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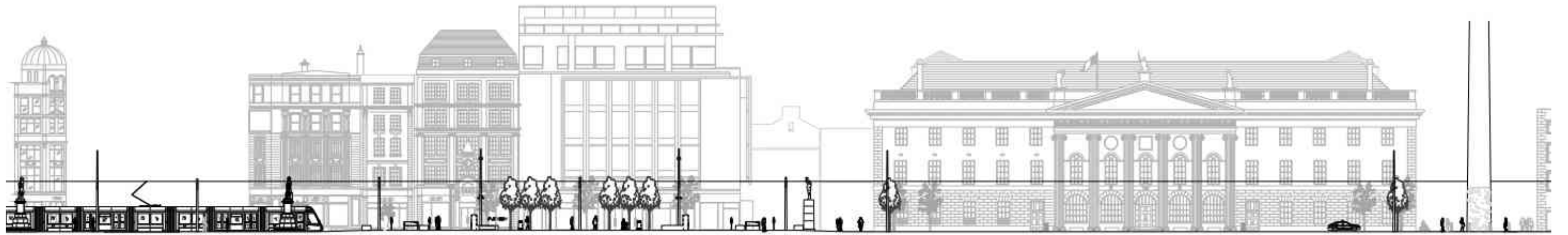
Centre and edge: a set of new civic spaces along a tramline from the centre to the edge of Dublin city

Item Type	Other
Authors	Cusack, Arwen
Download date	2026-03-08 00:42:49
Item License	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/1.0/
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/10344/1317

Centre and Edge

A set of new civic spaces along a tramline from the centre to the edge of Dublin city.

By Arwen Cusack



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There is a disparity between the public space of the centre of Dublin City and the built environment around the periphery. Civic space should be based on the same principles whether in the centre or at the edge of a city. A new civic architecture, civic space that is not derived from the block fabric of the city centre or the shopping centres and motorways on the periphery must be defined. New public spaces in the 21st century should not become sporadic boutique items dotted into regeneration projects and affluent neighbourhoods. Form not derived from context does not mean context should be ignored. First in order to understand what this new civic space might be we must look at the characteristics of shopping centres as public space in the periphery. Next a short inquiry into the reason why public space is necessary. Afterwards we must consider plazas that rely on dense block urban fabrics as public space in the city centre. Then an understanding of volunteering as a program for this new civic space and the choice of sites and strategy. Finally a return to the ideas expressed in the three primer projects that began the research.

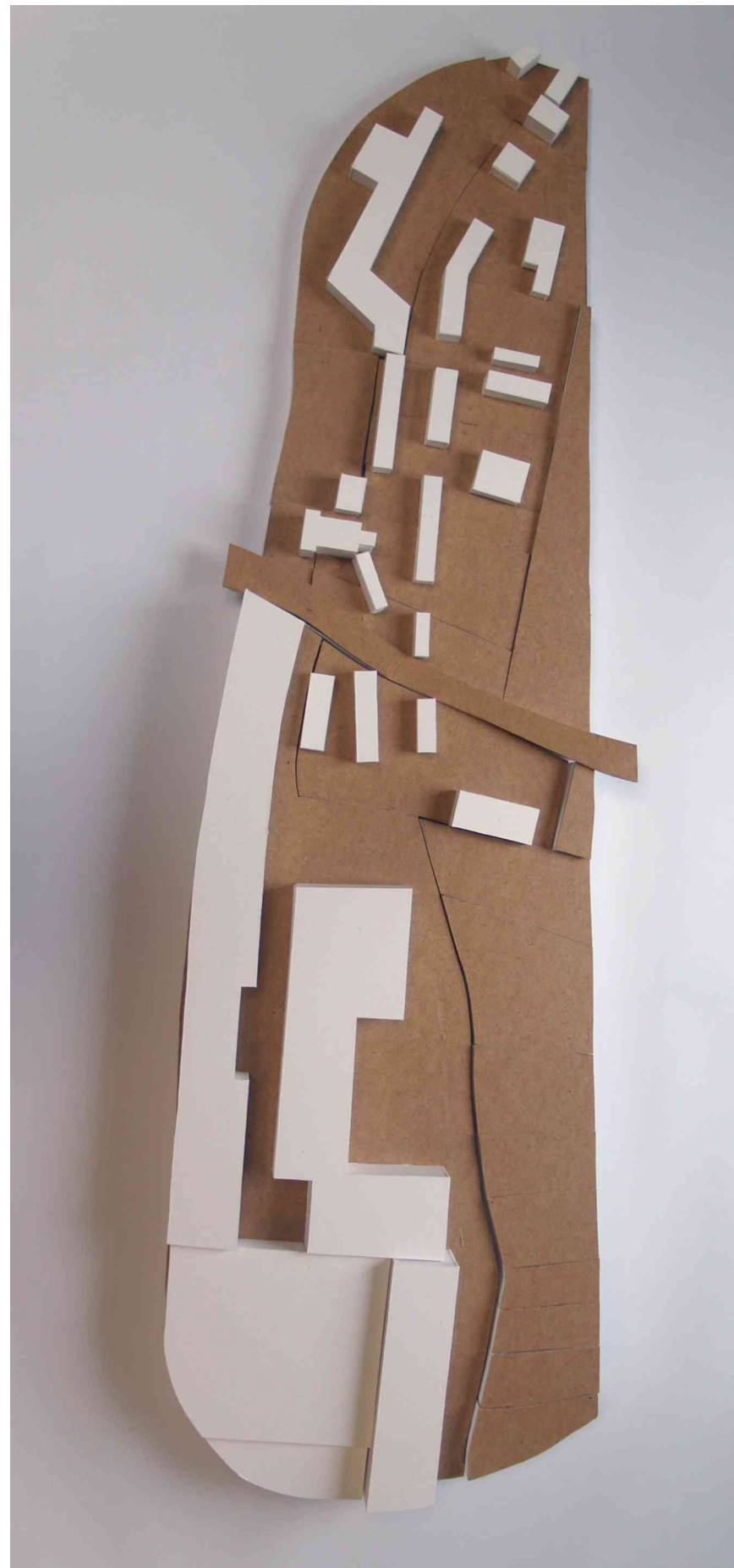
Observations in Dundrum

Dundrum is a small village at the foot of the Dublin mountains. The main street, the public space of the old village, has a very distinct grain with plots on either side divided into long narrow sites. The church at the small crossroads represents the former main gathering space of the town. The small courtyard to the front of the church invited the entire town to linger once a week. Inside, the church has one triple height room lit from above. This absence of visual connection with the outside world focuses the mind. The courtyard to the front acts as a welcome relief from this focus afterwards. The new addition of a shopping centre in the form of a massive block was finished in 2005. As the hill rises at the crossroads toward the Dublin mountains an enormous centre is cut into the hill. Three levels for cars and deliveries lie beneath the ground and three levels of consumption lie above. A connected square and street that open to two sides of the block are carved from it. The shopping centre seems to follow OMA's new rules for urban design. The voids including the old main street and new square and street and internal corridor act as a structural skeleton for the town. The promotion of density in the new shopping centre gives the impression that it was created for people not cars. Dundrum would be described as a "transferia" a place where the road network (M50) is connected to the urban public transport system (green Luas line), which gets easily into the city centre. The M50 is a wide ringroad around Dublin that has many very large shopping centres and car parks.



