

Z.U.P. Project Bayonne

(Basses Pyrénées, France)

Marcel Breuer,

Chief Architect

Robert F. Gatje, coll.

B.E.R.U., Planners

The Town and Its Needs

Bayonne is a city of 40,000 population in southwestern France. It stands at the confluence of the Adour and Nive Rivers, about six kilometers (four miles) from the Atlantic Coast. The crest of the Pyrenees are about 35 kms (20 miles) distant and stands in prominent silhouette on the southeastern horizon. The town stands athwart the main north-south route (N 10) serving tourists from the continent enroute to the southern seaside resorts of France and Spain. Steel has always been the principal industry of Bayonne, which also serves as the commercial and marketing capital of the Pays Basque. Historically, Bayonne has been defined by its river banks and walled fortifications—hard edges which have finally served to restrict its natural growth as an urban center.

The Z.U.P. Principle

Legislation establishing the Z.U.P. program dates from 1952 and seeks in general to control urban sprawl by giving to municipal authorities 1) powers of condemnation; 2) traffic control; 3) financial support; 4) government backing for urban planning. In return, urban expansion should be organized in definite areas according to an established and tightly controlled program. The vital step in any such organization is the selection of the Chief Architect, who is responsible for establishing the site plan and controlling the architectural character. It was at this point that the city of Bayonne decided that the site and problem it had to offer were worthy of the attention of an architect of international standing, and chose Marcel Breuer.

The Site

The land set aside by the town for its Z.U.P. consists of 133 hectares (332 acres). Along its northern edge is a departmental road (N 201), which runs along the crest of the low hills that make up the site. To the west is a railroad and the edge of the city itself, a district known as St. Esprit and Ste. Croix; to the east, a gentle ravine which has been chosen as the location of the contemplated Autoroute Paris-Hendaye; and to the south, the river with its background of hills and mountains.

In terms of general appearance and orientation, the site provides a series of beautifully wooded hillsides which slope generally to a southern view: there is no conflict between sun and view. Practically in the center, a wooded mound forms a secondary focus of attention.

The site also presents several problems: areas in which the slope is so steep that it either prohibits building or severely limits its form; terrain along the river which has a high water-table and is subject to periodic flooding; difficult foundations.

The Solution - Organization of Buildings

Along the ridge which defines the northern and eastern boundaries of the site, Breuer has planned a series of tall apartment buildings (14 stories), which form a continuously curving line following the natural contours. It will be possible to house about 3,000 family units, 85% of the population planned for the Z.U.P., in these buildings which benefit most directly in their commanding position from the view to the south. By concentrating a major proportion of the building volume on land where bearing substrata is best and high rise is appropriate, a degree of building economy demanded by the program is achieved. The town fathers have also recognized in the strong architectural line formed by these buildings a kinship to the urban forms of old Bayonne, its walls and citadel, something that will be apparent to anyone studying the relationship between the two, even in plan.

The central idea of the site plan might be thought of as a series of spaces within spaces—working from the overall enclosure provided by the tall structures on its crest, one finds at the center of the site a more geometric zone of four-storey apartment buildings in a parabolic grouping. These in turn surround a formal square at the core of the group, created by public buildings—commercial, administrative, and cultural. More casual commerce—the day-to-day shops and services—will be strung along arcaded walks at the base of the high-rise apartments.

Public schools will form their own enclosed groups at six points in the greenward left between the project's center group and its perimeter. Playfields and parkland take will up most of the flatland

south of the hills, where a group of artificial lake-reservoirs are planned to control the periodic flooding caused by high site runoff during heavy rains.

The solution - Organization of Circulation

The conception of high buildings along the periphery made it possible to hold roads within the site to a relative minimum—disturbing less the pedestrian life of the interior. The site will be completely ringed by a series of mostly existing access and bypass roads, with direct connection to the parking fields in the shadow of the tall building line at the perimeter. An interior loop which serves the center connects to the outer loop at four points, to the north, east, west and south. Otherwise, the land is left open green space, crossed only by pedestrian paths.

The Solution - Architectural Character

Certain principles have been developed in the course of discussions between the architect, his group, and the town. One is the continuation of a tradition of shopping arcades, established in the fabric of old Bayonne; the other is a plan to utilize industrialized building techniques wherever possible. The architecture employs elements of precast concrete, with deep-set windows and cast-in closets along the exterior wall: a three-dimensional façade with a strong play of sun and shadow.

