Graduation plan for P2

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Studio
Studio: Complex Project Graduation Studio
Theme: Chicago Lakeside development.
Teachers: Roberto Cavallo, Barend Koolhaas

Argumentation of choice of the studio
Architects today have to deal with a wide range of problems from social to economical. It is possible to address these problems through the architectural interventions and the environmental design, closely connected to the social and economic research. The issues of current importance are the ones addressing the problems of existing cities and buildings. The projects dealing with existing city fabric are the most complex. They are based on the interdisciplinary approach, providing the solid base for long term development. A complex project provides the strategic interventions at all scales from regional program to the small building acting as a catalyst.

In the current post-crisis situation the projects dealing with global problems of existing cities are of vital importance all around the world.

Title of the graduation project: “South works: a laboratory for healthy city”

Product
Problem statement
The location of the project is holds a lot of potential - a vast landfill area (227 ha) within the borders of the city of Chicago, just 20 minutes drive from the central loop. However there are many problems as well. South Chicago neighborhood was originally typical American working-class neighborhood, developed around US Steel South Works site.
Deindustrialization and the closing of the steel mill caused unemployment that over the time led to low income, housing vacancies and race segregation of the neighborhood. Unemployment, low quality of housing and lack of social services, race and class divides resulted in high vacancy rates, low education level and unattractive image of the community.
In order to attract the investments and improve the current state of the neighborhood a new strategy is necessary. The strategy must provide the base for neighborhood revitalization, make it attractive for future development as well as determine and address the problems of existing community.
The new development on the former South Works site could play an important role. It could become a “catalyst” for further redevelopment processes within the community. The essential part or the development if its functional core, that will become the first phase and establish a new “brand” for the neighborhood.

**Strategy**

Healthcare and social assistance is currently among the top employment sectors in the Chicago area, therefore it has the potential to provide a significant number of diverse job opportunities for local residents as well as for new arrivals. The research of the lifestyle related health conditions has become increasingly important today. Healthcare is one of the priority issues for the city government.

Based on the extensive research the project focuses on development of the Health Education and Research cluster that will establish a platform for collaboration between Chicago Medical Schools, healthcare-related companies, based in the city of Chicago and Chicago metropolitan area, scientist and researchers. The cluster will provide a number of supporting functions for the neighborhood: education and medical facilities, public space and cultural functions. The science cluster will be interconnected with the new residential clusters on the site that will become the prototypes for the healthy city, designed according to the standards of “healthy living”.

The strategic plan created a new important destination in the city. It addresses the infrastructure in the neighborhood, improving the connectivity, quality of life. It relinks the existing community with the lake Michigan through the network of green spaces.

**Goal**

The aim of the project is to create a strategic plan of the neighborhood development through the long-term catalyst development on the vacant land and minor short-term interventions in the existing fabric in order to revitalize the neighborhood, trigger the community change and create a ‘brand’ for South Chicago. Reestabishing the neighborhood as an important destination in the city will result in economic growth and fuel the latter development. The goal of the individual part is to develop a key building within the master plan that complies with the general strategy and projects my ideas of health city.

**Personal fascination. Individual project.**

The South Works site is unique in many ways. It has a beautiful location - on the lakeshore, with the view to the downtown. One of its important characteristics is the industrial heritage: industrial railway tracks, old vessel slip in the heart of the site and the massive ore walls. The ore walls represent the history of the place and hold a lot of potential for redevelopment. They, however, establish the boundaries and regulations for the design. My project is based on the relationship of old and new: a new multifunctional space within the historical framework. The ore walls located strategically in the center of the science cluster, proposed by the master plan, will be converted into the urban science village hidden inside the massive constructions. I am dividing the structure into functional areas reflected in the composition of open and indoor spaces within the building. The Health Education center will also become a laboratory of sustainable technology – from the first steps of the refurbishment.
Process
Method description

The first step of the project was a extensive research done on several scales: L – regional level (Illinois state in relation to the Midwest and the United Stated in general), M – city level (City of Chicago in relation to the metropolitan area and the state) and S – neighborhood (South Chicago in relation to the city). The research covered many aspects, both quantitative and qualitative, giving a clear picture of political system, cultural values, local typologies and infrastructure.

The study trip to Chicago gave an understanding of the context and local culture. The research of the SOM master plan for the vacant land of the former US Steel Mill provided an important material and an insight into the intentions of the developer, as well as the discussion with the McCaffery Interests (the developer) representatives.

Literature studies on context and Chicago planning features helped to gain knowledge on the context, society and the local characteristics.

The research of the case studies helped to define the strategies, provided the examples of holistic neighborhood development and catalyst architectural interventions.

Both physical model studies and digital representations of the master plan and design will help to develop the context and the architectural form.

The analysis and the master plan are developed in groups, while the architectural representation is an individual work of the student.

Literature and general practical preference

Sampson, Robert., Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect, Chicago, 2013
Ehrenhalt, Alan, The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City, 2012
Gehl, Jan, ‘Cities for People’, Island Press, 2010
Gehl, Jan, ‘Cities for People’, Island Press, Washington, DC, 2010

Reflection
Relevance

The project can be used as a case study for the redevelopment in post-industrial cities in America and in Europe. Deindustrialization had devastating effect on manufacturing employment and, as a result, working class neighborhoods all around the world. After the closure of many manufacturing sites resulted in rapid decline of the surrounding communities, as the entire way of life collapsed. Declining was fueled by segregation: the residents of these neighborhoods are mostly poor, unemployed, young not very well educated people.
Moreover, the housing boom and then crisis in the past decades led to foreclosures, abandoned housing and a very high vacancy rate. The project establishes general trends and proposes several possible development strategies for the neighborhood, facing similar issues.