

Visitor Centre for the revaluation of Industrial Heritage: The Averly Foundry

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Abstract

The old Averly Foundry is in Zaragoza, specifically at number 59 of the current Paseo María Agustín. Its activity began in the eighteenth century, creating strong economic ties around the Ebro Valley. The availability of water and the strategic location were strengthened in the mid-nineteenth century by railway communication. These factors particularly facilitated the development of the flour industry, which was concentrated in the river artery and Zaragoza.

To ensure the survival of the preserved buildings, a rehabilitation is proposed by a multidisciplinary team sensitive to heritage, which will seek a reconstruction faithful to the origins of the property, maintaining the authenticity of the architectural language and the clarity of the additions, respecting the buildings.

From this new centre, various guided tours will depart, focused on the appropriate sensitivity according to the theme. In this way, the urban growth of Zaragoza from its origin to the present day will be explained. For the industrial stage, the visits will be carried out on the grounds of the Foundry, using elements preserved in situ, such as moulds, architectural typologies, garden, machinery and the musicalisation of the family home.

Keywords: Averly-Foundry, centre, architectural typologies.

1. Introduction and background

The old Averly Foundry is located in Zaragoza, specifically at number 59 of the current Paseo María Agustín, one of the streets of articulation of the city near the centre. It is a space well connected to various public areas.

A few meters from its location, there are some historical landmarks, such as the city's medieval wall and the Aljafería Palace, and two other more contemporary buildings such as the CaixaForum and the Pablo Serrano Museum, located on the same street.

The activity of the Foundry began in the eighteenth century, creating strong economic ties around the Ebro Valley. Water accessibility and strategic location were strengthened in the mid-nineteenth century with railway communication. These factors particularly facilitated the development of the flour industry, which was concentrated along the waterway and especially in Zaragoza¹.

As mentioned, in 1863, the factory was founded by Antonio Averly, an engineer from Lyon who decided to establish his company in Zaragoza, thanks to financial opportunities. The workshops changed locations until they settled beside the Campo Sepulcro railway station. The economic situation was favourable, and the city had already begun to see the emergence of the first public works constructed in metal² (Figure 1).

The engineer Luis de la Martiniere was the author of this bridge, and it is believed that perhaps the arrival of engineers such as Antonio Averly, among others, is linked to him. Thus, the entry of French engineering into Aragón is related in this context³.

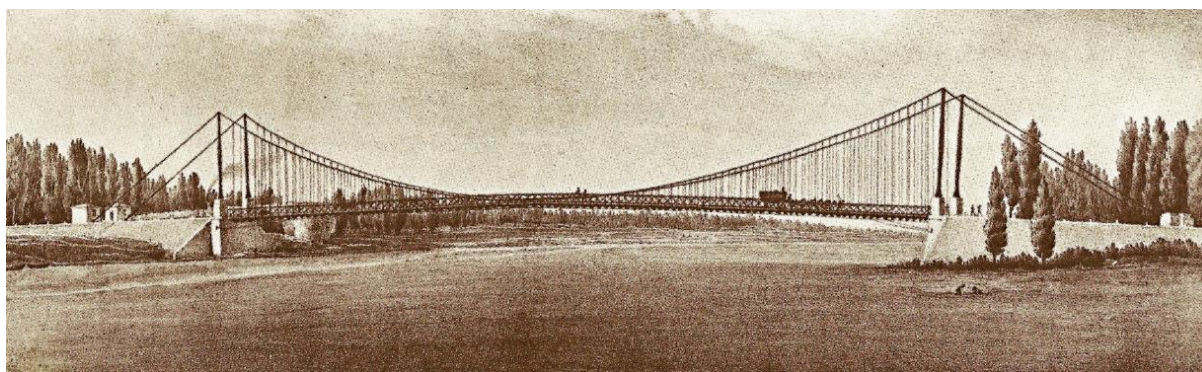


Figure 1. Iron bridge over the río Gállego. Source: <https://www.memoriadesantaisabel.com/historia-del-puente/> Accessed: 06/05/2024.

In 1853, Averly and his partners founded his first company in Aragón, dedicated to the foundry and construction of machinery. In 1863, the engineer Antonio Averly opened his workshops on San Miguel Street. He established several partnerships over the next two years to expand his market.