Dundrum is contained between two pieces of infrastructure running in straight lines on either side. Dundrum bypass is on one side ; it connects to the M50 and is impermeable. It is possible though not desirable to walk lengthways along the bypass. There is dammed earth on one side and the rear wall of the shopping centre on the other. On the other side of Dundrum is a tram line (green Luas line). The main street runs through the middle of Dundrum parallel to the Luas and bypass. Sandwiched between two pieces of infrastructure Dundrum reads as one place with old and new public space. The church and the shopping centre are both open every day of the year. The church is open 7am to 10pm daily but the shopping centre is open 24 hours a day. The church is often empty. One can slip in the side door and sit in silence or walk around the church without anyone watching. The shopping centre has many cctv cameras and employs discreet security guards. The new square and street in Dundrum are privately owned. The green public spaces in Dundrum are all left over spaces between roads and development. Many of the green spaces slope sharply or are completely flat with a thin covering of grass only with the constant surveillance of those in passing cars. There is no outdoor space where an appreciation of nature can be grasped. There is no place in which one can surrender to a slower pace, a nightfall that comes once a day. Nothing happens in parks most of the time except seasons, weather, light and the workings of one's body and mind. The social truth of a park differs greatly from that of a privatized shopping centre.

Dundrum shopping centre differs greatly from its ancestral passage in Paris. Parisian passages were rarely built on virgin territory ; pre-existing buildings were often wholly or partially, retained and reused. The entire site in Dundrum was excavated three stories below ground level, in order to begin building. Passages in Paris were essentially a small private road, most often for pedestrian use, linking two thoroughfares. Dundrum shopping centre has Luas stops a short walk away from either end however most people arrive by car into the underground car park. Passages are by nature ambiguous, subtly combine the features of an interior and the physiognomy of an exterior architecture; passages blur the boundary between public and private spaces. Dundrum blurs this boundary even more so with privatized exterior paths and more security personal and cameras. The facades of Parisian passages are characterised by their symmetrical arrangement and the uniformity of their disposition. The same is not true of Dundrum and it is largely characterised by the high reflectivity of all the materials used. This constant reflectivity disorients. Disorientation undermines the role of public space as a means of understanding the common good. As in Paris all sources of pleasure incite people to meet in Dundrum. It is interesting that the main corridor in Dundrum is only lit from above as in the church with no visual connection to the outside world.



Dundrum is not unique; the architectural form of a shopping centre has a dramatic effect on the territory in which it sits. Shopping centres have had a strong effect on public space all over Ireland. Their form was created in the 20th century. Alex Wall discusses the role of the architect in the design of Shopping centres. He also questions the quality of public space offered by shopping centres through the work of Victor Gruen. Victor Gruen is mostly remembered as a villain who pioneered the shopping centre. “The Gruen Transfer” is cited to describe a reputed phenomenon that occurs when visiting a shopping centre : in the presence of a dazzling array of goods, one loses one's purpose and begins to drift, transformed into a pliant and uncritical consumer purchasing random items. Alex Wall defends Gruen as someone who “simply perfected what every good shop designer practised”¹ which was to catch the eye of a passer by and make of them a consumer. Alex Wall continues to defend Gruen's designs as experiments in public space. The forms of Victor Gruen's shopping centres are based on two main principles : maximising profits and a reliance on the private car. These are private interests. Shopping centres blur the line between private and public. It is important to clarify the distinction between public and private.

Public is taken to mean : of pertaining to or affecting a population or a community as a whole. Private is taken to mean : in the interest of or belonging to some particular person. Just as infrastructure to allow for private interests is provided in a city so must infrastructure to allow for public interests. If good quality roads are necessary for private investment and a healthy economy, a spatial civic infrastructure is important for the people who live in the city?

Rem Koolhaas's essay 'Junkspace' describes shopping centres as well as other building types such as airports as “Junkspace”. Koolhaas writes that “Architecture disappeared in the 20th century ... our concern for the masses has blinded us to the people's Architecture ”². Could it be that in fact new structures of public space for the masses disappeared in the 20th century? To describe junkspace as the “people's architecture” is to highlight the opposite; Junkspace is in fact created for private investment. J. G. Ballard's novel 'Kingdom Come' imagines the culture that evolves when a shopping centre is the main public space and the cultural authority of an area. The novel is described as a suburb of the M25 and Heathrow airport not as a suburb of London. The author discusses two opposing views of the built environment through the narrative of the story. He says “Those not from there say it is a “nightmare terrain of police cameras and security dogs, an uncentred realm devoid of civic tradition and human values”³. He then offers the opposite view

¹ Alex Wall, *Victor Gruen: From Urban shop to New City* (Barcelona: Actar 2005)

“we like dual carriageways and parking lots. We like control-tower architecture and friendships that last an afternoon. There's no civil authority telling us what to do. This isn't Islington or South Ken. There are no town halls or assembly rooms. We like prosperity filtered through car and appliances sales. We like air freight offices and rent-a-van forecourts, we like impulse buy holidays to anywhere that takes our fancy. We're the citizens of the shopping mall and the marina, the internet and cable tv.”³

However these two opinions are not mutually exclusive. Cities and Public space tie different groups in society together so that opposing views can find a common ground. Throughout the novel groups of differing opinion begin to behave as opposing armies or militia without any platform for negotiation.

