Theme of the studio and the subject of study
Complex studios isn’t limited on a specific scale of architectural thinking, it tries to bridge the barriers between urbanism and architecture. Due to the project being abroad all aspects of a county, region, city, neighborhood and building are treated. It addresses places that are neglected or are in a form of social and/or economic distress. It’s focus is developing Master plans and building designs that address both public as private interests. Aim is to develop the area on a multitude of scales; from city to building, to identify the opportunities and weaknesses and use this complexity to create building plans.

The selected project is Garfield Park, an old neighborhood in the Westside of Chicago. This area situated in the middle between the city Centre, the loop, and Chicago’s suburbs. The neighborhood was built as a city expansion for the middleclass when Chicago’s economy was booming. During the great migration many of the six million African Americans that moved from the Southern United States to Chicago moved to neighborhoods like Garfield Park. Enabled by growing wealth many of the white population moved out of the old city expansions to neighboring suburbs, while the African American population remained. Due to racial inequality at the time numerous attempts to consolidate the separation of these African American neighborhoods form the rest of the city where made. This nowadays results in Chicago being one of the most segregated cities in the country. As a result of redlining, the practice of denying service to residents of certain areas based on ethnic makeups, facilities disappeared and population dwindled. The once thriving neighborhood is reduced to an area in social and economic distress.

On top of this the people living in Garfield Park are threatened by a new enemy. Due to low land prices and large amount of vacancy new companies and a new generation of middleclass are discovering the possibilities of the area, gentrification is hitting Garfield Park. While this attracts new much needed facilities for the current inhabitants is also raises land value, forcing many of them to move.

My study concerns the prevention this displacement through design. Masterplan, urban plan and building are utilized to provide the tools for current inhabitants to bring about an identity shift with the greater goal of improving social cohesion. Goal is to provide a platform from which defensive collaboration could start.

Research and design
Research was an integral part of the design studio. Before we ever started on individual designs we researched Garfield Park for the better part of the first semester. To gain insight in the area we were individually assigned a topic to investigate. Examples of these topics where: demography, identity, mobility, sustainability, crime etc. The conclusions of this research was combined and subsequently used to develop masterplans. While masterplans where created on the basis of just a few topics all researched matters formed the basic framework and source of reference throughout the continuing design process.

When developing the masterplan and initial design proposals new research was needed on a smaller scale. This process of switching between design and research refining was integral part of the whole design studio. With my masterplan group consisting of Bertus Bomhof and Edwin Damen we decided that in order to initiate a positive change we had to target the weakest parts of the neighborhoods. Quite literally we layered research maps of crime, vacancy and poverty, thus mapping areas of social
and economic distress that as a result at the same time literally had created space for intervention.
The lack of social cohesion and negative identity of inhabitants became very apparent after the
excursion to Chicago. For me it was clear that the high amount of religious people in Garfield Park
provided an unused opportunity for change. By combining small churches into a single building a
place for collaboration, an ecumenical space can be created. This provides a platform to strengthen
the local identity and initiate social development. For the development of my program I researched
African American churches and culture to find functions that could support both the religious as the
social aspects of my design. This research of the surrounding area regarding both architecture and
social subjects stayed prevalent throughout the further development of my design.

**Line of approach and method**
Complex projects emphasizes the elimination of the linear roles which define the building process:
Planning, Urban design, and Architecture. The studio’s designs obtain their complexity by regarding
architecture on all scales. This approach supported the research of less conventional subjects which
resulted in a broad spectrum of researched. They provided a unique framework to develop a design.
The studio encourages recognizing patterns through critical thinking to form design principles. This
approach provided the tools needed to elaborate my design, while referencing and researching.
Logical conclusions led me to design a community church, a program I would have never thought to
design otherwise.
I however did find great difficulty translating research results into a building design. The multitude of
assessments of research on different levels that had to be taken into account sometimes limited
design possibilities, looking back I had troubles prioritizing information. However, my tutors where
able to widen my gaze and make less strained design choices, see the possibilities not the
impossibilities.
In addition much has changed concerning my approach towards tutoring. I considered these weekly
moments as presentations instead of moments of dialogue. My design process drawings represented
this in their appearance, which in turn limited their discussibility and made the design seem set in
stone. While my tutors addressed this earlier in the graduation process it took me a while to fully
understand what they meant. I now see the dogmatic nature of my approach and it’s limitations
taking into account all aspects of an integral design. To illustrate this grown insight I’ve chosen to
replace static 3d renders for hand sketches in my final P5 presentation.

**Project and wider social context**
The threat that gentrification has on disadvantaged communities is one present in many cities. While
my approach of creating social cohesion through reinforcing positive identity focusses on the African
American community it could serve as a method of intervention in many segregated areas. Making
use of a common denominator, in my case religion, is a viable strategy for inhabitants to be brought
together and subsequently provide a platform from which collaboration could start. Like graduation
colleagues have shown, the same could be achieved through for instance education, music, and even
a cemetery.
If inhabitants stand together and prevent displacement by gentrification they can take advantage of
the positive aspects of it: enhanced job opportunities, better facilities while at the same time fight
negative aspects of the community like gang culture and ending segregated neighborhoods.
Future research could show if the same strategy could also be applicable in neighborhoods with a
wider variety of ethnicities and religion. While not applicable to my graduation projects it would be
interesting to research how such a design could improve solidarity. Directly translating such an approach would introduce a whole new level of complexity when exploring the possibilities of a multiple religion building, but also increase the benefits to society.