

## **P4 Project Reflection**

AR3AD132 Dwelling Graduation Studio: Global Housing Studio (2015-2016)

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### ***The inclusive pattern, tracing the city fabric of Addis Ababa.***

The intriguing case of Addis Ababa. One city, numerous challenges, numerous opportunities.

#### **Problem statement**

The Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa is nowadays one of the fastest growing cities in the world. Despite its economical growth, the city faces an enormous challenge to deliver accommodation to the urban poor. Currently, 80% of housing in Addis Ababa is considered informal, this means that the greatest part of the population lives in inadequate houses with several problems such as bad hygienic conditions, overcrowded spaces and lack of the basic amenities.

In order to address the problems of overcrowding and housing shortage, new social housing projects have been built by the government during the last years. These new developments are middle and high rise condominiums able to accommodate a greater number of people and different typologies of bigger and smaller apartments. Despite that, these social housing slabs are revealing not to be a successful strategy because of numerous factors. First of all, these developments are being built mainly at the outskirts of the city, this leads to a tear of social bonds that is negatively influencing the social cohesion and integration of the different communities and social groups. Furthermore, the long distance between the condominium developments and the hearth of the city makes it more complicated and expensive for the citizens to reach their workplaces, which are mainly found in the metropolitan area of Addis Ababa. On top of that, the new condominium apartments are currently assigned with a lottery system that is privileging people with a basic income and consequently excluding the lowest social groups.

On the whole, it is evident that improving the living conditions in the slum areas has to be prioritised. However, it is important to mention that unlike other developing cities around the world, in Addis Ababa the informal settlements are spread throughout the whole city. In this context different social groups live side by side without the systematic creation of urban ghettos as is visible in many other big cities of developing countries. The coexistence of different social groups and type of buildings make Addis Ababa an incredible heterogeneous city where the urban mixity becomes a key factor of inclusiveness.

In these terms it is possible to conclude that the city of Addis Ababa has the unique opportunity to become a successful example of an African metropolis. However, in order to be able to face and accommodate its future developments, the city needs to improve the quality of life of its citizens and recognize the value of preserving its urban mixity. Since

these two elements form core and strength of the city, a fundamental step forward for the renewal and progress of the city must be an urban redevelopment able to improve first of all the living conditions of the people by providing them with adequate affordable housing combined with restored and new public spaces and facilities. In doing so, it will be crucial to renew the urban environment without relocating its current inhabitants in order to maintain the existing social bonds of the different communities. Such intervention, based on the current urban conformation and respect for the local way of living, would benefit both the city and its inhabitants simultaneously.

Without an inclusive urban and architectural strategy, able to deal and adapt according to the existing situation of the city and able to respond to the needs of the rapidly growing population, any programme to improve the urban environment of the city and provide better living conditions to the people will continue to fail. Addis Ababa is calling for new strategies in order to densify the urban fabric and improve the living condition of its inhabitants.

At this point, considering the current context of the city, the research question reflects upon how to develop an architectural strategy that corresponds to and improves the current urban and social scenario of the city. At the same time, in order to develop the process it is important to define which guidelines and factors have to be considered in order to guarantee a sustainable and inclusive growth of the city.

### **Project's Brief**

In order to plan a strategy which could work for the improvement of both the city environment and of the quality of life of the people, it is necessary to begin from a urban redevelopment which uses cross-cultural and societal inclusive approaches able to address the different layers and actors of the city.

With the primary goal of providing adequate housing at a minimal cost to its citizens, Addis Ababa needs to renew the urban tissue of the city starting from its very central areas in order to enhance the existing special and spatial conformations such as the existing landmarks and all the different places enriched with social and/or historical values. These places have the important role of qualifying and defining the hierarchies and characters which compose the identity(ies) and the collective memory of the city.

In this way the strategy would have the quality of setting the basis for a sustainable growth of the city in synergy with its inhabitants and respectful of the local physical and societal characteristics of the place.

In order to be able to test and prove the value of my strategy, I chose a specific part of the city situated in a central area in the north of Addis Ababa as the base for my analysis and design proposal. Choosing a determinate neighbourhood of Addis allowed me to shape my design strategy and to adapt it according to the existing dynamics and specific societal, historical, economical and spatial qualities of the area.

The chosen area is called “Dejach Wube” Sefer, a historical neighbourhood located in one of the earliest and most central areas of the city.

Built on an indigenous settlement structure, the area is characterised by three main building categories: ‘Street-liners’, ‘In-fills’ and historical or/and socially valuable buildings which compose the ‘Landmarks’ of the area. The first ones are linear development of mid-rise, mainly commercial buildings which have the function to relate with the main road system and to accommodate commercial public and private functions. These buildings are placed along and facing the ever-expanding main roads network.

The second category are the ‘In-fills’ which are low-rise, mainly residential buildings that compose the inner tissue of the part of the city bordered by the main road system. Nowadays the largest part of the in-fills is composed by informal settlements which, following the organic development of the road networks, are grouped in small compounds. These compounds are visibly shaped according to the traditional ethiopian way of living which comes from the first indigenous settlements of the city. In this way the houses are grouped around a communal courtyard where all the daily activities are developed.

The landmarks, third and last category, are strongly embedded with historical or/and social values and represent and preserve the collective identity of a place and the one of its inhabitants; they are ‘places of memory and identity’.

My design approach is a reinterpretation of the urban space based on the existing dynamics of the area which are particularly represented by the harmonious coexistence of different social and urban actors such as heterogeneous social groups, Street-liners, In-fills and Landmarks. Aiming for a densification of the city fabric and a more clear definition of the urban borders, it has been developed a new basic system able to combine the Street-liner with the In-fill urban figures. This new basic figure, inherited with the qualities of both, will perform as a new inclusive pattern for the city enabling the coexistence and synergy of different architecture typologies and social groups. This new type, beside considerably densifying the area, will introduce new qualities and functions such as generous communal outdoor spaces, amenities, commercial spaces and workshops.

Aiming for a sustainable and affordable project, the design will be mainly realised taking advantage of sustainable and local available resources such as earth and bamboo. On top of that, the new ‘hybrid compound type’, will have a system to collect, filter and reuse the rainwater. In this way the project will perform as an efficient and environmentally sustainable system for both its inhabitants and the entire city.

**Project data:**

Total area of the plot: 29512 m<sup>2</sup> (29.5 Ha)

Average density: 228 dwellings/Ha

## **Methods & Analysis**

The Global Housing Studio offers the opportunity to explore and deal with global issues which are becoming day by day more important due to the emerging problems of world population growth and the uncontrolled expansion of cities and urban areas.

I consider my proposal as the result of an intriguing learning and experimenting process developed during my participation to the Global Housing Studio.

Personally, I am convinced that my strategy proves how, the awareness and respect of the existing conditions and complexities of a city, allow the definition of valuable strategies to improve the urban and social scenario of our built environments.

In these terms, it is possible to affirm that the design approach adopted for this project, can also be seen as a model of reference for other similar contexts in different parts of the world.