² Rem Koolhaas, *Content* (Taschen :2004)

³ J. G. Ballard, *Kingdom Come* (Harper Collins:2006) 101

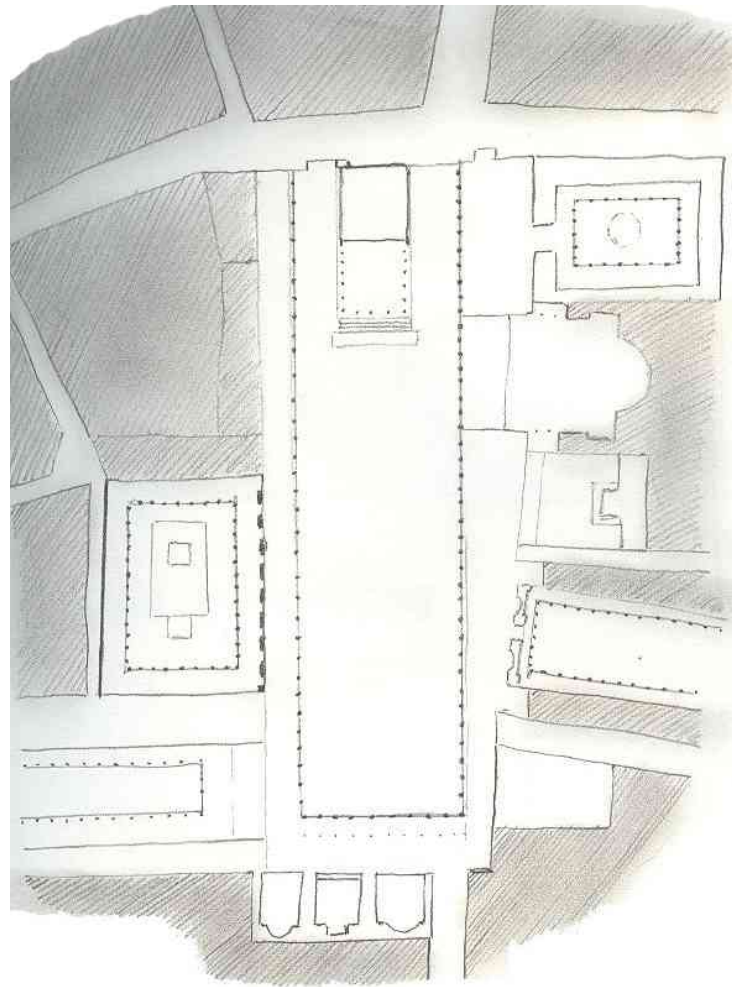
³ J. G. Ballard, *Kingdom Come* (Harper Collins:2006) 101

Why is public space necessary?

Why do we not live in isolation? Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges describes how we came to understand the idea of a shared public realm. He begins by explaining that the religion of primitive ages was exclusively domestic; so also were morals. It is explained that “religion did not say to a man, showing him another man, This is thy brother. It said to him, that is a stranger; he cannot participate in the religious acts of thy hearth”⁴. Domestic religion reinforced isolation. The family (gens) was at first the only form of society. In the history of ancient societies the epochs are more easily marked by the succession of ideas and institutions than by years. Several families formed a group called a phratry in Greek language and curia in latin. With it there was an enlargement of beliefs (religious ideas) and a god common to all was created. Eventually several phatries joined together to form a tribe. Eventually temples were made for shared divinities. On the day several tribes grouped together on the condition each of their beliefs should be respected, the city was formed. In politics numerous little governments continued to act while above them a common government was founded. Every Athenian formed a part of four distinct societies; family, phratry, tribe and city. The city is a confederation of groups. The religious idea was among the ancients, the inspiring breath and organizer of society. Social laws were the work of the gods; but those gods, so powerful and beneficent were nothing else than the beliefs of men.

Civitas and Urbs, either of which we translate by the word city, were not synonymous words among the ancients. Civitas was the political and religious association of families and tribes. Urbs was the place of assembly, the dwelling place and above all the sanctuary of this association. Religion, politics and law were mostly synonymous in ancient culture. There was no exact reason why families broke their isolation other than to satisfy “their needs or, their sentiments” according to Fustel de Coulanges. Why is public space necessary? Because we choose not to live in isolation. Because otherwise tribes remain as such without common ground to become a city.

⁴ Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (Dover: New York 2006)



Understanding plazas in the city centre

Public plazas in the Dublin city centre are all designed differently. Part of the goal of the new civic space is not to rely on the dense urban fabric of the city centre to formally shape the space. An understanding of the principles by which many plazas were designed in major cities in continental Europe would help to understand the qualities that make them so successful without copying their form.

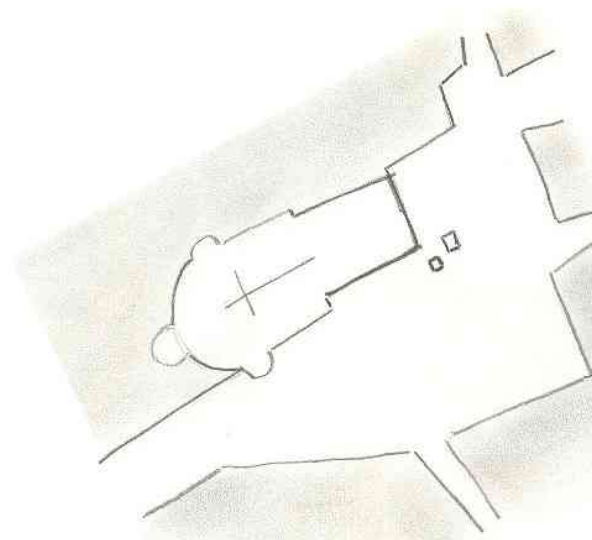
Camillo Sitte's book 'The birth of Modern City Planning' analyses the design of public places, plazas and streets in the city centres of continental European cities. The spaces described are beautiful. The public buildings attached to these plazas are described only in the way that they form the exterior public space. Sitte opens by condemning the three major methods of city planning of his time : the "gridiron system", the "radial system" and the "triangular system" as being of no interest artistically speaking. Their primary concern for street patterns makes their intentions from the start "a purely technical one"⁵. Throughout his analysis he explores the qualitative success of the plazas.

Sitte makes the convincing point that in modern planning "a network of streets always serves only the purposes of communication, never of art, since it can never be comprehended sensorily, can never be grasped as a whole except in a plan of it". Sitte explains that only that which a spectator "can hold in view", that can be seen, is of artistic importance : the single street or the individual plaza. This is interesting when building in two completely different environments in the city centre and on the periphery as the grain of the wider context is not crucial.