Elevation-Perspective of tall buildings





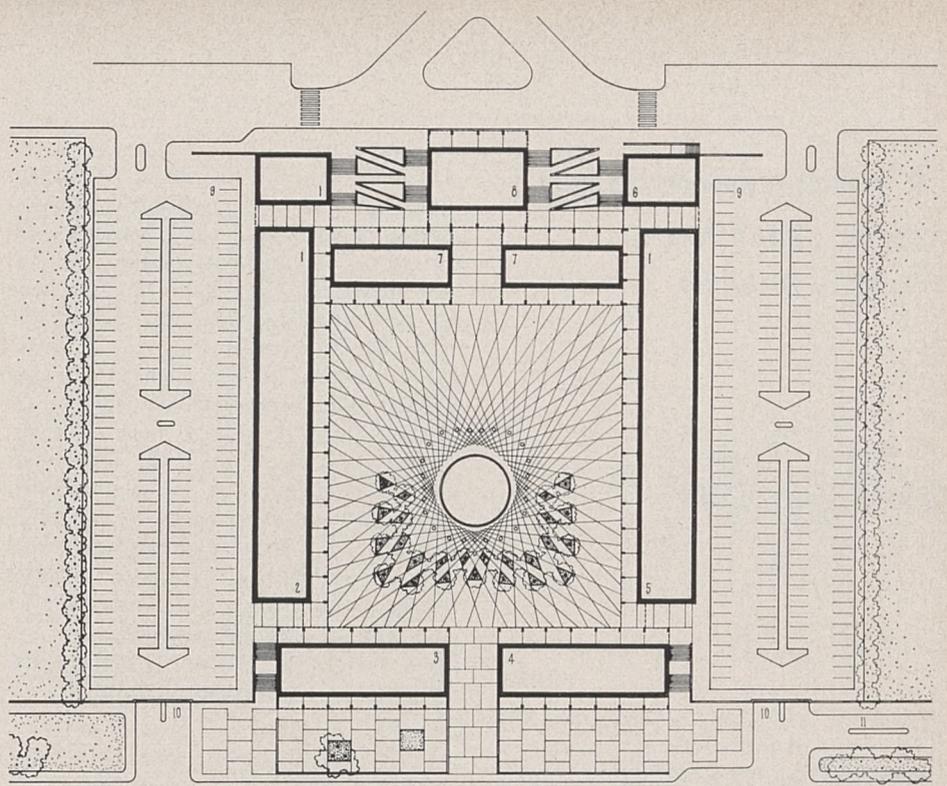
situation-plan



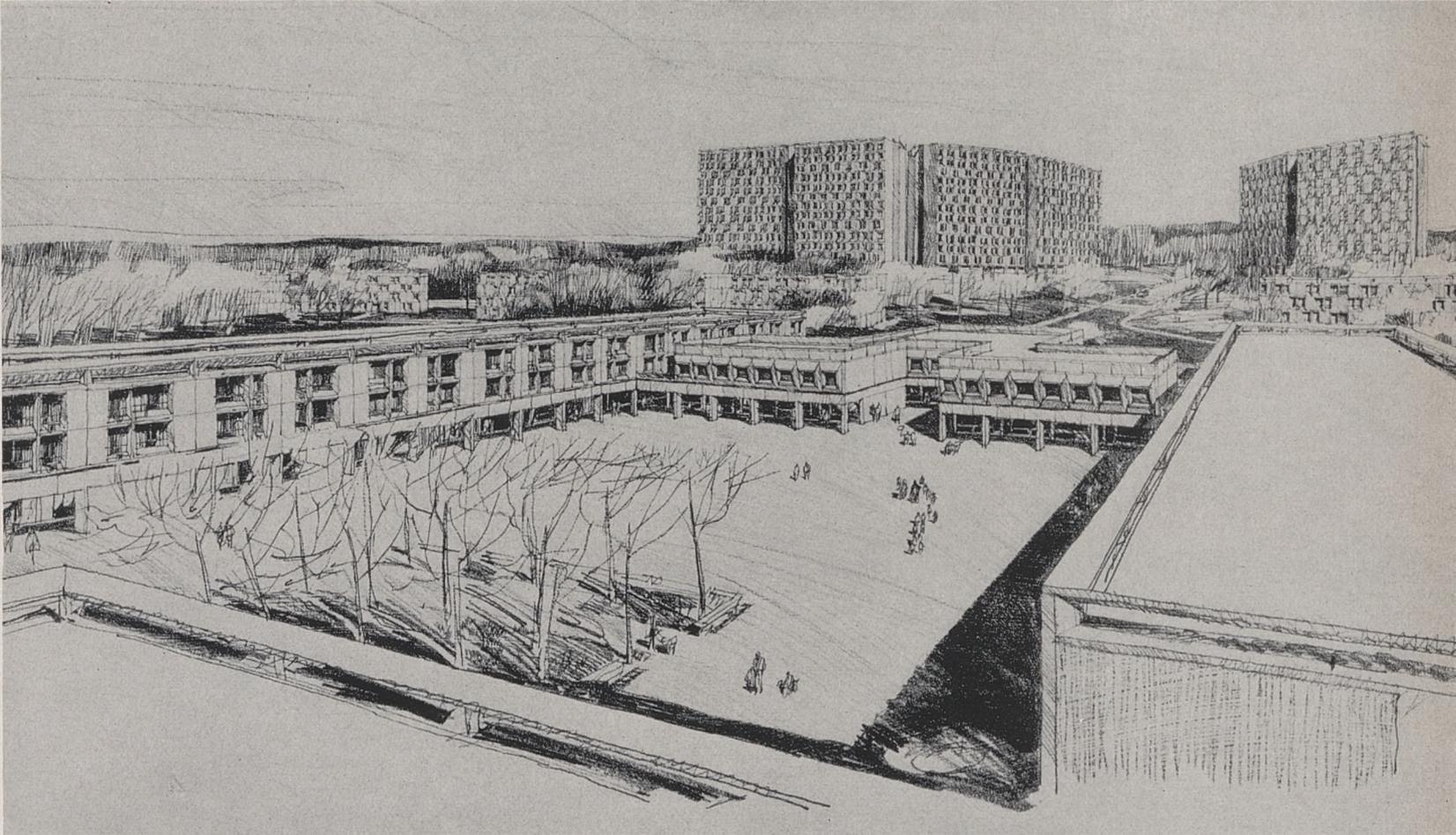
sketch showing East View

Diagrammatic Plan of the Center

1. Shops plus two stories of apartments above
2. Post Office and Police Station plus apartments above
3. Two-story Municipal Building above Nursery with adjacent Playground
4. Youth Center and Theatre
5. Hotel
6. Shops plus two-story Medical-Dental Center above
7. Shops plus offices above
8. Two-story Department Store
9. Open Parking Field above Underground Garage
10. Entry to Underground Garage and Delivery Docks
11. Service Station



Perspective of City Center



Diagrammatic section through the Center looking east.

