

Reflection

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Studio Information

Name: Border Studio

Theme: Investigation into the US-Mexico border region

Teachers: Sven Jansse, Karel Vollers, Mitesh Dixit

Title of the graduation project: Parliament of the United TransBorder Federation

Introduction to the studio

The border studio looks at the border between the United States and Mexico. One of the most controversial borders of the last decade, one where the 3rd world meets the 1st world. The last decade saw an acceleration in the physical divide between the two nations but the interdependence has grown more than ever. This shows in Americans going across the border for healthcare, Mexicans crossing to do groceries and shop for good manufactured on the other side. We try to map and identify the strengths of the region upon which we can build a new reality where the both side can profit and provide for the other side using the border as the attractor instead of the divider.

THE TRANSBORDER REGION



The relationship between research and design

The foundation for the design has been laid in the first semester of the graduation track Border Studio. By doing extensive social demographic research and based on the evidence we found during our trip we structured our following semester as too answer the questions that were raised. There was also research into the existing type of government representation, looking at modern and older seats of government. From this there was the aim to find what the different representations of power are across the world. From there came a detailed study of the surroundings of the Chamizal zone located in the twin cities of El Paso/Juarez located on the border dividing the United States from Mexico. This allowed us to tackle not only the large scale problematics but also to revive an underdeveloped part at the heart of both cities. By dividing the site in different zones we could tackle a number of social and spatial problems through new program.

At the centre of the site there will be a new desert, copying the nature outside of the cities, in the middle of this expanse there will be a circular arena dug out from the ground. This forms the centrepiece of the new building as a place of congregation and assembly of the new representative government of the border region. The research showed the aim of parliament buildings to put the assembly central but secluded from the surroundings. By placing the assembly outside it gains more connection with the public realm allowing the public access to the field of debates and decisions. Therefore the design is more focused towards inviting the public in the discussion.