Sitte's belief in civic space is evident. He writes

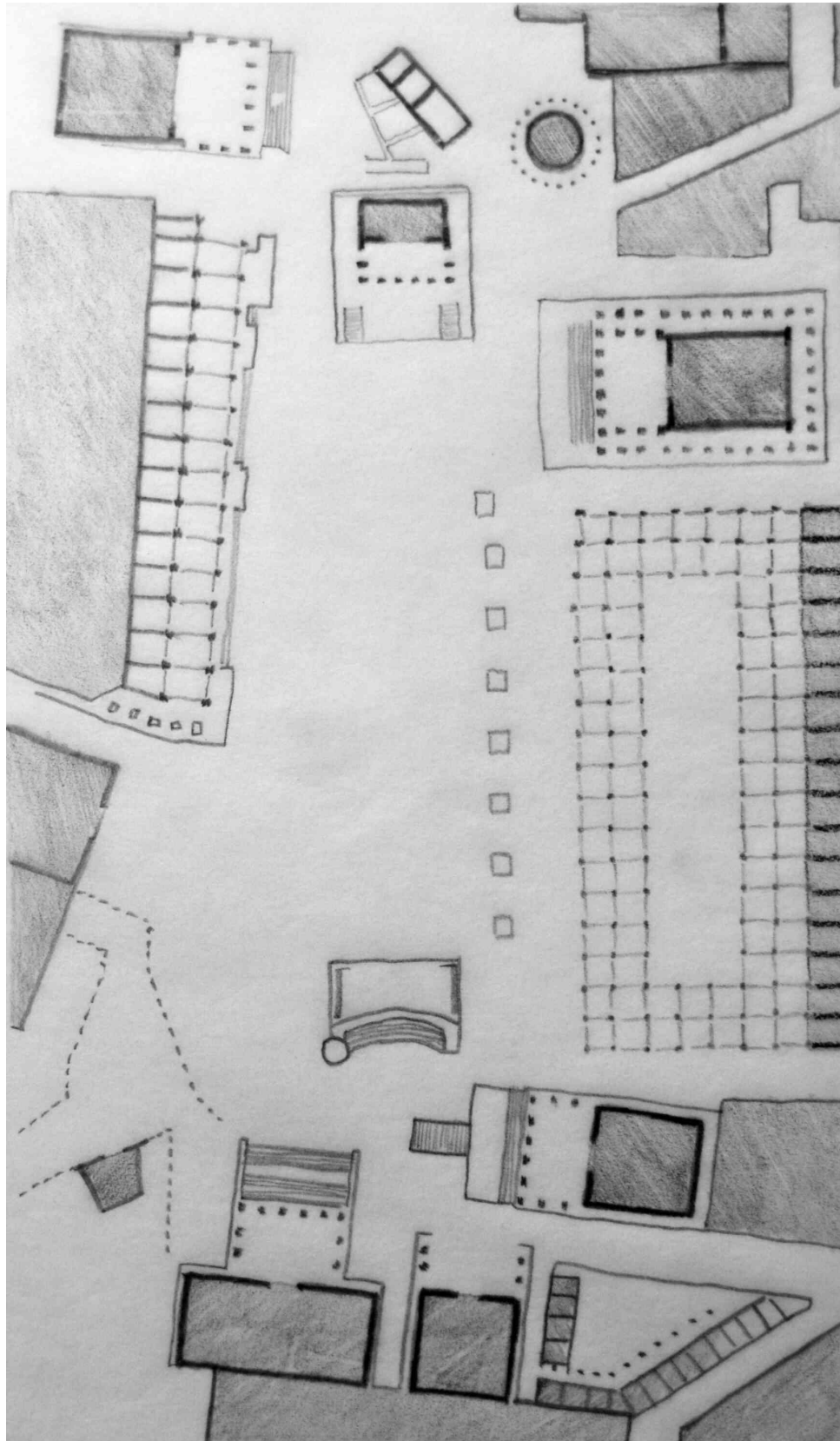
" The broad mass of living quarters should be businesslike and their the city may appear in its work clothes. However major plazas and thoroughfares should wear their "Sunday best" in order to be a pride and joy to the inhabitants, to awake civic spirit, and forever to nurture great and noble sentiment within our growing youth".⁶

In analysing plazas in Europe Sitte explores certain principles whether the plaza resides in Italy or Belgium. These are not rules. The first principle is that the centre of plazas be kept free. Monuments and market fountains were placed at points in the square untouched by traffic. They both avoid vehicular paths, centres of plazas and in general central axes thereby achieving especially pleasing artistic effects. Monuments should also not obstruct the line of traffic or the line of view to



⁵ Camillo Sitte, *The birth of modern city planning* (Dover: New York 2006) 222

⁶ Ibid. 230



a particularly decorative building. Sitte describes decorative buildings as poor backdrops for monuments. The rule for keeping the centre applies not only to monuments and fountains but also to buildings (churches, town halls and theatres) which today are sometimes located in the middle of plazas, in contrast to the older custom. Churches in these plazas were fused to other structures on one side or were encased by them on two or three sides.

Another principle is that public squares should be enclosed entities. Sitte states that from an artistic point of view a merely unbuilt piece of ground is not yet a city plaza. Aesthetically speaking a great deal would have to be added in embellishment, in meaning and in character. Each of the three or four corner streets that enter a particular plaza, do so at a different angle, so that from any point within the plaza no more than one single view out of the plaza is possible at a time. This reinforces the enclosed nature of the plaza.⁷

Sitte in his next principle describes the size and shapes of plazas. His thinking is in stark contrast to many plazas built in recent times. There are two categories of city square: the deep type and the wide type. Generally plazas in front of town halls (broad dimensioned buildings) are wide plazas and those in front of churches deep. A plaza that is too small does not give due effect to monumental buildings; on the other hand, one that is too large is, obviously, still more awkward because even the mightiest of structures seems dwarfed in relation to it. The comparative relationships alone are important between the square and its surrounding usually monumental buildings, the absolute size counting for but little. The size of plazas is in proportion to the size of the building dominating each plaza; or, to put it otherwise the height of the building (from the level of the plaza to the cornice) varies in proportion to the plaza. Square plazas are rare and do not look good. Overly long plazas in which the ratio of length to width is more than three to one already begin to lose charm. The width of streets opening into the plaza should also be mentioned as a decisive factor. The narrow alleys of old towns permitted small plazas while nowadays if only to overcome the effect of our broad streets huge spaces are necessary. The larger the space, the less impressive as a rule is the effect of its buildings and monuments because they cannot in the end prevail against it. These observations are interesting in that Sitte does not discuss the building of the plaza ground itself only its definition in relation to its surround buildings.⁸

Sitte's next principle is that the irregularities of old plazas is a positive attribute. Sitte writes that thoroughfares of interminable length and the modern absolute regularity of public squares are useless as far as artistic aims are concerned. The irregularities of old plazas do not have an unpleasant effect, but on the contrary, they stimulate our interest, and "they augment the

⁷ Ibid. 32

⁸ Ibid. 178, 179

picturesque quality of the tableau". Sitte observes that "the plazas always give good vantage point for viewing the facade of the prominent building on the plaza". The idea of a definitive prominent building amongst other buildings and its inherent hierarchical implications may be alien to my project.

