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TWO MAIN ISSUES IN THE TRANSFOR- MATION OF ANATOLE FRANCE SQUARE, TOURS

Anatole France Square, at the top of the rue Nationale, Tours' main central artery where it meets the Loire, is an important element in Tours's urban structure. The analysis of its position and significance (place and space) identified two main issues of crucial importance for its renovation and transformation.

ANATOLE FRANCE SQUARE AS A DIVERSE AND UNIQUE URBAN SPACE

A theatre of diverse and varied urban elements, this northern end of the rue Nationale offers potentially a rich range of visual experiences. There is variation in elevation, architectural style, street furniture, land-use density etc., a rich diversity. If these potentials could be exploited and developed, such a space could represent a substantial asset for the central urban perimeter. However, at the present time this contribution is lacking. The square has no common core where all its parts intersect. There is not even a minimal, recognizable uniqueness; it is not a cohesive, clearly defined and identifiable whole. This strategically important space is static, more a heavy conglomerate of separate parcels, without direct links between them. This promotes the emergence of barriers, both physical and symbolic, making movements in the square unnatural and uneasy. This singular conformity substantially promotes a negative perception of the area.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop a coexistence between the different particularities of the square and provide a common identity cutting across them as the first major development priority. This approach means a profound change in the current arrangement; it is necessary to rethink the connections between the different parts of the area. The encouragement of alternative movements of people by a less balanced and symmetric organization of structural elements and urban furniture, with more

parcels 'irrigated' by pedestrian movements, and less dominance of current 'main lines', is one of the main objectives to deal with this first issue. However, the desire to unify whilst preserving diversity in Anatole France Square is a question of fine balance and therefore carries with it a warning. Whilst it is necessary to improve the present homogeneity, an all too exotic or radical renovation would undermine the identity of this urban space. The proposed project must therefore be an optimization of the existing space, not a total upheaval.

ANATOLE FRANCE SQUARE AS THE ENTRANCE TO THE ANCIENT CITY

Occupying a strategic position, Anatole France Square has the function and status of being the main urban entrance to the ancient city of Tours. From whatever direction one enters the historic centre from the North, Anatole France Square is the first space one experiences: Tours' antechamber as it were. It thus offers the visitor his/her first impressions of the old centre of Tours. As "first impressions count", this function requires high aesthetic values and urban quality for Anatole France Square. Unfortunately these conditions have at present still not been met. Damaged facades, cracked walls, poorly maintained roads and low-value, badly maintained buildings dominate the impressions that meet the visitor's eye. The more valuable buildings and other structures in the square suffer from inconsistencies and aesthetic mediocrity. There is de facto a lack of the most basic attractiveness and intention to be a liveable urban space, welcoming the visitor. For people strolling at the top of the rue Nationale, the area inspires, at most, only a frank indifference.

The aesthetic rehabilitation of Anatole France Square is therefore needed as a major development priority, to give this urban space a status worthy of its location, an important

element at the riverside with its sensitive landscape features and the northern end of the long rue Nationale. Where for the first issue, the concept of balance is paramount, the aim of the second issue is to rid the Anatole France Square of its current dismal banality without distorting the important physical and functional interrelationships with the adjacent urban fabric,. It must become an original and enjoyable public space, inviting people to move between river, historic centre and shops.