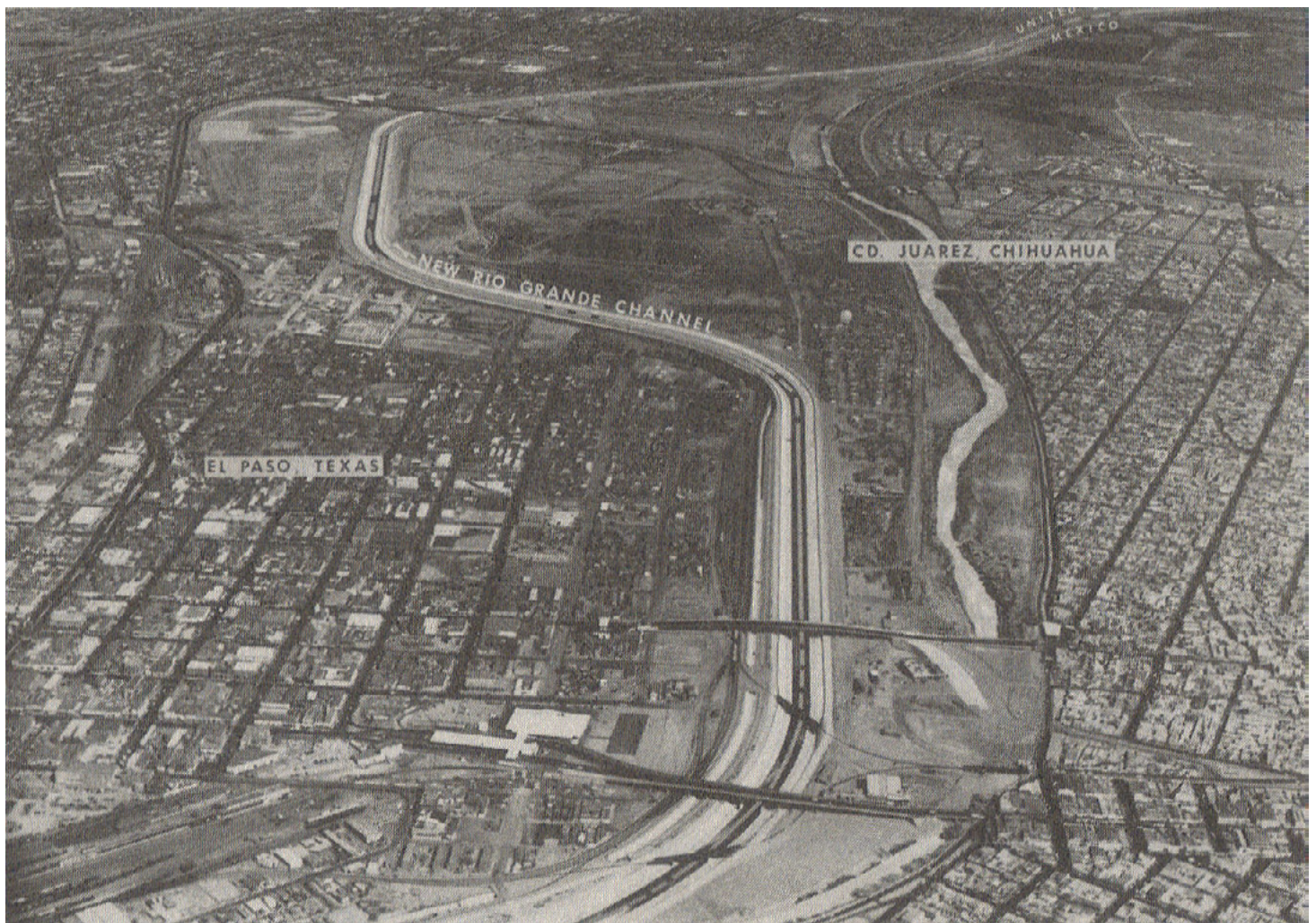


Impression of the new border parliament located in the Chamizal strip

The relationship between the studio theme and the subject chosen

We investigated the larger border region, eschewing the traditional methods and looked at the region in a new perspective. The larger ecological regions found around the border provided a frame to focus our attention, then we looked at hard and soft data i.e. the (build) environment and the people. This revealed a number of clues that led us to the development of a regional master plan in which we envisioned the region as one system divided by the border. During the research we stumbled upon a number of organizations that focus on the border but each has a national component where in the end the benefits of one outweighs the benefit of the region. By imposing a new federal system that oversees the potential of the region we can fully utilize the regions benefits to the fullest.

