

CARLOS PELLEGRINO INTERNATIONAL AWARD

2nd edition of the International award on landscape for students

A brief historical review of the origins and evolution of the Benito Solari Park

The city "of the Salto Oriental" is located on the banks of the Uruguay River, surrounded, almost like an island, by the Sauzal and Ceibal streams. The Salto Grande dam, which connects Uruguay to Argentina, forms a vast lake of great beauty.

Origins. Its geographical location on the border with Argentina and its rocky areas formed an enclave inhabited since prehistoric times, a place of intersections of roads and passages.

Landscapes. Salto is surrounded by fertile fields suitable for agriculture, with fruit trees and vegetables: the dark soil is ideal for vines and oranges. Its natural meadows, ideal for livestock breeding, were the ideal terrain for the location of the ancient Jesuit settlements.

Culture. Salto is a land where different cultures have come together. Among all, the Guaraní aborigines, who still mark their presence with their language, their customs and their people. Mate, Pororo, Mburucuyá, Ingá, Guaviyú, Ibirapita, Itu, Arapey and others. Much later came European immigrants: first Spanish, then Italians and then from other countries.

Salto was a fluvial port, connected to Buenos Aires and from where the products of the country were exported to Europe. In the mid-nineteenth century, this commercial bond created a very Europeanized society, like that of Montevideo or Buenos Aires.

Benito Solari. With Genoese origins (Italy), he settled in Salto with a brother and dedicated himself to the importation and exportation of fruit. He was an important agricultural producer who distinguished himself in livestock breeding and citrus production. This last activity has given him international fame.

From his political and social position and his knowledge of several European cities he conceived the idea of giving the city of Salto a public park like the ones he had known in Europe. A place to find peace, enjoy nature and that everyone can perceive as its own.

Blandengues. It is the private country villa (1894-1923) at the origin of the current Solari Park. The park was donated to the city of Salto, when it was almost thirty years old. The land was purchased by annexing two plots of land in 1894. There, Benito Solari planted orange and mandarin trees. Where today is the garden of Silva Delgado there was an orange grove with sweet oranges, "criollas" and other more sophisticated and refined varieties, less common. A road with stones bottom crossed a cypress and eucalyptus forest, then introduced into Uruguay for their wood.

Topography of the place. It was characterized by slopes alternating with flat terrain, interspersed with sandstone terraces that define very different landscapes.

The main entrance was from an iron gate supported by a long wall of stones and bricks. A natural subsidence has allowed Benito Solari to create a pond with an island in the middle with bamboo collections.

It was also the family garden, full of flowers and greenery, with collections of roses brought from France (from the house of Vilmorin). Peacocks, geese and guinea fowls populated the garden.

Public park. Benito Solari died on June 3, 1923 of a fulminant disease, at a time when there were very few medical resources. A few hours before his death he expresses his will to give his beloved land to the people of Salto, to thank, in this way, a city that has welcomed him with hospitable generosity.

He made an official donation that legally conditions the fact that the use of the park must always be public. A necessary requirement that, if not respected, cancels the donation.

Inauguration. On December 22, 1924, at 6 pm, Benito Solari Park was opened and inaugurated.

A white Carrara marble sculpture "La Venere del Bagno" is installed on a small, purpose-built island, a replica of the original found in the Vatican Museums.

The Park has become, since its inauguration, the favorite place of the inhabitants of Salto, people of all ages and social conditions. Its history is very dense with social events that go through different generations. For many decades it was the only public walk in Salto. Sports, cinema, popular and classical music festivals have been organized. "Retretas" evenings were a ritual.

Social life. A dance floor, between cypress and pine trees, on Sunday afternoons, was a must. Games for children, skating parties, excursions on lake boats, around the island, high school end-of-year parties, poetry competitions.

Abandonment. In the seventies of the '900 it remains closed for two years: a heavy chain tied with a padlock closed the garden.

The park had been officially abandoned and damaged by arson. In the northern part, an empty area showed a looted landscape. A sports karting track, unfinished, abandoned, outraged the landscape. The subsoil had been damaged.

Spanish discovery garden. At the time, Leandro Silva Delgado (born in Salto) lived in Spain. He had restored the Royal Botanical Garden of Madrid. He was considered an eminence in landscape studies. He was then asked to intervene in the park. His talent has been recognized and appreciated.

Silva Delgado was struck by this deep wound, by this sad empty space. Originally it had been an orange plantation. He decided then that he would create a garden in its finest details.

The year 1992 is approaching in which there will be the commemoration of the five hundred years of the discovery of America. It was felt that Spain could share a project that included the beneficial species introduced into America in its colonial history: olive, vine, orange, among others.

The project sponsored by Spain was realized in the park: "The Spanish garden of discovery" designed by Leandro Silva Delgado.

The Chart of Salto and landscape recommendations. The first Iberian-American Landscape Meeting was held in Salto in May 1988, organized by the Comisión Honoraria del Patrimonio de



Salto, together with Carlos Pellegrino and Leandro Silva Delgado. Participants: Roberto Burle Marx and Rosa Grena Kliass from Brazil, Ana Maria Demo Fiore and Pradial Gutiérrez from Argentina, Marta Cecilia Fajardo and Alfonso Leiva from Colombia, Leandro Silva Delgado from Spain/Uruguay, Carlos Contreras Pagés from Mexico, John Stoddard from Venezuela and Carlos Pellegrino.

They remained in Salto for almost a week. They met every day on the last floor of the University, to define a useful method to enhance the green spaces with a multidisciplinary perspective.

They tried to establish and define the study of the landscape. A method that enhances green spaces, guided by multidisciplinary perspectives. They produced a document, the "Chart of Salto" which defines the guidelines to be adopted in landscape design. A fundamental approach, whose key concepts would have protected the landscape of America. In that week they visited the park and also produced the "Recommendations for the city", which include the Park: "We consider the park of great importance, with particular reference to the Spanish Garden of the Discovery". It is recommended to integrate the park with the landscape architectural complex of Las Nubes, which not only has great historical-cultural value and is recognized, but also represents a potential green area that should be integrated into the landscape project of the El Sauzal Linear Park".

Recovery of the B. Solari Park. In 2016, the University of Milan (Italy), together with the University of the Republic (Uruguay), the Intendencia de Salto and the Comisión de Patrimonio Histórico de Salto elaborated the study for the "Recovery of the Solari Park". To this end, the Architect Fabiola Cerutti came to Salto and stayed there for the months of September, October and November, working on the realization of her thesis for the Master in Landscape Architecture. A project of great value that involved the departmental authorities, the institutions that organized this study and that the Comisión del Barrio Parque Solari considers a clear and feasible proposal.

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