The irregularity of the plaza is behind the observer. The next principle of grouping plazas is one often forgotten. Sitte's analysis found that a single public square is the exception. The grouping of plazas is also related to the enclosed character of plazas and to the basic idea of attaching other buildings to churches and palaces.⁹

These principles are elements in the design of civic space but not rules. Sitte writes that nobody is concerned today with city planning as an art- only as a technical problem, "when as a result, the artistic effect in no way lives up to our expectations, we are left bewildered and helpless".¹⁰ We can't change, nor might we want to, the fact that today public events are discussed in the daily papers, instead of, in Rome and Greece, by public readers and town criers in the baths and on the open square. Sitte remarks on the uses of public space :

"Markets have moved indoors or diminished due to home delivery. Fountains are ornamental. Works of art are straying increasingly into the art cages of the museums. The life of the common people has been steadily withdrawing from public squares".¹¹

Even whilst acknowledging this, until we do not need to move physically from place to place public space will be necessary. I would agree with Sitte that the answer is not to leave city planning simply to chance.

⁹ Ibid. 197

¹⁰ Ibid. 222

¹¹ Ibid. 246

Volunteering

A civic architecture in the centre and the periphery will need a program that will appeal to a balanced cross section of society. What civic interest ties people to a place? Volunteering represents both of these ideas. Research by Prof. John Moyan into “The idea of a civic core” discusses the nature of volunteering in Britain. The research defines the term civic involvement as the amount of unpaid help people give to voluntary organisations, the amount of money they give to charity, and the number of civic and community organisations they belong to and participate in.¹² In Britain the research proves there is a civic core in society. One percent of the population do about ten percent of voluntary work however ninety percent of the population contribute to one of the three areas of civic involvement. What are the normative expectations in this area? The research discusses the perceived barriers to civic involvement. People's confidence is important when discussing volunteering ; what it is that they think they might be able to do beyond giving money. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that more people would volunteer if they were sure becoming involved didn't involve any risk to them. Another perceived barrier the research found was the perception that once involved a commitment of three or four days a week was necessary, forever. Sport is interesting because it provides an opportunity for people to attend without commitment and then allows things to evolve afterward. There is less information on volunteering in Ireland however the GAA is a voluntary organisation and one of the best organized amateur sports in the world. In a city with a large critical mass various volunteering groups would be a better and more inclusive program, than a program that relies on only one organisation.

The sociologist John Wilson further describes the nature of volunteering. Wilson defines volunteering as “any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause”¹³. Volunteering is part of a cluster of helping behaviours entailing more commitment than spontaneous assistance but narrower in scope than the care provided to family and friends.¹⁴ Theories that explain volunteering through individual attributes fall into two groups : those that emphasize motives or self-understanding and those that emphasize rational action or cost-benefit analysis. Wilson admits that less research has been conducted on contextual effects on volunteering. Contextual effects constitute the impact of organizational, community and regional characteristics on individual decisions to volunteer. Civic spaces surrounding volunteering both in

¹² BBC Podcast. Prof. John Moyan, The idea of a civic core (Radio 4, Thinking Allowed 24/11/2010)

¹³ John Wilson, “Volunteering”, Annual Review 26 (2000), 215

¹⁴ Ibid. 216

the city centre and the periphery would make legible the latent civic activities of a cross section of society.

