



Reinterpreting the Social Value of the Marketplace for the Community

EOI Melilla Language School
Ángel Verdasco Arquitectos
Melilla, Spain

Former Use: Indoor Market
Current Use: Music Conservatory,
Language School, and Adult
Education Center

The 2003 closure of Melilla's central market building created a rupture in the neighborhood's cohesion. Located in Spain's north-African enclave bordering Morocco, the 90-year-old commercial center was once also, as Ángel Verdasco Arquitectos (AVA) termed it, a "social catalyst," connecting the city's Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities. A 2008 competition sought to reassert the market's social value. AVA's winning proposal transformed the site into an academy of music, a language school, and an educational center for adults. Today, it supports 1,600 students and provides cross-cultural connectivity.

The resulting 7,548 m² (81,246 ft²) scheme has transformed the two single-story market halls into connecting two and seven-story steel-framed buildings. Rising up within the footprint of the original market, the scheme offers Melilla's different communities a place to interact. At ground floor, the open-plan market halls, which have retained their original signage, have become a meeting point for the three schools, providing squares and halls for impromptu gatherings.

The original structure had fallen into a state of dereliction and the roof required removal. The market structure was reduced to a series of walls that provided the market with shelter, but which had no foundations to build up from. The architects embraced this fact, and instead of underpinning foundations to increase the walls' loading capacity, they left them freestanding—allowing them to enclose the new structures within. This might be seen as facadism, but in this case, reducing the building to a mere skin is true to its original structural intention. By retaining the facade, AVA was able to build upon the memories and identity of the market, which might otherwise have been swept away, leaving any new intervention to create new ones from scratch. Instead, the center is able to help promote multiculturalism and foster a sense of diversity through coexistence by reappropriating the market structure for its new purpose.

The new towers that form the education center are covered in locally produced white ceramic tiles in a standardized 88 × 43 cm (34.6 × 17 in) rhombus format. These are both perforated and solid, while specially designed tiles wrap the structure's corners. These tiles help reduce the burden of cleaning and maintenance, while also providing a sense of continuity with the buildings of the surrounding area.

A new aluminum lattice frame sits proud of the walls and varies in density depending on the orientation. This covers the ceramic tiles, overlapping with the window openings to create a pattern of *jali*-style screens that temper the climate by providing shade and ventilation to the teaching rooms. These panels are a contemporary reinterpretation of local Islamic architecture, for which perforated *jali* screens (which ordinarily feature ornate patterns derived from calligraphy and geometry) control the light and ventilation through an interior space, creating patterns of shadow and light. Here, the multiple layers of glazing, aluminum lattice, and tiling have been expanded to offer similar functionality, providing a distinctly modern contrast to the historic market hall below.