REFLECTION

SOUTH WORKS CHICAGO STUDIO
COMMUNAL INNOVATIVE CREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION CENTER

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The Graduation Studio is divided in two semesters, where in the first semester we are assigned to research and design in big scale where in the second semester we focus on the smaller scale and our individual project. Yet the aim of the studio is to target all scales, so when designing in small scale we reflect on bigger scales as well. The ultimate goal of the studio is to generate analytical and critical thinking aside the conventional design process.

The first semester's research—which is groupwork—consist of a collection of hard and soft data based on previous analysis of Illinois (L), Chicago (M) and South Chicago neighborhood (S). We used this objective data and did our research on the city of Chicago within the frameworks of three themes: ‘Shrinking’, ‘Ecological’ and ‘Identity’ to know more specifically about the characteristics of the South Works area and it was also the fundament for the Manifesto and Masterplan. Based on this research we have created a manifesto to give us direction to our thoughts and we used it as the theoretical groundwork to formulate our masterplan. We came with our masterplan “Made in South Works”. This masterplan was a vision against the shrinking neighborhoods and other problematic findings of the South Works.

What shrinking means are population decrease, unpaid propert taxes, closure of public services which schools, food desert and problematic neighborhood, where concentration a solution for the ongoing shrinkage and multi functional nodes instead of the traditional mono functional american urban sprawl.

So the plot of former steel factory have to be recolonized within the spirit of the new frontiers. This node proposed to bring back the manufacturing, return the lost of jobs for the neighbors, accomodate different type of functions and provide access to retail.

Building on the tradition of colonization, an exploration into American frontier literature addressed the issues concerning the development of a new settlement. The South Works site needs to be recolonized in a modern way. For the new settlement education in relation to manufacturing and commercial world is significant. This settlement in the node will open the borders in positive way and will help to develop the problematic society. The new settlement needs therefore to be a Communal Innovative Career & Technical Education Centre.
The theme of the Complex Projects, Chicago studio was to develop an alternative proposal for Lakeside development in South Chicago, a location where the South Works Steel factory was located. The site, located 15 miles from the Loop and is surrounded by neighborhoods that are dealing with a lot of social and economic problems. Today the whole city is dealing with decreasing population and particularly in South Works, when the US Steel South Works in 1992 was closed, it result in shrinking. The industry provided for the whole area for a long time well paid jobs, but put the area in decline when these jobs disappeared. With this decline a lot of problems emerged, like vacancy, decreasing property values, emptiness, plagued by crime, high-unemployment, bad education, lack of activities, lack of jobs, closure of public services which are schools and so on.

Another main problematic findings is that Chicago is one of the most spatially, economically, socially, and physically segregated cities in the United States. This distinction is clearly visibly in the differences between North and South Chicago.

Another problematic findings were the monofunctionality of the urban sprawl with less amount of public services, less money to pay the public amenities because of less people per square km and there is unsustainble car based model that demands a lot of energy. All in all, the shrinkage is aggregated by the urban model.

So the main real problem is how to develop an empty territory where the South Works Steel factory was located in the situation of declining and unemployed community all around. The questions that are arises; how to turn South Chicago’s ongoing decline, how to improve the deteriorating living environment of the unemployed community and low educated people that surround the empty plot and how to deal with this distinctions.

All these problematic findings we discovered also major opportunities. The most important one is to bring back the manufacturing that once made the city flourish. There are few good arguments to do so. US manufacturing companies are “reshoring”: they bring back their businesses to the US because of increasing wages in Asian countries and growing sentiment of US made products. Because of that, the amount of manufacturing jobs are already increasing. Also, the South Works site is very well connected by train, water and road.

Another important finding was that Chicago is developing in the direction of a multinodal network, a region of multifunctional centers in the monofunctional sprawl. So The main theme of the masterplan design was to bring back the manufacturing, but in a new way.

Create a high dense multifunctional city, based on manufacturing, with development rules and principles to guarantee the different way of working than the non-functional urban sprawl: density and multifunctionality based on new ways of transportation, so that the new city can resist future stresses.

To emphasize that we do it differently than the rest of the city, we designed a “node”: a very well connected dense urban environment that lies as far as possible from the existing neighborhood. We used the theme of recolonizing: a new start, exploring new frontiers. As a new frontier designer I think South Works site needs an Innovative center which consisting of Education, Commerce and Manufacturing.
The graduation Studio was structured into common research phase, group masterplan and strategy development, individual project proposal and building design. The first five weeks the studio carried on objective research about Illinois, Chicago and South Chicago, which was the basis for field trip to Chicago. Furthermore, the studio offered the freedom to approach the design “philosophical” and allowing the architect to look at the project from different angels and take position on it. With this attitude our masterplan was designed and also my individual project. The masterplan was most of all a statement that criticizes American urbanism and challenges one to think about the subject “the new frontiers. The methodology of the individual building design was similar. The individual building design is also criticized the education system of America and tries to combine different functions in one unified building. The challenge was to interact with the border of those different functions inside the building, the border of the whole unified building with the surrounding and creating qualitative spatial of the inner side building. I think the methods that are used in both phases are in line with this philosophical approach.

The research has led to certain observations, which are used as framework for the urban strategy for the location. One of the main observations is that Chicago is one of the most spatially, economically, socially, and physically segregated cities in the United States. This distinction is clearly visibly in the differences between North and South Chicago. North Chicago is a prosperous part of the city, with ethnic diversity, varying education institutions, cultural facilities and a developed infrastructure, whereas the South is facing problems with violence, poverty and criminality. 21% of the inhabitants of South Chicago is unemployed, and especially the youth unemployment is severely high. The neighbourhood adjacent to the location is poor; it has to deal with a lot of vacancy, and empty dwellings, there is a lack of cultural facilities and education institutions. The distribution of well-educated people is mainly centered in North Chicago, since the well-educated people from the South are moving to the North for better job opportunities and a better living environment.

By investing in education, especially the children get the opportunity to work for a better future. In this way they have the opportunity to address the unemployment, poverty and indirectly the violence. Placing an education campus with facilities for the neighbourhood during the first developments in the area, creates functions that attract a variety of people and create a lively space. The campus is an area based on interaction, information sharing and synarchy.
The graduation project is a reaction on the American cities shrinking. On the scale of masterplan the project proposes an alternative way to organize our cities and therefor be value to many cases. The aim of the project is to bring back the different types and sizes of manufacturing in combination with other functions and how to deal with the problematic neighbourhood was the core of the masterplan.

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My individual project proposal idea of the Communal Innovative Career & Technical Education came from above mentiond research finding to open the border between the society as a new frontier designer. By investing in education, especially the youth get the opportunity to work for a better future. In this way they have the opportunity to address the unemploymnt, poverty and indirectly the violence. Placing an innovative education centre with facilities for the neighbourhood creates functions that attract a variety of people and create a lively space.