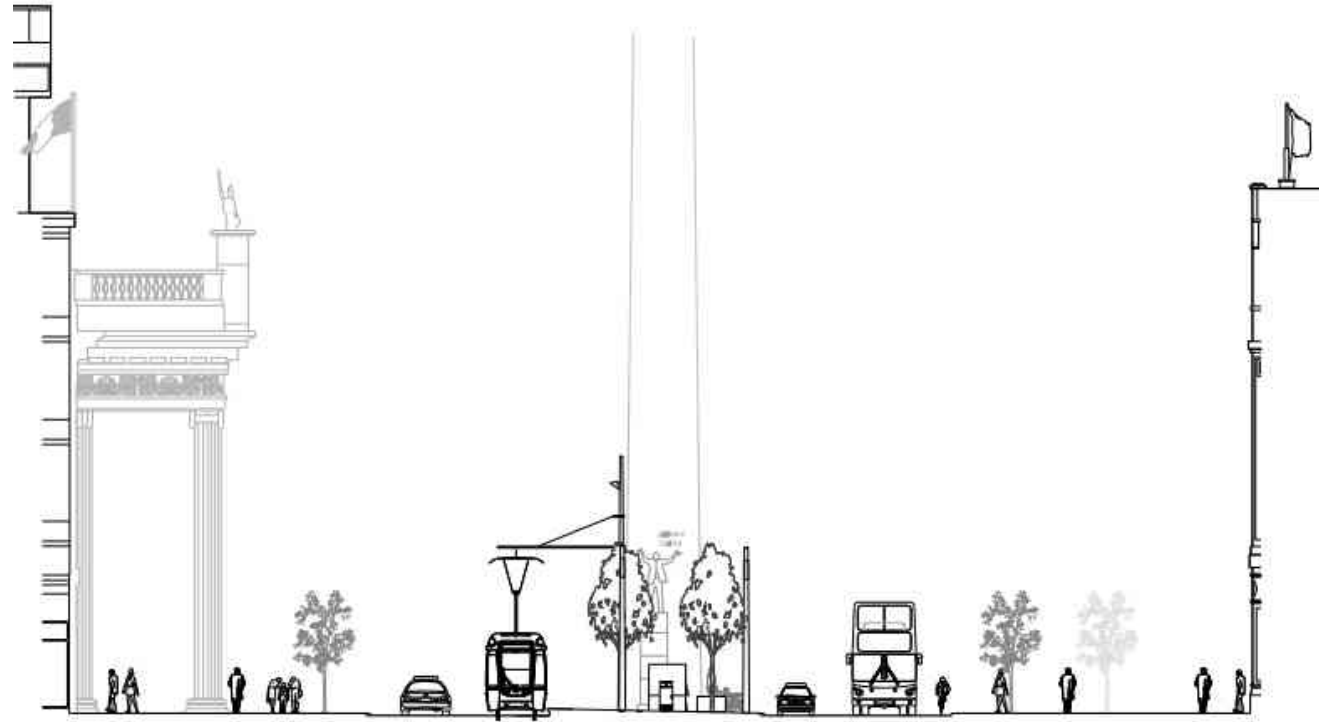
Site

I propose the choice of four sites along the red Luas line (light rail tram) in Dublin. The red Luas line was finished in February 2004. Initially built with twenty two stops it stretches from Connolly dart station next to the Custom House deep in the city centre out to the suburb of Tallaght outside of the M50 motorway that encloses Dublin. The light rail tram can be read as a section through the city. The stops are varied including : The Four Courts, the National Museum of Ireland, Heuston Train station, St James's Hospital, the red cow roundabout, Tallaght shopping centre along with various suburban housing estates, an Industrial park and a number of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. There is much empty land around the stops as not all the land purchased was necessary to build the rail through. All of the stops are the exact same although their context is much varied. The stops are small and provide equal access. The carriage of the Luas acts as a civic space in itself. Sometimes people busk on the Luas. The Luas arrives every three to five minutes at peak times and every six to ten minutes throughout the rest of the day. The Luas had 25.4 million passengers in 2009. One becomes more aware of those around you on the Luas than in underground subways because an exit strategy does not need formulation. The ease of arrival and departure from the tram allow you to observe those around you. The Luas is a single tube in form without divided compartments. Large sections of the wall of the carriage are glass so that the Luas is filled with natural light. The large glass doors reinforce the easy entrance and exit from the tram. When exiting the tram you are often confronted with an unnecessary wall to the back of the slightly raised platform forcing you to turn left or right. How should one encounter this new civic space after the doors open?

Tony Judt writes that railways are “the harbingers and emblems of an age of public investment and civic pride”¹⁵. Judt describes the systematic destruction of train stations in Western countries particularly America, between 1955 and 1975, as a mix of “ antihistoricist fashion and corporate self-interest”¹⁶. Judt remarks that the stations were often moved underground “ while the visible building- no longer expected to serve any uplifting civic purpose – was demolished and

¹⁵ Tony Judt, “Bring Back the Rails”, (The New York Review January 13th 2011)

¹⁶ Ibid.



replaced by an anonymous commercial centre or office building or recreation centre, or all three”¹⁷. Judt highlights something very important to my project “ the modern city is now so large, so far flung - and so crowded and expansive – that even the better-heeled have resorted to public transport once more...more than at any other point since the late 1940s, our cities rely for their survival upon the train”. The construction of two new Luas lines in Dublin and the further three proposed lines coincide with a new understanding of the importance of rail travel for society. Judt writes that

“what we thought was late modernity – the post-railway world of cars and planes – turns out, like so much else of the decades 1950-1990 to have been a parenthesis: driven, in this case, by the illusion of perennially cheap fuel and the attendant cult of privatization”.¹⁸

Trains are perennially modern. Ireland built train stations and railways from 1834 to 1920. Now nothing is more modern or convenient than the Luas. Judt writes that trams “ cannot exist without common accord (and, in recent times, common expenditure) and by design they offer a practical benefit to individual and collectivity alike”.

I agree with the powerful statement Judt makes in the end that

“if we cannot spend our collective resources on trains and trams and travel contentedly in them it is not because we have joined gated communities and need nothing but private cars to move between them. It will be because we have become gated *individuals* who don't know how to share public space to common advantage”.

17 Ibid.

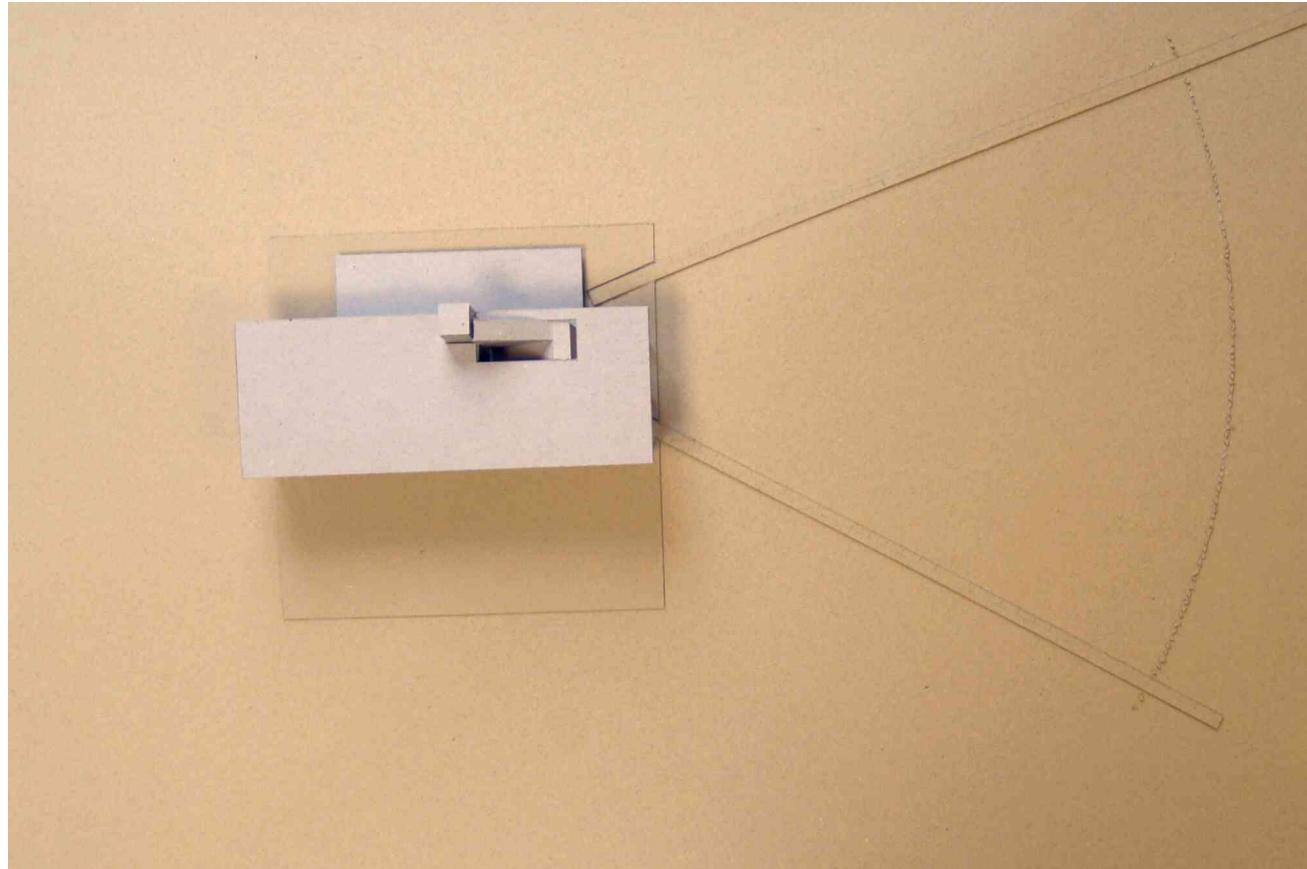
18 Ibid.



