

Towards a weak monumentality, ISO as a stage for a diffuse culture

ISO, or the difficulty of curating diffuseness

The "ISO" district is the epicentre of Carabanchel's cultural revival. Yet there are no monuments or public cultural facilities to be found here. Here, culture is not embodied in the representative power of the institution. It is silent and diffuse, coexisting with the very people who produce it. Cultural experience here involves the everyday events of life itself. Artists, walkers and residents are the protagonists of this cultural "happening". But while ISO is performing an alternative culture that is both diffuse and vibrant, its spontaneous nature has essentially produced internal 'heterotopias' that struggle to address the district as a place in itself. It is this lack of representativeness that political ambition now seems to be coming up against. The question posed by European is along these lines: "What kind of facility should embody this cultural renewal? We rephrase: "How can we give the district a new consistency, without undermining its essence as a diffuse cultural space ?



Nolli plan : the city as a continuous monument

The missing pieces

One possible experience of ISO as a place in its own right might be found in the image of the Plan Noli, which, by cancelling out interior/exterior boundaries to represent a continuous public space, manages to make the urban substance comparable to the organisation of a building: a heterogeneous aggregate of rooms linked into a whole by corridors and anterooms.

Whereas a few decades ago, ISO consisted almost entirely of large black pockets (because they were private and monofunctional), industrial decline has seen this opaque mass gradually nibbled away by a hybrid form of public space. The industrial workshops were gradually converted into 'cultural condensers', bringing together places of artistic production, community centres and local churches. By bringing together increasingly diverse groups of people, these spaces achieved a public dimension.

Despite the first signs of these spaces opening up to the city - the music studio café stretching out onto the pavement, the street art on the facades calling out to passers-by - it seems that public density remains largely hidden behind the blind walls of the old industrial buildings. The nibbling away has produced public pockets that are still struggling to open up and linked to each other.

However, the industrial decline and subsequent urban redevelopment have created a series of hollow spaces and unoccupied plots of land that offer opportunities for extending and opening up these 'pockets' to the public realm.

We believe that these hitherto neglected spaces have the potential to act as forecourts for cultural condensers, places where exchanges take place and where cultural production meets neighbourhood life. These places are the missing pieces of a 'public figure' which, combined with the openness of the cultural condensers, are capable of giving the district the consistency and clarity it lacks.

There are at least five of them, all in the immediate vicinity of one or more cultural condensers: some are already public squares, some are public property, others are not. The site proposed for European is one of them.



Towards a "weak" monumentality

While the European brief called for a new monument to embody the cultural renewal of Carabanchel, our project proposes instead to reveal the neighborhood itself in its "alter-monumental" nature. Rather than condensing energy into a hot spot, designed to radiate and showcase the cultural production of the entire neighborhood, we propose to disseminate our intervention, which, through the new visibility it gives to cultural condensers, projects the neighborhood itself as a site worthy of interest.

The city becomes a living cultural monument in process, "weak" in the positive sense used by Andrea Branzi about modernity. Still a "monument" because of its representative dimension, but "weak" because it has lost its "triumphant" and "institutional" character.

This re-examination of the brief is based on two fundamental observations :

1 - ISO does not need additional square meters, but rather to increase the porosity and accessibility of existing ones.

The built substance dedicated to artistic production is already there, in large quantities, flexible and affordable. Some ISO buildings are still vacant and constitute an unused land reserve. But despite their great interior hybridity, these buildings do not really communi-



El EKO building : almost blind facade, few contacts with the urban space but great inner mixity of public functions

cate with the city.

We propose a "toolbox" for condominiums, associations and organizations managing cultural condensers, designed to increase their porosity by means of "low-tech" solutions. We also believe that these initiatives will be encouraged by the prior requalification of vacant plots as public space.

2 - ISO doesn't need to build these vacant plots, but to affirm them as public spaces.

The district features a large number of left over plots resulting from the industrial decline, located in the vicinity of the cultural condensers. While these spaces may have a negative connotation, embodying the decline of the district, they are also a tremendous opportunity to increase its porosity.

