MADE IN SOUTHWORKS

... Plug-in production city
Relationship between research and design

The first part of the research was the defining of a masterplan. This masterplan gave a direction and design assignment for the individual product. The individual research elaborated on this masterplan and initiated the first phase of the individual research. In this first phase a research is been done on how to define a system which can facilitate high density programm but at the same time keep the small-scale community feeling. This system should provide space for the realisation on a bottom-up way of the desired programm (housing and manufacturing).

The bottom-up approach is a result of the study that has been done on how to form a new way of life which follows directly from the masterplan criticising the non functional American urban system. The research shoed that when applying the full top-down method, the product faces a number of obstructives and actually shiws similarities with the current system that I am criticizing. In this phase sustainability and liveability plays a major role while researching different configurations of the combination of living en producing. The result was a flexible configuration of small scale units which combine individual housing and production. This showed to be the most suitable for enterpeneurs of small scale manufacture bussinesses. When researching what the most suitable constructive solution is for these units a constructive framework in which these units can be fitted on a flexible way showed to be the best solution. This structural framework in combination with the flexible small-scale units defined the needed system.

In the next phase the technical aspect of this system is explored and flexibility played a major role in the research. All the different aspects of the system where explored on possible technical solutions. This was done on sections and details on the 1:10 and 1:5 scale simultaniously. The result was a inegration of the climate system in the structural frame work with plug-in possebilities, light weight facade panels to form the units, a flexible floor and ceiling system to enhance internal flexibility in spatial organization and finally flexible plug-in units to form the public space.

Important in this phase was the continously switching between the 2D technical drawings and the architectural expression resulting from it in order to find a good balance. The results was a catalogue of facade panels and the design of structural elements in the overall system.

In general the research and design approach that I have used, worked fine for me and led to interesting results. The early start of the technical approach was necessary for my project because of the system that I have chosen, the problem is only that the it took a lot of time to finalize the system because of its complexity but when it was there it provides me a ot of freedom to elaborate on a big range of architectural expressions for this system which I would like to spend more time on.

Relationship between the theme of the studio and the subject chosen by the student within this framework

The theme of the graduation product where complexe conditions are of major importance on the final result, is in relation to the choice of the studio to locate the project in South Chicago which is full of far reaching social and spacial conditions. Because of the fact that the small-scale architectural product is a direct respons to the big-scale of the masterplan, the conditions of South Chicago are reflected in this product. The masterplan provides a complex assignment with for example high density vs small-scale and housing vs manufacturing. These subjects have different needs on different scale and are often contradicting each other. Still these factors provided, in combination with the individual problem statement, the complex conditions that lead to a interesting architectural solution.
The social and urban conditions of Chicago as a shrinking city resulted in a non standard masterplan, an urban strategy with a more bottom-up approach. This was in our eyes the most suitable method to deal with the extreme conditions of the subjects location (which is a choice of the studio).

In my individual product this same issue can be found. The complex and diverse conditions that derived directly from the subjects location, resulted also in a strategy where the focus lies on a bottom-up approach aswell (small scale units within a structural framework) which I again find the most suitable approach for the conditions I worked in.

the relationship between the methodical line of approach of the studio and the method chosen by the student in this framework

The individual formulation of the problem and topic of relevance which can be found in my approach to this subject, formes the basis of my graduation research. First the research starts on a big-scale where the social aspects are explored and a position is taken. In this phase I defined the problem statement, the individual assignment and arguments to form a base for the research. Instead of focussing only on a defined architectural scale, my research was hereby focused on a broader and more social scale which is a direct result of the methodical approach of the Complex Projects graduation studio. The exploration of how to define a new way of live as a reaction on the non functional american urban system is one of the the broad social points of interest. Although this phase took a high percentage of the research time, the product eventually became more and more technical. Still, all of the technical elaborations (flexibility, sustainability, ed) did reflect on the wider social aspect instead of plain solutions on a given problem in the design product. It is especially the formulation of wider social aspects which play a major role throughout the project what results in a interesting architectural but also technical product. This reflects the methodical approach of the Complex Studio graduation studio aswell and this is the method I presonally prefer.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context

In the past the topic of density and bottom up freedom is often been a point of interest for many architects. The projects that emerged from this are often been criticized as being unbuildable and utopian megastructures. Examples are the Fun Palace by Cedric Price or Spatial City by Yona Friedman and many more. Nevertheless the topic of density and bottom up freedom remains a interesting and a present day relevant topic. Specially when looking to the current global urban trend of concentration and multi-polarity. This applies not only for cities in prosperity as can be seen in the booming Asian countries, but it also applies, as I believe, to cities under stress as it is the case for Chicago. Concentration and high density can be the answer to the extreme shrinkage of a city as I have argued in my position paper (Polycentrism; the answer to a shrinking city?). This is also the reason to address this current topic and elaborate on it. My project however in contrast to the previous mentioned unbuildable and utopian megastructures addreses this topic on a more practical way that matches the current global trends and building practices. This practical approach of the topic focuses on the possibility of defining a new way of live as a criticism on the current non functional urban system of American cities.

Livability, Flexibility and sustainability are related to this topic of density and bottom up freedom in the current day conditions. It is therefore these three topics that are addressed throughout the research.