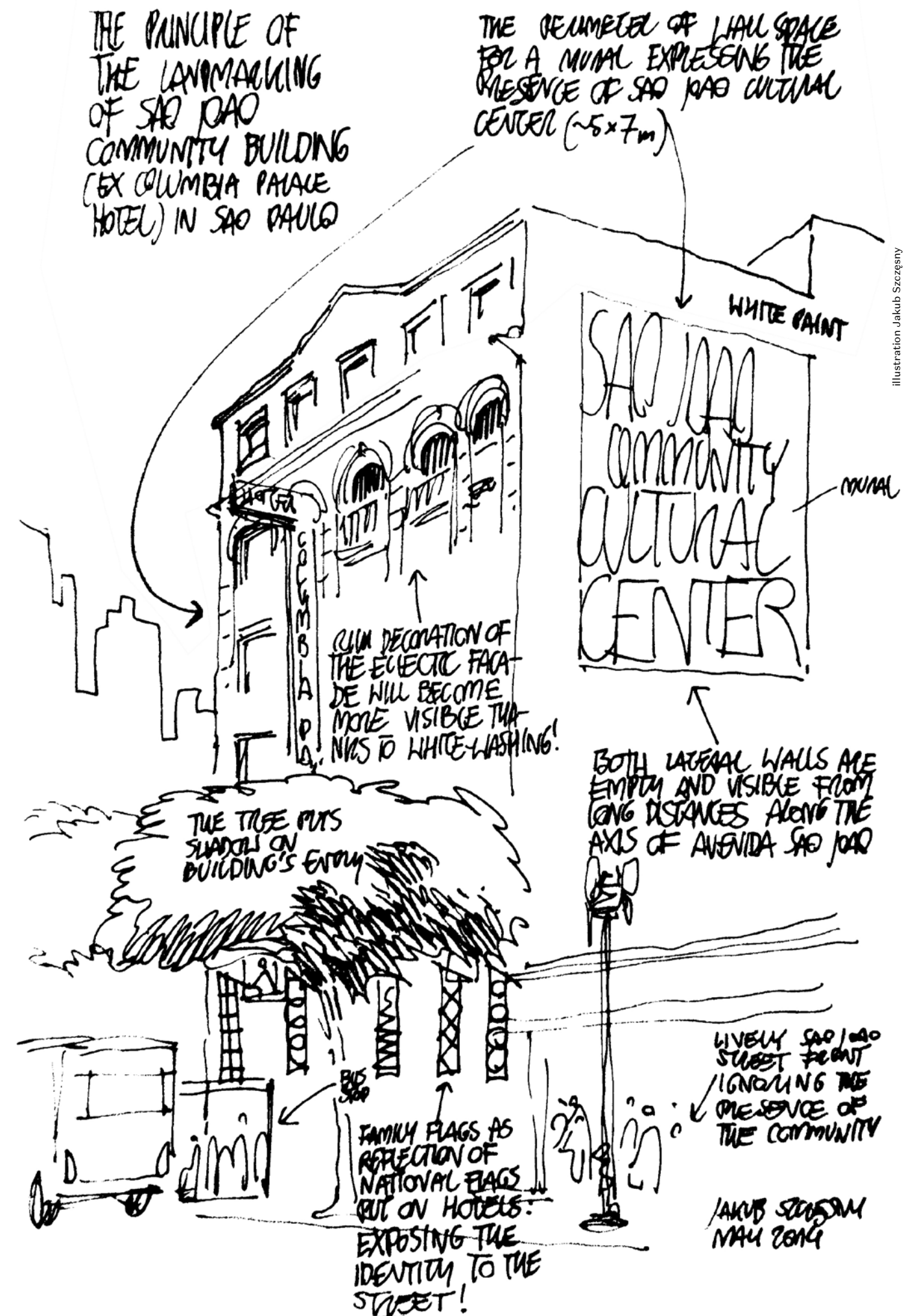


Developing identities to improve collectivity

Ocupação São João
São Paulo, Brazil



“Those who don’t fight are dead”

“The heart of the movement is the collectivity: when the time comes to fight, it’s one for all and all for one”
—Nazaré Brasil (cultural center coordinator)

Faced with chaotic and uneven processes of gentrification, today São Paulo has a serious housing deficit: the city lacks 200,000 accommodation spaces for its citizens and has a chronic lack of access to social housing facilities. Ocupação São João is an example of this reality, the occupation of an abandoned hotel being carried out in 2011 by families under the FLM - Frente de Luta por Moradia (Front for the struggle for housing) banner. The São João occupation is about more than housing however. For example, on the first floor there is a self-managed cultural center, the Centro Cultural São João, which aims to strengthen political participation through arts and culture.



it's not

Coat of arms, representation and precarity

“When we talk about social justice (...) it is fascinating to observe the emergence of self-consciousness”

—Jakub Szczęsny

The artist Jakub Szczęsny was the first Lanchonete.org resident to live in the Ocupação São João. After two weeks of daily contact with the families and the collective tasks of the occupation, he decided to create the “flag workshop”. Dividing the workshop into two sessions, he first focused on the past of the occupation’s families, through questions about previous generations, values and shared memories. The second moment was focused on making the flags, with some materials that were donated to the cultural center. The idea was that anything conceived by the families could be designed as a family “coat of arms”, as a symbol of representation.



only about

Raising a flag

The dynamics proposed by Jakub respected the daily modus operandi of the occupation's life: the presence of the three-day workshop was not obligatory, the members of the families had full flexibility as to the making of the flags and the schedule was not rigid. Using fabrics that were donated, the participants were invited to draw, paint and sew their coat of arms, with the final touches to the flags being made by a seamstress who was also a member of the occupation. Children played a particularly important role in designing the flags working with the idea of hanging them from the building's façade to ironically recall its former use as a hotel and thus reinforcing the presence of the families therein.



a facade

Not just a façade

Given the way the Brazilian mass media criminalises the city's many occupations, the act of raising the flags from the front of the Ocupação São João has its own symbolic importance. It goes beyond the exhibition of an art work, demonstrating to passersby that the space is occupied by people and families, all with their own singular complexities.



created by Lorena Vicini (lorena.vicini@gmail.com) and Raphael Daibert (raphaeldaibert@gmail.com)

graphic design by Laura Daviña (lauradavina.com), photos by Isabel Gandía and Raphael Daibert

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