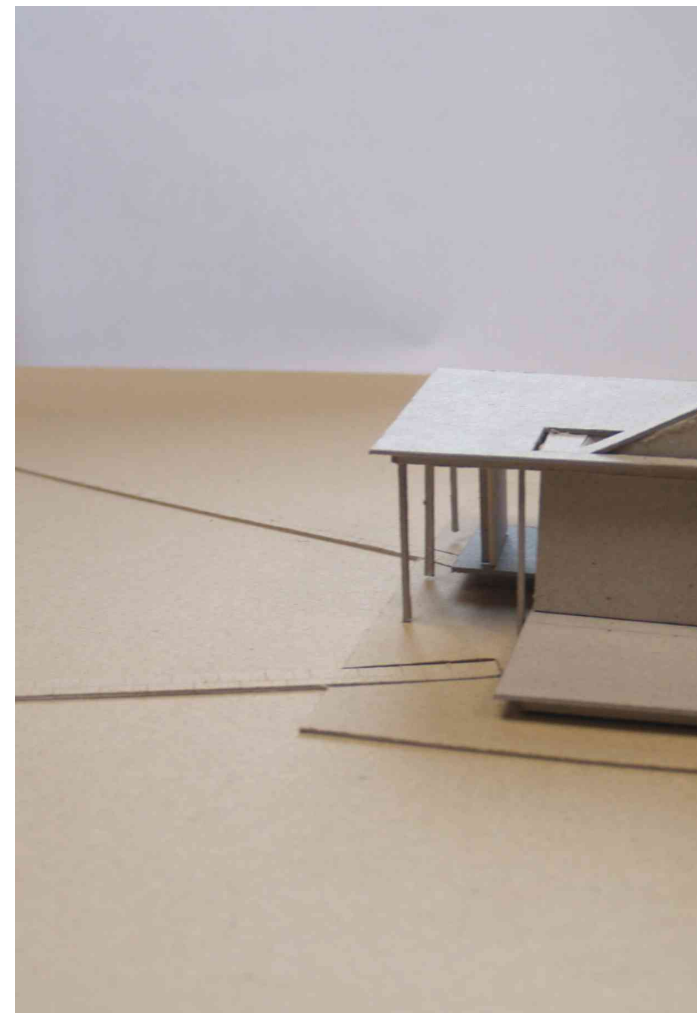
Primer projects

The primer projects I designed this year were all centred on the idea of civic space. The brief for the first project was to design a cold storage facility in Shannon. Shannon airport was built in the late 1930s as the technology of flying changed from landing in harbours to landing on runways. In order for the flying boats to land a semicircular harbour was built in Shannon but never used. The harbour makes a significant mark on the landscape. Shannon airport and the adjoining tax free zone were very successful economic ventures. A new town was built for those that worked in the airport. The airport created a strong centre for those in transit with looping roads, drop off points, escalators and waiting rooms. I wanted to create a centre for the people of Shannon that were not in transit. I placed two buildings in the harbour, one at the centre and one at the edge of the semicircular harbour. The pavilion (changing facilities) at the centre was 750 meters from the edge on all sides. The harbour was to become a park open to the public at all times. The water was the surface of the park and the public could use boats, rafts and inflatable spheres to navigate the park. This place of leisure would foster a solidarity amongst those who swam there. The centre of the roof of the pavilion was open to the sky allowing rain to fall through. There were six openings equally spaced around the circular pavilion making it permeable from all sides. The floor to ceiling openings and the proportion of wall to opening in the building makes the experience of the building inextricably linked to the surrounding park. Could the harbour now be described as civic infrastructure?

Our second project was situated in Hafencity. Hafencity in Hamburg is an island on the river Elbe created originally as a tax free zone. Hamburg is the second largest port in Europe. With the creation of the European Union the concept of a free port lost its importance. Hafencity was rezoned as a new section of the city centre. 12,000 new apartments and workspace for 40,000 people were planned. Our task was to propose a project that foster a culture of art in Hafencity. I explored a rectangular civic space for Hafencity with a connection to the canals. Most of the public space in Hafencity is built in long narrow streets. My proposal looked at a gathering space or plaza in the centre. A regular rhythm of artist studios were included along one side. In my initial sketch there was a new gathering space at the centre of Hafencity and a zone along the edge Hafencity where it met the historic city centre.



