of the work

The aim of the architectural proposals is to improve substantially both the physical structure and the different uses carried out in parks, as they are important public spaces of the municipalities’ green heritage as well as true open-air recreational sites for inhabitants. The strategy followed in striving to improve the parks avoids the idea of large global projects, which are much more costly and aggressive to the environment in which they are located, opting instead for micro-interventions.

These works consist of small detailed actions, limited in their extension, with reduced investments and integrated into the pre-existing structure and the natural environment in which they are located. These actions aim to comply with the economy of means, adaptation to places and their resources, recycling of materials, and building over that which is already constructed. Above all, the main objective is to provide a solution to the social needs of the surrounding area and thus improve people’s quality of life.

4. Assessment

An important aspect to highlight in these micro-interventions is their direct relationship between the drafting/implementation and the social transfer and collective participation, fostering the development of activities and educational events around them. One example of this is the construction of a butterfly garden in which primary-school students from neighbouring schools carry out all the planting of species, the monitoring of the invertebrates and the maintenance of the kitchen garden.

Equally important is the participation process that some neighbours perform in them, such as in the construction of a large recreational area for dogs in La Muntanyeta Park in Sant Boi de Llobregat—a project far from those commonly known as pipican (canine pee-pee spots)–, whose design is a huge enclosure measuring some 2500 m2. Both the location and its features were agreed upon among experts and the dog-owners neighbours’ association.