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The project takes place in Ambert, a village in the Puy-de-Dome region, France. Because of the topography, Ambert is **disconnected from the surrounding big cities** and has developed a strong cultural identity. Part of **this identity can be reinforced through a local economy based on the reinterpretation of local building techniques** using eco-friendly materials (wood, raw earth, hemp...). The overall objective of the Arts&Crafts project is to **use art and architecture to gather together the qualities of the region into a single point in order to strengthen them and spread them back**. The project groups a multi-purpose studio for local craftsmen, artists' studios and temporary accommodation, which are connected to the historical centre by a cyclists and pedestrians street.

The buildings in the region are quite different one from another according to their function or to their localisation. For instance, because of the existing wood industries, there are many sawmills whose monolithic architecture is characterized by **vertical wooden cladding**; around the train station, there are a few long railway warehouses with **regular industrial windows**; and as in the Dore valley, the earth is perfect to build rammed earth walls, there are many **raw earth houses** in the town. Finally, most of the buildings have their **windows underlined by a wooden frame**, which was at first a protection for the walls and now participate to the cultural landscape, the «lindage».

The Arts & Crafts project proposes **three different architectures** inspired from the local vernacular architecture and adapted to the programs they host. The craftsmen studio, close to the railway station is inspired from the railway warehouses; the artists' studio are located in a re-established warehouse and the temporary accommodation buildings are inspired from the sawmill buildings. All three buildings have wooden frames which are used as a link between them and allow the creation of different **micro-spaces adapted to the inhabitants of each building**.

In Ambert, there are two major training centres whose aim is to sustain the traditional building methods. Basing itself on this existing dynamics, the building process of the project is used to empower those skills through training sites. The idea is to train people on local skills in order to **contribute to the cultural identity and to create links between people while encouraging them to stay in the region**.

1. Environmental scopes :

The master plan's first aim is to connect the recreational base to the historical centre by extending the existing pedestrian and cyclist paths. The heights of the buildings are similar to the surrounding houses in order to create a global consistency and the orientation allows bioclimatic conception to maximize solar gain during the particularly harsh winter. As the site is close to a humid area, the rainwater is captured and a special attention was given to the ground covering to limit sealing it and to **protect the surrounding biodiversity**, by using permeable coating (grass, distant cobblestones...). In addition to that, a tree barrier along the major road protects the site from prevailing west winds.



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The building materials which are used are mostly eco-friendly and carried by train which contribute to **reduce the global impact of the project**. During their lives, the three buildings use a minimum of energy as they respect the latest French thermic standards, using both active and passive strategies.

2. Socio-cultural scopes:

All the Arts & Crafts project tend to gather people around to create new solidarities between them. In the craftsmen studio, depending on the function, there are many different spaces that **facilitate meetings and collaboration between people** (exhibition area, common kitchen, studios...). It is also the building process, through training sites, which is used to **promote local traditional skills**. Those trainings, done by apprentices who would be staying in the accommodation building, are an opportunity for them to share and to learn from each other. The large common spaces accompany this dynamic by encouraging meetings of apprentices in a cozy and spacious living room. In the artists' studios, the finishing touch are done by the artists themselves and the coated earth exterior walls are voluntarily irregular in order to **stimulate the creativity of the apprentices**.

The identity of the place, an ancient sawmill, is still visible in the new project. The position of the buildings emphasizes the existing paths; the existing warehouse is re-established and given new artistic functions and finally the use of wood in various forms (structure, cladding, isolation) **calls to mind the ancient wood industry**.

3. Socio-economic scopes:

In order to sustain the existing economy, most of the materials used come from local industries. To facilitate the construction, the wooden structure of the accommodation building is **meant to be prefabricated and the different elements can be carried by train**. All the thermic isolation of the building is insured by a wood chip and clay mix, blown directly into the walls, which has high performances but also very little environmental impact as it uses **recycled wood**. To support autonomy, a collective wood boiler supplies a **heating network** and the rainwater is **collected, used and treated on site** in an aesthetic garden. Finally, the craftsmen studio is meant to be built in two phases in order to gather reuse materials and the accommodation building can easily be transformed into individual small flats depending on Ambert's needs.

The Arts & Crafts project integrates itself in the surrounding with a contemporary architecture using local materials and techniques, while encouraging the inhabitants to collaborate and to learn from each other.

Related bibliography and photo credits :

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