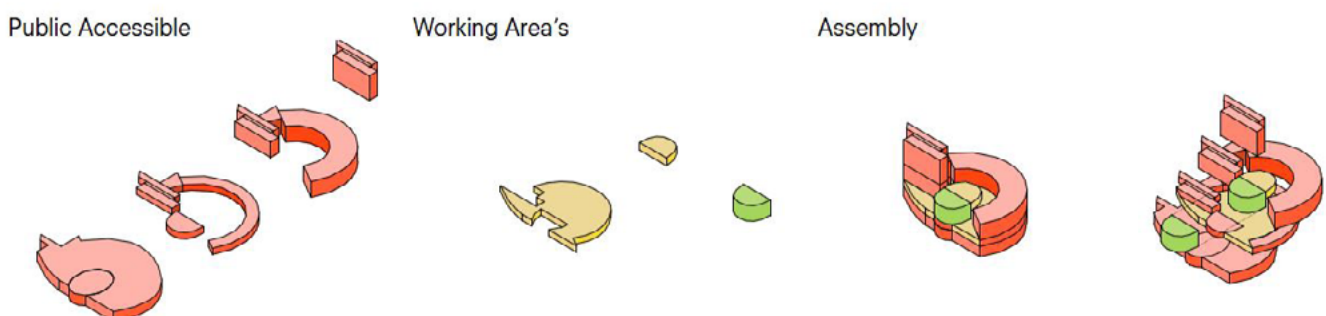
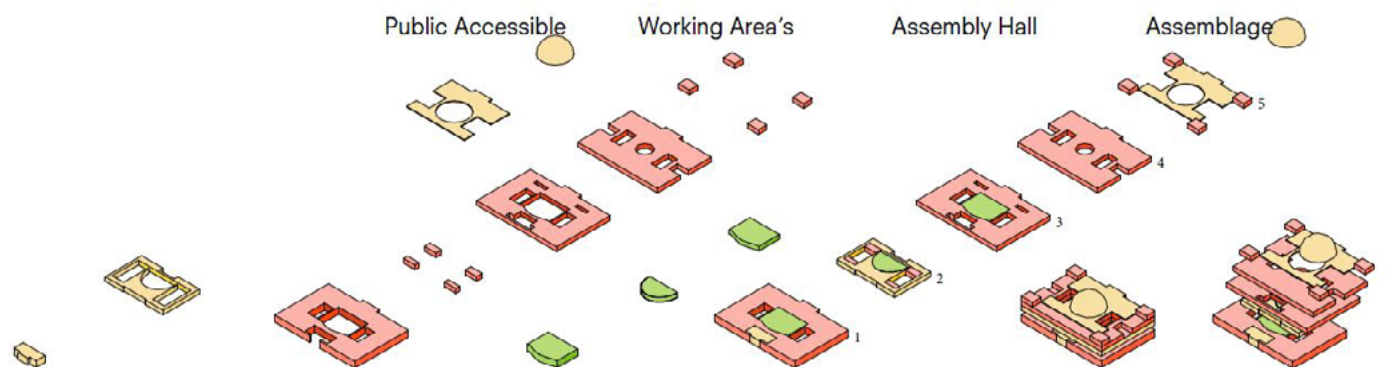
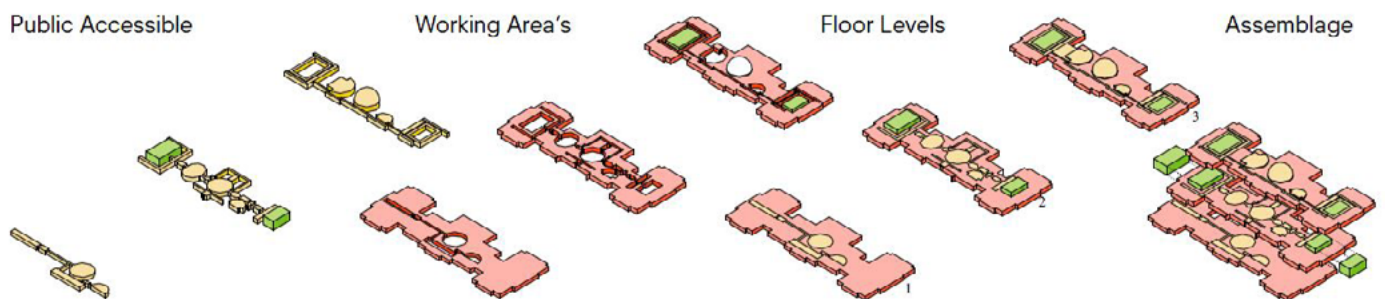
The Chamizal site in Juarez is the result of the channelling of the Rio Grande during the 1960's. The border in this part of the region is made up by the deepest point of the river. Because of the unpredictable flows of the river this piece of land changed ownership a couple of times over the decades resulting in a number of conflicts. The resulting Chamizal dispute was settled with rerouting the river in a concrete channel in 1964. The land given to Mexico has been a programmatic void in the city. This resulted in the question how can we keep the attraction that the border provides while at the same time revamp a piece of relative undeveloped downtown of Juarez/El Paso. The resulting strategy saw us reconfigure the border procedures and introducing a new governing body. The resulting plan provided in a new impuls for the city through the added program of the government functions but also introduce a new border crossing typology and cross border programs like sporting venues and shared infrastructure. Through this way we try to reinforce the potentials on both sides of the border and accelerate the development of the region.



Aerial photograph of the Chamizal in 1968 around the time of completion of the channeling of the Rio Grande (Mueller, 1975)