1885 was the year of the emergence of the great Basque steel mills, and Antonio founded “Averly y Cia. Fundiciones y Construcción Mecánica de Nervi6n” in Bilbao. A few years later, between 1894 and 1910, the period of maximum national expansion came with participation and recognition. At this time, they were already

¹ Sora, A.S. (2000). Especialización flexible y empresa familiar: la fundición Averly de Zaragoza (1863-1930). *Revista de Historia Industrial*, 61-95.

² The iron bridge over the Gállego river, located in the Santa Isabel neighbourhood. Built between 1839 and 1844. It was in service until 1930, when the new bridge was built. Blázquez Herrero, C. Sancho Marco, T. (1999). *Obras hidráulicas en Aragón. Zaragoza: Caja de Ahorros de la Inmaculada de Aragón*.

³ Martínez, J.C. (2015). Jules Seguin en España: prefabricación e innovación en los puentes colgantes de Fuentidueña, Arganda, Carandía y Zaragoza construidos por el empresario francés. In *Actas del Noveno Congreso Nacional y Primer Congreso Internacional Hispanoamericano de Historia de la Construcción*. Segovia, 13 a 17 de octubre de 2015 (pp. 347-356). Instituto Juan de Herrera.

developing complete projects: machinery construction for industries such as flour mills, paper and brick factories, power plants, tram rails, hydraulic turbines, urban furniture, etc. Thus, it became the first company in Aragón and one of the most prominent in certain specialities⁴.

The importance of the foundry's participation in universal industrial exhibitions should also be noted, which expanded its scope of action. Records have been found of numerous orders distributed throughout Spain between 1864 and 1911, as well as two orders in Morocco and Mexico.

Between 1903 and 1970, ownership passed from Antonio Averly to his descendants. Production had evolved to include hydraulic presses, forging, prestressed concrete equipment, and a return to turbine manufacturing by then⁵. The factory reached 131 workers at its peak⁶ (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Photo montage of current photography with a photograph from the early twentieth century. Source: Gran Archivo Zaragoza Antigua. <https://adioszaragoza.blogspot.com/>. Accessed: 08/05/2024.

The 20th century did not bring good news. In 2006, the factory complex was impounded due to the construction of the A-68 tunnel through the city, and by 2011, the number of workers had been reduced to ten. The situation forced the closure of the facilities.

Things did not improve between 2013 and 2023 when the construction company Brial-Neurbe bought the facilities and demolished 70% of the complex to build new housing (still in progress today).

⁴ Jiménez Zorzo, F.J. (1987). *La Industrialización en Aragón: la Fundación Averly de Zaragoza*. Zaragoza, Diputación General de Aragón.

⁵ Jiménez Zorzo, F.J. (1987). *La Industrialización en Aragón: la Fundación Averly de Zaragoza*. Zaragoza, Diputación General de Aragón.

⁶ Sora, A.S. (2000). Especialización flexible y empresa familiar: la fundición Averly de Zaragoza (1863-1930). *Revista de Historia Industrial*, 61-95.

2. Description of the complex

Averly is a historic industrial complex located in the heart of Zaragoza that, over time, became one of the main companies in the metallurgical sector in the Ebro Valley. The complex, as it has come down to the present day, is the result of the association of material and immaterial elements that make up this set of architecture in which business and housing coexist, one of the few cases that endure today.

Analysing the space as a whole, we can see a fusion between the industrial architecture of previous decades and the development of some ideas of the modern movement, which have brick as their main material with variations in their polychromy that dynamise the façades, especially in the access to the enclosure and in the openings of the warehouses. Its homogeneous architectural language highlights eclecticism in appearance and elegant functionality in its spatial distribution and construction, resulting in simplicity not exempt from technical sophistication.

The plan organisation achieves a succession of buildings and open spaces endowed with functionality composed of a monumental access door and two blocks (the owners' home and what were once the adjustment workshop and offices). Both spaces have a rectangular floor plan, and the house stands out for its plastic treatment.