We propose that the role of public authorities should be to keep these spaces open against real estate pressure. The money the municipality doesn't spend on an expensive building could be reinvested in the purchase of land it doesn't yet own. Once preserved, the land can be made available to the management committees of the closest cultural condensers to use as their forecourt or as their "outdoor room".

Rather than making ISO visible through fullness (as suggested by the construction of a radiating facility), we propose that this can be done through emptiness. In this way, the mark of the public player becomes more discreet, no longer measured by the height or luxury of a building, but by the surface area and porosity of public space.

In the end, it is the conjunction of public and private players, both operating a strategy of openness to their respective heritage, that will enable ISO to emerge as a singular place, a destination in its own right that we call "weak monument".

Projet témoin

Thus Plaza Almodovar could be understood as the pilot project of a larger strategy, a first step into engaging with the diversity of actor in order to test the following spatial strategy.

One building and two public square instead

Highlighting the importance of enabling public void we intend to invert the approach suggested by the brief; instead of 2 buildings and 1 public square, we propose one building and two public squares. Located at the interface between the metropolitan axis of Av. de Ntra. Sra. de Valvanera and the residential fabric of carrabanchel, the new building offer the piazza Almodovar its missing facade and on the north side, give to the ISO town's entrance a new « parvis ».

A landscape strategy is implemented at the scale of the reflection perimeter to precisely define each of the two created void. The plaza de Almodovar further supported in its existing perimeter is unified by a dense plantation of pin trees, which high reach allows a free circulation on ground level. Thereby absorbing its vis-a-vis on the other side of the Avenue, the plaza Almodovar declare its metropolitan figure. The second void generated on the northern part belongs to an already existing constellation of "pocket park". Away from the turmoil of the metropolis and managed by ISO's association this space allows gardening. Its surface kept unsealed is densely populated by trees of lower amplitude giving the park a more intimate environment.

2.Silent cultural machine

In addition to the created void, a small cultural condenser is implanted so has to activate the surrounding public space in different manners. The condenser is made of three basic elements: a shelf, a flat programmable surface and an adaptable facade. The shelf are used to accommodate kitchen, basic sanitary facilities or a stage for 300 people. Always adjoining a shelf the free programmable surfaces varies their degree of accessibility to the public thanks to easily operable facade and roof shade.

Facades provide a visual framework for public open space. Operable and performative, they engage in diverse dialogues with the public space they frame. The new facades materialize latent urban fronts: on one side, the kiosk provides the last facade for the almodovar square, while on the other, it creates a forecourt for the ISO zone. The enfilade space closes the hollow tooth.

Although the project proposes a repetition of basic element, it offers spaces with different temporalities. Here two typologies are proposed: the pavilion and the enfilades. The enfilade is a series of room segmented by sliding doors and floors of different levels. This space function all year round: when it's not rented out, it becomes a public space. The doors between each cell can open to allow the continuous public space of an exhibition or be closed and one could privatize (artist in residence, exhibitions, private parties, etc.) to offer the outdoor space one can require.

The pavilion is a permeable public space at the junction of the Plaza Almodovar and the



Square ISO. Unlike the traditional pavilion developed in 19th century parks, which had a roof and were open on both sides, our pavilion offers the opposite experience: the absence of a fixed roof maintains contact with the outside space, while the facades create an impression of intimacy and withdrawal from the flows of the city : it is an open-air room. The essential condition of the kiosk is to be a permeable space, open all year round. However, its configuration means that it can be closed off as required, to accommodate one-off events that sometimes require an enclosed space (noise/light/temperature): concerts, exhibitions, performances, conferences, screenings, etc. (the roof and doors can be folded back and the blackout curtains drawn). When the event is over, the space becomes permeable again.

The kiosk acts as a climatic device. In winter, polycarbonate panels unfold at the bottom of the façade, acting as windbreaks and letting in the rays. The flexible transparent roof unfolds to accentuate the warming effect of the sun's rays.

In summer, the lower part of the façade opens wide to let in the breeze cooled by the surrounding vegetation. At the top, the sheet metal panels are superimposed on the polycarbonate to block the vertical rays.