Reflection report

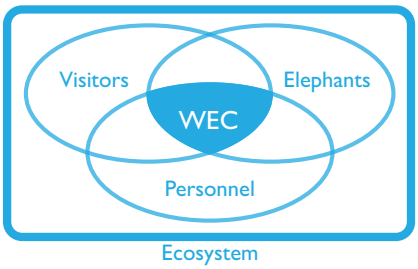
Personal information
Name: Marta Rota
Student number: 4251679
E-mail address: rota.marta@gmail.com

Studio
Theme: Explore Lab Studio
Project: Site arrangement and facilities for the World Elephant Centre
Teachers:
- Research Mentor: Gregory Bracken
- Design Mentor: Robert Nottrot
- Building technology Mentor: Andy van den Dobbelsteen

Introduction

Since my early studies in Architecture, I have been focusing on how this discipline could improve the quality of life and satisfy human needs. At TU Delft, I saw the opportunity to help to design the World Elephant Centre in Tanzania. It began with a desire to do something to improve the difficult conditions in Africa, followed by genuine curiosity and the prospect of a professional challenge.

What fascinated me it is how this project brings together different points of view, not only the human's point of view, but also the animal's point of view. In fact, the challenge is designing a tourist infrastructure in a new way, where humans and elephants interact with each other in an harmonious sustainable framework. The coexistence of local personnel, visitors and elephants, the so-called 'triangle system', is maintained in order to preserve the durability of the ecological ecosystem. Minimize environmental impacts of humans and enhance a long-term preservation of the environment arresting the depletion of endangered elephants, is the aim of the project.



Explore Lab, as an exceptional thesis laboratory, gave me the possibility to start this project, that could not be developed in any of the other graduation studios.

Relation between research and design

The project required a careful planning in terms of time and thanks to the freedom offered by the Explore Lab studio and by my mentors, it was possible to develop my own method of research. It started with a general overview about the possible research's subjects, followed by a field research of one month in Tanzania. The research on-site was fundamental to have experience of the tropical climate, local materials, technologies available and to understand social and cultural context.
The second part of the research was based on different kind of literature. General literature gave me information about materials and microclimatic condition of the site, while specialized literature, as for example biological and ecological literature and tourism management literature, allowed me to create a background to design the World Elephant Centre.

After building up this knowledge, I was able to start to design. The first step was the definition of the concept and the study of the program, connected with a definition of spaces. During the design process, pre-

cedents were consulted being considered an useful design instrument.

The circumstances of the context require me to take account of local materials and available construction techniques in order to involve the local community in the construction process. In fact, the principle of the design is avoid complexity and satisfy the rational need of the different users within the World Elephant Center. The simplicity is one of the quality of the project, which can be seen in the technical drawings and the elaboration of the details. What it is interesting is that all the research was fundamental to create arguments that lead from knowledge to design decisions. Moreover, it can be seen in the choices made for the structural system, climatic aspects and water management.

Research and design have always been linked together, to such an extent that there is no strict boundary between them. In the beginning, the research supports the development of the design, later on it was an instrument to enhance technical knowledge in order to achieve architectural qualities within the project. The output of the research gave recommendations and advices in the effort to find the best architectural solution, capable of responding not only to the context in terms of local materials, technology available and earthquake, but also to the users' requirements in terms of spaces.

Conclusion

The World Elephant Centre tackles two problems of our time, in a global relevance framework. In fact, it is not only a typical case of global problem related to conservation of species, but also it is connected with the issue of poverty reduction in developing country. This project could be an example for similar study, being relevant for academic community and, in general, for the public.