Standing at the entrances to the factory, we find the house on the left, surrounded by a fence that closes the perimeter of the current site. The family residence seems reminiscent of a Renaissance palace inscribed in this new industrial setting (Figure 3). It consists of a basement and three floors; eaves top the last one. The façades of the house alternate between plastered brick as a closing element and exposed brick. For the plinth, a striking chromatic play is proposed. As for the closing wall of the house, a series of arches are prepared that modulate the façade in a uniform composition whose regularity is broken by a balcony.



Figure 3. Current photo of the Averly Foundry family home. Author: Antonio Duaso Clusa.

As for the existing nave next to the house, its decoration focuses on using stained glass windows and alternating red and white brick in the openings.

Both buildings are surrounded by the garden (an organic axis that articulates volumes), which gives it a country air that, at the end of the nineteenth century, was integrated into the housing trends of the local high bourgeoisie.

3. Legal status of the degree of protection and conservation status

As far as the protection of the building is concerned, multiple controversies have addressed this issue from different points of view. On the one hand, the more conservationist public has sought to preserve the entire complex, and on the other, those who support converting part of the complex into new residential buildings.

Finally, the same year in which the purchase and sale contract between the historic property and the construction company-promoter was made, the Provincial Council catalogued it as "Heritage of Architectural Interest" according to the General Urban Development Plan of Zaragoza, being declared "Catalogued Asset of the Aragonese Cultural Heritage"⁷.

Considering this level of protection, and due to the lack of political agreement in 2016, the land was not classified as a social and cultural use. Only 30% of the complex remains within the heritage framework, but some movable assets, such as machinery, casting moulds, etc., have been preserved (Figure 4).