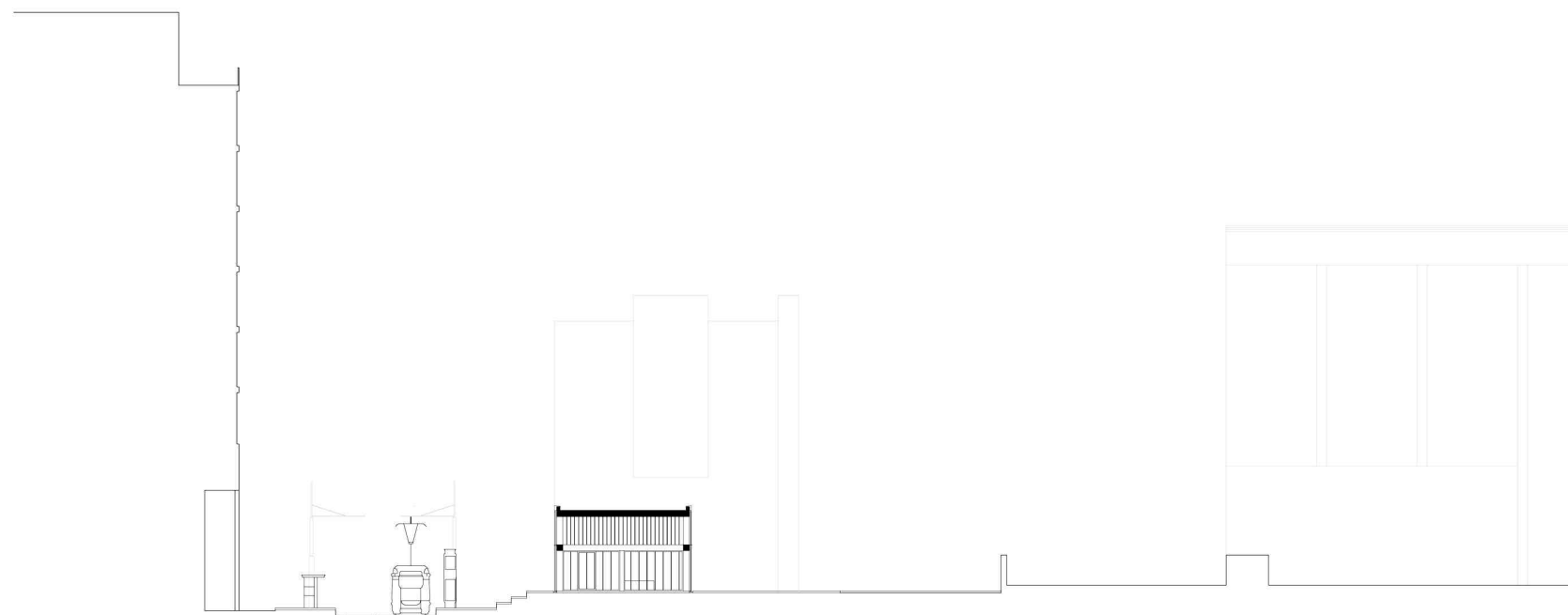
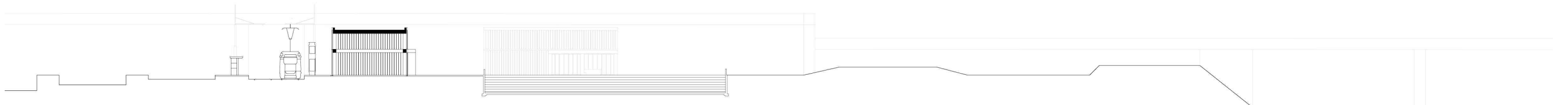
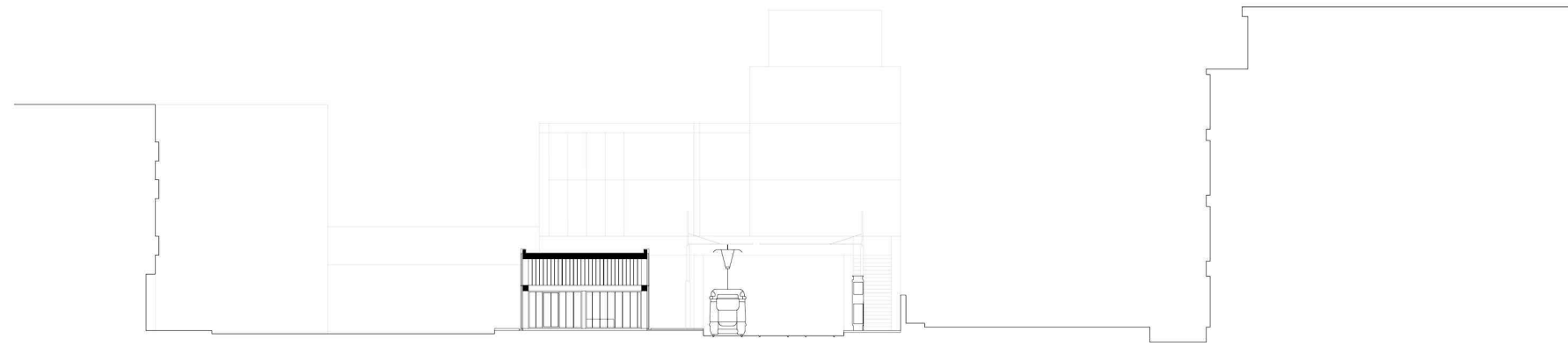
Our third project asked us to test our thesis idea in the University of Limerick. I choose the lawn in front of the president's house as a possible civic space. My idea was to create a centre of political activism. The building was small compared with the other buildings on campus but the lawn was large enough to hold the students of U.L. I explored the form of the building in this project. I placed a two meter square podium first. I surrounded it on three sides with a small building. I then explored transitional space between the building and the lawn. The lawn seeks to project an image of the university. The juxtaposition of the lawn as an image of the university with the real views of the students would make an interesting civic space.



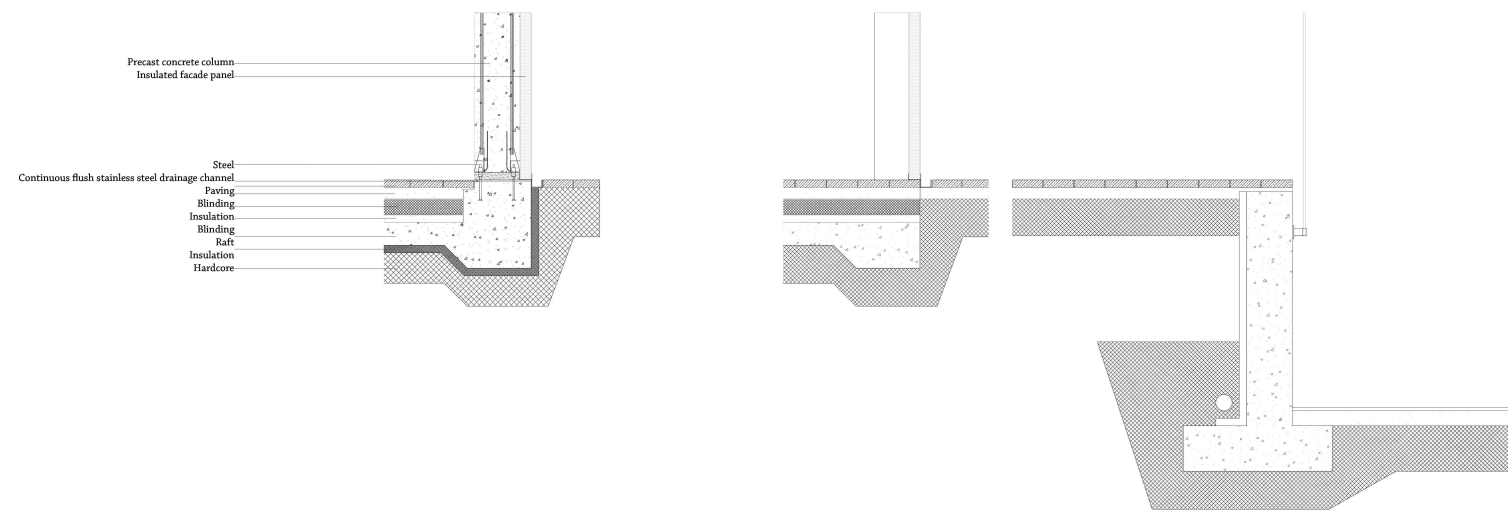
The civic space in my third primer project sought to promote conflicting opinions and debate. The proposed civic spaces along the Luas seek to consolidate existing groups within Dublin. A university as an organisation and a city as a collection of groups of people are different. The student body is less divided than the divide between different groups in society. The conflict created in my third primer would be a welcome addition to the university. The University in its role in society is to question received wisdom. A city already harbours much conflict and opposing ideologies and further friction would not be as meaningful. The city is a much divided group of people between centre and edge, poverty and extreme wealth. The city in its role is to improve the quality of life of all its citizens.



Perspectives of reception area in Tallaght







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