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

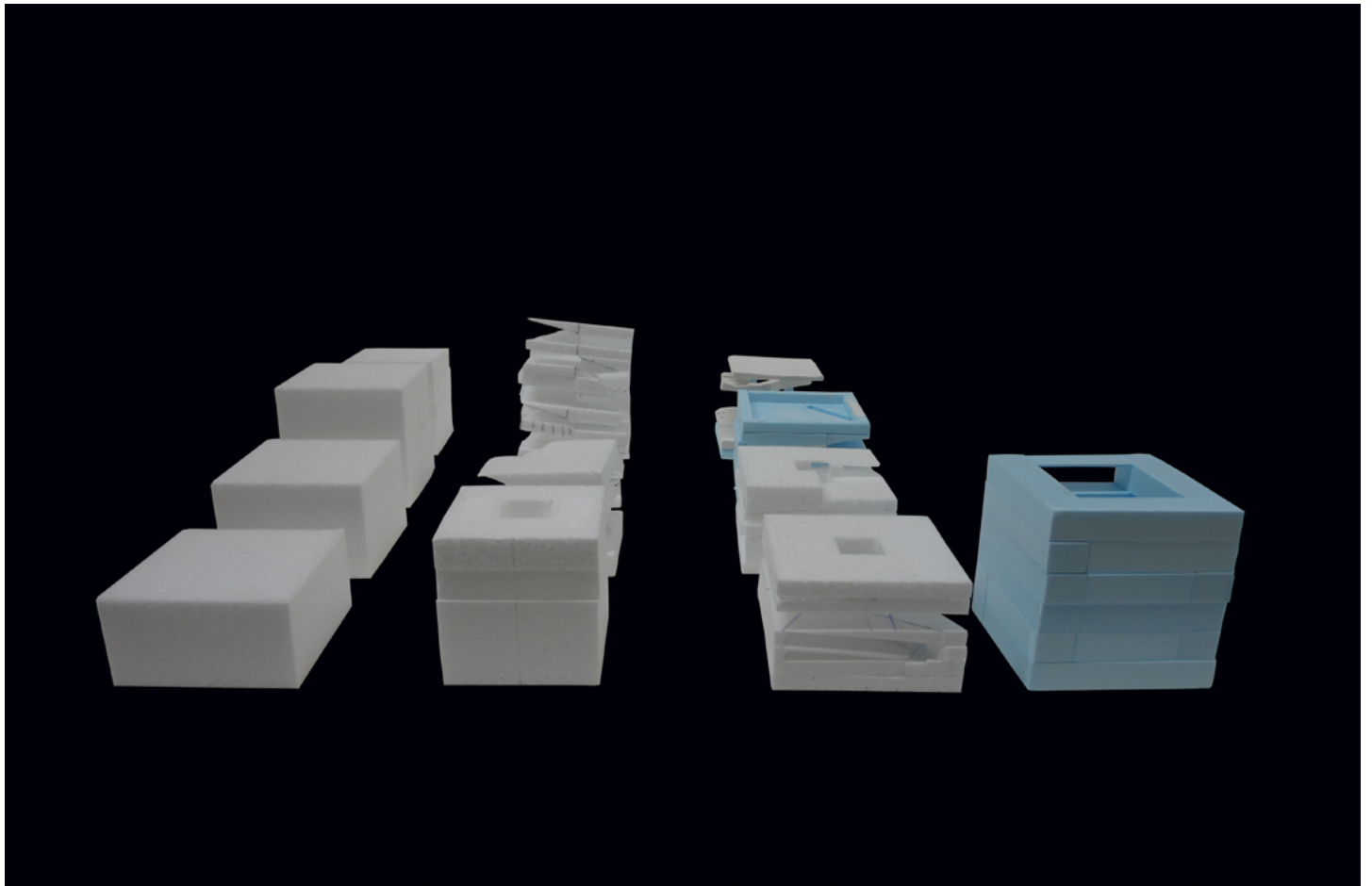
The framework of the studio saw us providing the foundation for the MSc 4 studio in the MSc semester. By first focusing on the larger scale we could then use this for the argumentation on our own personal scale. This meant that we did an extensive research into the region before going on a site visit. During our trip along the border between the United States and Mexico we crossed the border on a number of occasions as to familiarize ourselves with the daily lives of the people of the region. We also spoke with a number of organizations that focus on the cross border trade and commerce like the El Paso based Borderplex. But also with the Architect Teddy Cruz in San Diego who is more focused on the impact that both sides have on each other through the existence of the border. We then took our own research of government cities into finding the programmatic mix and relationship between institutional buildings and its surroundings and combined those into an approach for the redevelopment of the cities.



Number of case studies conducted towards the typology of parliament buildings around the world. From top to bottom: United States Capitol (Washington DC), Reichstag (Berlin), Senado (Mexico City)

The relationship between the project and the wider social context

Through this project we as a studio and me in person try to question the validity of these borders in an age that is fast outgrowing these outdated notions. By providing a future scenario in which the region is ruled like a multi-state federation we show the true potential and unique selling points of the border region. While we realize you cannot do away with the border entirely because of social issues we want to show how the region can profit from the attraction of the both sides. The new parliament is a way of how we would like this representation to take shape and how we want this region to be governed.



Model studies