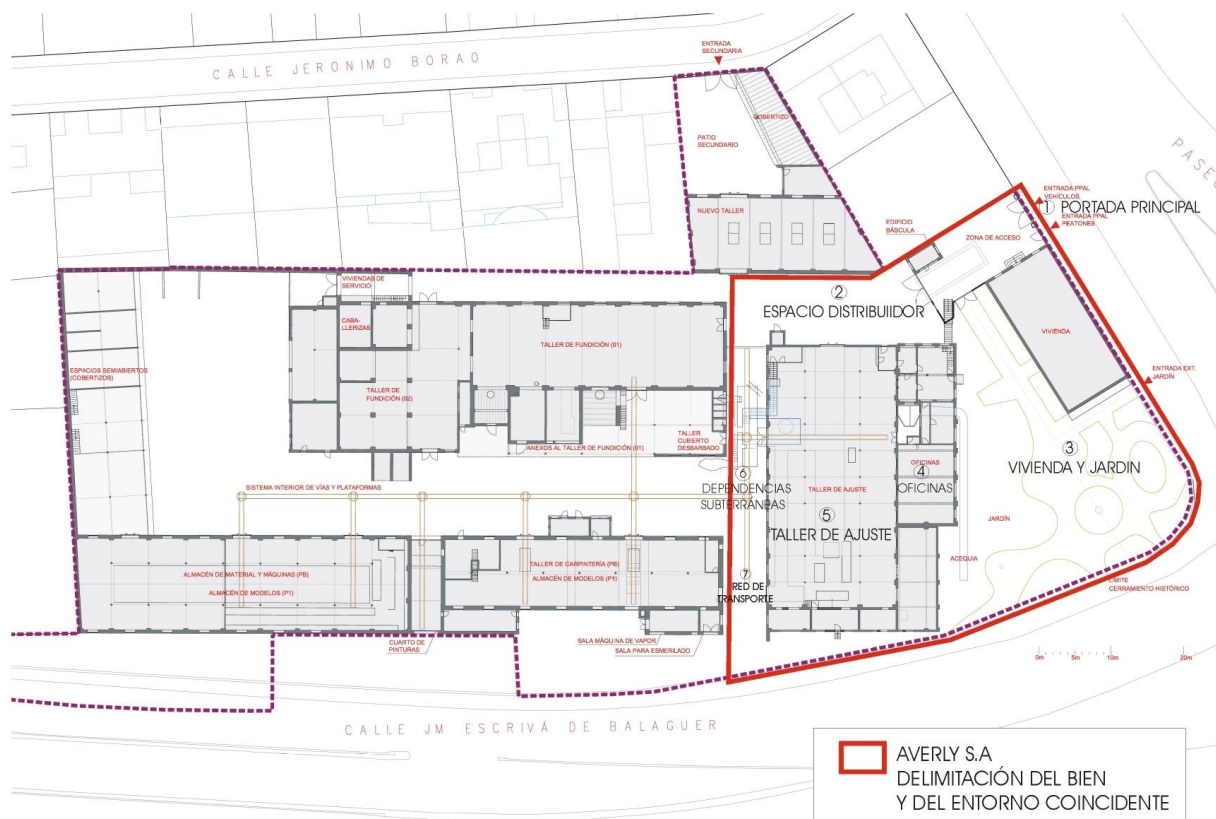


Figure 4. View of the delimitation of the heritage property. Source: BOA. Accessed 10/05/2024.

In 2008, Zaragoza was first in the Top 20 provinces with the most assets at risk of disappearing. Even today, it has a very long list of monuments on the red list by Hispania Nostra. In addition, has been declared endangered by the World Monuments Fund⁸.

As additional information to the one already mentioned, it is necessary to analyse the main problems of the property to establish a series of objectives.

⁷ Departamento de Educación, Universidad, Cultura y Deporte. Orden de 28 de noviembre de 2013, por la que se declara la Factoría Averly, sita en el paseo María Agustín, 59, de Zaragoza (Zaragoza), como Bien Catalogado del Patrimonio Cultural Aragonés. <<BOA>> núm. 247, de 18/12/2013.

⁸ Redacción, A. (24 junio, 2016). World Monuments Fund solicita la conservación integral de Averly. <https://arainfo.org/104547-2>. Accessed 10/05/2024.

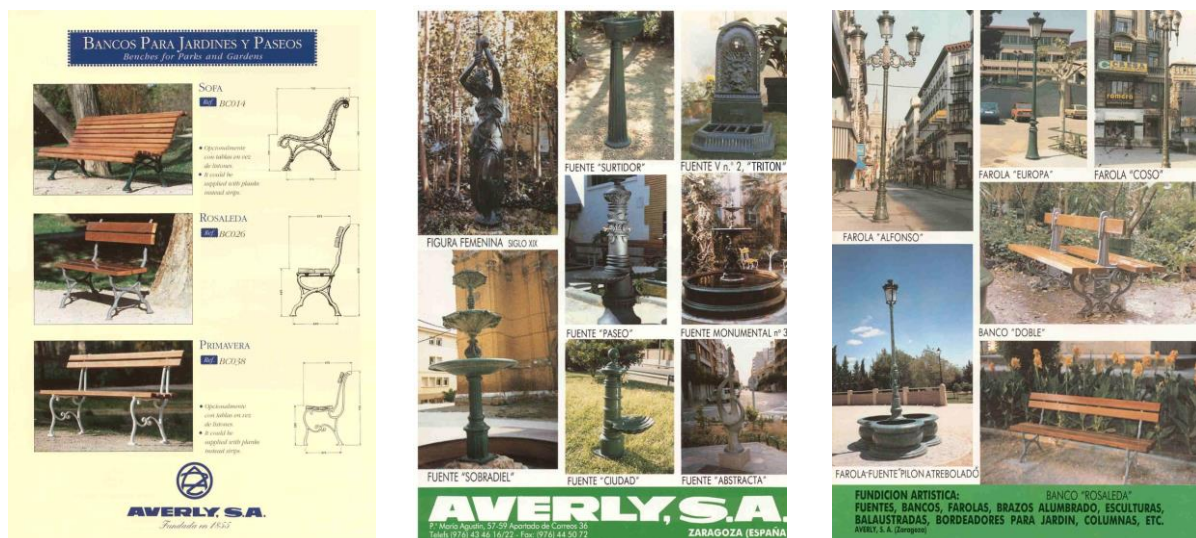
The main problem of the building stems from the progressive and prolonged abandonment over time, both of the building and the surroundings. This has favoured the creation of an isolated space very close to the city centre. In addition, the abandonment by the owner and the lack of heritage protection has meant ignorance on the part of the citizens, and therefore, the loss of a large part of the industrial complex and the possibility of demolishing the space without consequences.

