

Zentrum Töss

today



View on the ‚Marktplatz‘ with the sculptural fountain and a scaffolding next to it. March 1990

Forgotten Dreams

It soon became clear that the concrete buildings aged far less gracefully than expected in the 1960s. Built quickly and cheaply, also Zentrum Töss soon suffered from leaking pipes and heating failures. By the early 1980s, the Zentrum Töss was already in need of renovation and rapidly lost its appeal as more shops moved out.

In 1988, the Erb Group purchased the complex, intending to expand it and use the hall as its company headquarters. The plan failed — not only because of the building's poor condition but also due to a city regulation requiring the large hall to remain open to the public.

Over time, the center became a neglected property, poorly maintained and largely unwanted.

In 2003, Migros closed its restaurant, and the Erb Group went bankrupt the same year. The property was sold again in 2017, and while little has changed since, hopes remain high in Töss that the concrete icon might one day experience a revival.

,In 1970, the centre was at
the peak of its time.'



The urban design concept of Zentrum Töss remains largely intact. The post office and Migros are still there, while other shops have come and gone. All the key elements of the original idea — the ‚Dorfplatz‘, the ‚Ladenpassage‘, and the ‚Marktplatz‘, the “city within the city” — still exist. Yet they bear the marks of time and the neglect that came with their low status in the property portfolios of their successive owners.



It recalls Le Corbusier's utopian Plan Voisin (1925), in which he envisioned inserting a city of high-rises into the historic fabric of Paris.



Even after 50 years, the center remains an insular block — a solitary structure with little real connection to its surroundings.

, Dorfplatz‘ today

Not much of what was once envisioned and celebrated at Zentrum Töss in its ideal form still reflects the original intentions. The so-called “village square” in front of the hotel, hall, and library now serves as a bleak parking lot.

The reasons are obvious — these addresses alone no longer generate enough public activity to sustain a lively place.



,Ladenpassage‘ today

Beneath what was once a ‚Dorfplatz‘ with collective character lies a dimly lit arcade with several small shops, hair salons, and a snack stand. Even on bright sunny days, only diffuse natural light reaches the interior of the ‚Ladenpassage‘, since its atriums have all been at least partly closed. Even the light bulbs only work partially as well.

Just the colours of fresh fruits and vegetables in front of the Merdan Market provide a contrast against the gray exposed concrete. Nothing here invites people to linger anymore — the space has been reduced to a functional access area.



, Marktplatz‘ today

Bordered by a few scattered plants, the entirely sealed square offers hardly any shelter from the busy roads that frame it. Still, even on a chilly autumn evening, there is noticeable movement — though people tend to pause only for a moment before moving on.

The fountain, emerging from the ground like a piece of public art, stands dry; whether this is temporary or a lasting condition remains uncertain, adding a quiet sense of neglect to the scene.



Tr a c e s o f p a s t v i s i o n s

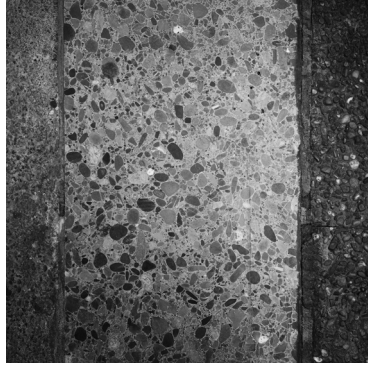
The landmark of Töss celebrated its 50th anniversary five years ago — a commemoration that came almost close to an obituary. Over time, it has experienced many ups and downs. In the eyes of the public, it remains controversial; the widespread optimism of the years shortly after its opening soon gave way to the many deficiencies.

If Zentrum Töss ever lacked one thing, it was money. As a result, many of the originally high-quality design features were gradually removed. What proved too expensive to maintain was either discarded or put to more practical use.

Throughout the building, one can still see the original vision of its creators — everything was thoughtfully designed as a cohesive whole.



atriums



reliefs



sculptures



Children playing with the fountain on the square in front of the migros, Zentrum Töss in 1981.

The People of Töss

Few buildings in Winterthur are as polarizing as Zentrum Töss, yet the perspective of those who live and work there is often overlooked. Very few structures manage to keep an entire district and the city so engaged over such a long period.

The debate is no longer just about crumbling concrete; it revolves around the fundamental challenges of coexistence, the varied needs of urban planning, and the ongoing search for a distinct identity in a rapidly changing neighborhood.

Despite these challenges, the center still appears to be well frequented, with a noticeable feature being that many of the shops serve a clientele of diverse nationalities, reflecting the multicultural character of the area.

Slobodan **Arsenijevic**, janitor

‘For me, Zentrum Töss is just adequate’

One of them is Slobodan Arsenijevic, who has worked for 15 years at Cleanotec, the dry-cleaning shop in the arcade, and between 2010 and 2022 also served as caretaker of the residential block.

He is well aware of the rumors about redevelopment: “There are always speculations that it will be demolished, that it will disappear — but it’s still here and will remain for years.” At 60, he is calm and pragmatic. Renovations over the years — lifts, the roof, even doors throughout the building — have kept it functional. He finds the center quiet and manageable; occasional thefts are normal in a larger complex.

The concrete building may not be a “gem,” but for Arsenijevic, that isn’t the point: “If we tear everything down and rebuild, it will end up looking like Dubai and everything will get more expensive.” He pauses thoughtfully: “For me, Zentrum Töss is just adequate.” His words carry neither enthusiasm nor disappointment.

Can Cagla, hotel & restaurant

‘For me, Zentrum Töss is just adequate’

Can Cagla also earns her living in Zentrum Töss. For the past five years, she has worked in service at the hotel and restaurant located on the parking deck above the arcade. She moved from Zurich into the residential tower for the job.

Cagla wishes the building would be renovated, describing everything as very old. When asked if she enjoys living there, the 37-year-old answers bluntly: “No, definitely not!” An older man overhearing the conversation adds: “Tear it down, Zentrum Töss gone — do you know how old it is?” He himself does not live in the tower, noting that only those with enough money could afford it even now.

For Cagla, high rents are a major issue, given the building’s condition. She also complains about the people: “There’s action here every day. Young people come and smash our Swisslos machine on a normal afternoon.”