

P4 Reflection Report

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Global Housing: Cross-cultural Methods and

Positions / Addis Ababa

Chair of Architecture & Dwelling / Chair of

Methods and Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

The graduation studio Global Housing is part of the Chair of Architecture and Chair of Methods and Analysis. This is a unique collaboration between these two chairs. Global Housing is focussed on pressing issues in the world, specifically the Global South. Part of the modernization process currently happening in the Global South is the rapid urbanization and population growth, causing cities to expand and densify at an enormous pace. The formal approach is not able to close the gap of supply and demand, whilst the informal approach of squatters is not able to provide the needed and wished environment as well. For this graduation studio Addis Ababa the capital city of Ethiopia is chosen as example to investigate new and existing housing models. People living in the cities are expected to follow a forced way of living by the governments, which is not affordable for the majority of people like the rural-urban migrants. The rural-urban migrant has no place to go when they arrive in the city, and there is no opportunity to use their personal skills from the rural areas. The current housing programs are too expensive and fixed or rigid to answer the changing needs of the rural-urban migrants. The design will answer these questions in a way that it can function as a pars-pro-toto. It should provide the rural-urban migrants in Addis Ababa a basis which facilitates incremental growth and income generation with their present skills based on the underlying processes of urbanization.

The graduation project also engages in the increasing cross-cultural character of contemporary architectural practice. What is the position of the architect in cultural contexts that are not his own? An answer needs to be given to particular cultural, political, social, environmental and economical conditions. Finding a balance between local cultures and techniques on the one hand, and global developments on the other is an important challenge.

METHODS USED

The studio had a quite rigid planning regarding the research period towards P1 and P2. The students were working in groups of 3/4 students in different formations on different subjects. The subjects researched by me are: the colonial period under the Italians (1938-1945); rural-urban migration. After this research there was the fieldtrip to Addis Ababa for three weeks. In this period I focussed on tracing the patterns of the rural-urban migrant and the places where they settle. I visited two different kebele's, one close to the city centre, and one on the fringe of the city.

Simultaneously there was a course called research seminars, which investigated different housing designs, built and unbuilt all over the world. These case studies covered Asia, Africa, South America. I did research on Ecochard's Casablanca and Steven Holl's proposal for a new neighbourhood in Manila. But more important was that all the material collected by me and the other students formed a 'common knowledge base' with a variety of projects.

RESEARCH AND DESIGN

On the fringe of the city the circumstances were bad and this is where I first started to think of this place as location for my design. The migrants settle on the worst places in the city, with harsh terrain and filthy streams or rivers. Towards the P2 we had just two weeks to start designing, with a bag full of knowledge that came from the research part. For the P2 I also used knowledge from the 'common knowledge base' we created. During this two weeks before P2 I found it hard to channel my thoughts, but I decided that incremental housing would be a good direction for my design, supported by projects of Charles Correa's Belapur, Doshi's Aranya and Siza's Elemental.

After my P2 I struggled to come up with new insights regarding incremental housing and I became more suspicious of this approach. Maybe incrementality should be seen as flexible and adaptable, and should the project be built by the migrants themselves at once. For this reason I first looked into different materials and building processes which would enable the migrants to build their own place, and also providing them with a new skill which would provide them a new opportunity regarding livelihood. After I came to the conclusion that stabilized soil blocks (SSB) should be the building material, I went back to my research (books and site survey) to see if an existing typology would suit the needs of the migrant and the city. Typologies with a shared space showed to be the most useful and I opted for the courtyard model. The collectivity the migrants have in rural areas should be kept, as well as their collaboration. In the rural areas everybody functions as a part of a bigger whole.

Then the hardest part of my design came to me; the harsh geographical circumstances. My design location was near a river bank with steep slopes, so how would my courtyard model populate the surface? I looked at different case studies from Rokko Housing to Halen, but still I found it hard to find a solution for this problem. At one moment it came to me that the size of the courtyard should be determined by the angle of the slope, and in this way the site would design the ensemble by its geography.

During the summer break I thought a lot about the storyline behind my project, and especially the urban strategy. I came to the conclusion that only the geography itself was not able to shape the urban plan, it needed more structure. I thought back at Belapur, Chandigarh and Aranya, where there is a clear hierarchical structure in the urban plan which I also found during my site visit in Addis Ababa. This clear hierarchical structure could shape rules on which the courtyard models should react and interact with.

CONCLUSION

The start of the graduation studio was a quick and smooth process, providing a lot of information which are still present in my design. However, the step towards a design was a bit harder, maybe because of the overload of information, or the fact that I was free to focus on whatever felt best. In the end it proved me that designing bottom up, thinking about the users regarding self building, collectivity and urban strategy worked out well. When I was stuck on a certain scale I switched to a different scale to find the solution somewhere else. I'm happy with my design, although I would like to investigate its borders and maybe stretch them a bit. I would also have liked to design the riverfront a bit more with a more urban or city scaled strategy, but that proved to be a too big problem to tackle.