The Averly foundry is part of a long list of forgotten and eventually disappeared properties. For this reason, some associations, such as APUDEPA, and Aragonese heritage professionals in the institutional and educational fields, have mobilised to achieve their goal of resurrecting the architectural complex. Therefore, this project's objective is to recover and enhance the buildings that are still preserved in situ, guaranteeing their use and avoiding their disappearance due to abandonment, purchase, sale or real estate speculation.

4. Enhancement

The Averly complex has special relevance due to its importance at a key moment in the industrial development of Zaragoza, transcending the regional framework with its productions and distributing its products throughout a large part of the national geographical area.

The labour policy developed by this family business was based on the production of elaborations adapted to orders and adjusted to customers' needs, creating industrial machinery, urban furniture or iron and bronze cast sculptures, becoming the largest workshop in the artistic and industrial foundry (Figures 5-6-7).



Figures 5 - 6 - 7. Urban furniture and sculptures. Source: Averly, S.A. <https://averly.es>. Accessed: 16/05/2024

That said, and knowing that a large part of the urban furniture of the Aragonese capital is made up of this foundry, it is necessary to strengthen the link between the factory and the population. This industry is now inserted into the urban framework between blocks of flats, overshadowing the small buildings that are beginning to be forgotten.

Currently, the name "Averly" is still active. The company changed and updated the course of the business; however, the original facilities of the factory complex are unused, and their state of conservation is in the progress of degradation.

The lack of heritage cataloguing has led to the owner abandoning its maintenance. Today, the building is propped up and surrounded by construction sites. On one side, the construction of the block of flats by the construction company that bought the land, and on the other side, the sanitation of Paseo María Agustín, which has involved lifting the pavement. The heritage building is surrounded by rubble that piles up, and the works make it physically and visually inaccessible (Figures 8-9).



Figure 8. Current view of the Averly foundry among the rubble and the new block of flats under construction. Author: Antonio Duaso Clusa.



Figure 9. Current view of the Averly foundry among the rubble and the new block of flats under construction. Author: Antonio Duaso Clusa.

The proposal to enhance the value of this building is based on the idea of forming a visitor centre focused on residents, visitors, and tourists. The objective is to manage the cultural attraction resources available in the city and the building through the hiring of qualified personnel and taking advantage of the furniture and buildings available on the premises of our object of study. To this end, a prior rehabilitation plan for the building is urgently required. In addition, a connection will be established with hotels in the area to guarantee the full experience for those not residing in the city.

5. Proposal for a Visitor Centre

The centre will be a space that reveals the meaning and relationship of the visitor with heritage through direct experiences and applying strategies that allow a clear interpretation for its enhancement and dissemination.

That said, the objectives are to welcome the visitor, learn about their concerns and, from there, make them aware of the values of the place where they are and offer them a map with access to the routes of the guided routes that can be accessed through the centre.

Thus, the preserved space of the Averly foundry is proposed as a place capable of bringing together the latest innovations in cultural services practically and functionally, becoming a pioneering centre of these characteristics in Zaragoza. At the same time, the outdoor areas will provide visitors with benches and seats to rest and enjoy the garden of the original family residence while preparing to get to know the city.

6. Proposal of contents and results

It is proposed that the visitor centre be multifunctional at different levels, such as the promotion of the space and the building, the improvement of the tourist and cultural attractions of the city, the control of visitor flows and the structuring and organisation of the information to be disseminated about the area.

For all these reasons, a series of guided routes are proposed on the different historical stages of Zaragoza, which start from the building and bring the visitor closer to the city centre progressively and enjoyably.

Next, the different possible routes will be summarised, starting with the Iberian, Roman and Visigothic routes, which will begin with a brief introduction about the foundation of the city in the Iberian period, on which the Roman culture sinks its roots, giving way to the foundation of Caesaraugusta around the 14-13 centuries B.C., the only city to which Caesar Augustus bestowed his name. During the visit, the urban planning of the city will be explained, as well as its main buildings, mentioning specific cases such as the Cathedral of El Salvador, which stands on the site of the first Roman temple, which, according to several hypotheses, was modified by the Visigoths to reuse the space as a Christian temple.

Another option will be the Islamic route, which highlights one of the city's best-known eras. The introduction will be made in the gardens of the Averly complex, focusing on the historical context to obtain a greater perspective of the explanations. The visitor will then go to the Aljafería to understand the complexity of Islamic art and its subsequent influence on architecture as we know it today.

The Romanesque and Gothic Route would focus on these two styles, which have been grouped to provide an overview to the visitor, who will have access to the Basilica of Nuestra Señora del Pilar to see the only remains of the Romanesque church (the Chrismon of the temple still preserved in situ today). Afterwards, the visit will be directed to the head of the Seo del Salvador (both outside and inside, where you will see the hidden capitals behind the cathedral's main altar, accessible on rare occasions).

The Renaissance and Baroque Route will be a route through which you can understand the city as the cradle of cultures, witnessing countless historical events. In this period, the city is known as "La harta". It was the golden age that marked his legacy and encapsulated a period of economic, cultural and artistic splendour. It was in this context that countless Renaissance palaces emerged. Some examples, such as the Real Maestranza de Caballería and the Palacio de Los Luna, will be visited. The route will end in Plaza del Pilar to analyse the Baroque basilica project.

The Route of the 19th and 20th centuries would have the foundry as its headquarters and main place. However, the introduction will take place on the other side of the Paseo María Agustín, who was one of the protagonists of the upcoming speech.

The nineteenth century was a period of technological advances at all levels, which is why the War of Independence was so abrasive as it passed through Zaragoza. At this time, the city still had the medieval wall, which, unlike the Roman (stone) wall, was made of brick and less resistant. This wall was razed during the war and is currently abandoned and on the verge of being part of a new housing project in which it will be inserted into one of the portals (proving to be a controversial topic) (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Appearance of a medieval wall fragment from Paseo María Agustín. Author: Irene Duaso Pinilla.

As we mentioned, at the end of the war, some of the names of the heroes and heroines of this battle were collected, and today, they are part of the context of the city's historical memory. One of them, María Agustín, to whom the Paseo on which the foundry is located gives its name.

The route continues its discourse by mentioning the Industrial Revolution by returning to the visitor centre, where there will be a review of trade and industry from the foundation of Caesaraugusta to the 19th century and the strong weight of the Industrial Revolution and the factories established in Zaragoza between the 19th and 20th centuries. The aim is to explain the casting process (supporting the discourse on the preserved movable objects: machinery and moulds), from the previous design to the materialisation of the final object.

In addition, an attempt will be made to transmit the way of life of the bourgeois families of the time, making the home of the Avery family a museum.

Finally, the 21st Century Route. The last one proposed in this new visitor centre corresponds to the last decades of this century. Taking as a reference the site of the 2008 Water Expo and having modern architectural typologies such as the Bridge Pavilion by Zaha Hadid, an exceptional work in the city that today houses the Museum of the City's Mobility, which offers us a journey through the history of the automobile that can also be visited.

7. Discussion and conclusions

For the project to be economically profitable, it will be necessary to have a thorough knowledge of the market. When developing this plan, it's important to be realistic and base the project on solid data and analysis. To do this, the idea of the business and the products or services offered will be described. Next, it will be necessary to carry out a study that includes the characteristics of the public that will participate in this type of activity to establish a plan for the prices or rates that we will make available to the client.

The dissemination on social networks and through hotels and tourist offices with which we will collaborate in this project will be influenced during this process.

Do not forget to study the possible risks faced by the business. In this case, it would be wise to carry out a SWOT analysis before implementing the project.

As for the staff who will attend the activity, guides, historians, and archaeologists will be hired to provide the visitor with as close an idea as possible of the concepts to be discussed.

On the other hand, about the restoration, rehabilitation and musealisation of the space, architects, technical architects and videographers will be hired to approach the space with the appropriate sensitivity.

Finally, a plan of key performance indicators is established to measure success or failure and, consequently, the progress and viability of the activity.

An industrial heritage management plan is crucial to preserve and sustainably manage the historical resources of this period, which are still underexploited today compared to other eras. For this type of action, citizen participation is essential, which is why this project aims to raise awareness among visitors by disseminating data within everyone's reach.

However, administrative and legislative protection is crucial to preserve heritage. It is important to ensure that legal frameworks and regulations are in place to protect and manage industrial heritage more effectively.

In short, an industrial heritage management plan must be comprehensive, participatory and sustainable, aiming to save and protect our heritage for present and future generations.

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