

Reflection

Graduation studio: global housing---cross-cultural methods and
position/Addis Ababa

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1. The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and my design subject:

The graduation studio I am working on is: global housing---cross-cultural methods and position/Addis Ababa. The theme of the studio is focusing on addressing the pressing dwelling issue in developing territories with the increasing cross-cultural character of contemporary architectural practice. Positions breed especially from the local culture, environment, society and economic circumstances are required to be developed.

Undoubtedly, for Addis Ababa one of the most urging problem is how to coping with the increasing number of urban poor in terms of housing. So my design subject is housing for the urban poor, aiming to put forward an alternative housing figure that can improve the living standards of low income group in Addis Ababa.

2. The relationship between research and design

There are mainly two parts of my research and each part involves both document research and site survey. The first part is to learn the lifestyle and livelihood of the urban poor: how does their social network affect their living? how do they make use of public space? what is the main form of their income generating activities. Before the field trip, by reading related literature I had a preliminary understanding of the everyday trajectories of urban poor, which provides me certain aspects that are worth to be mainly studied upon the field trip. Then during the field trip, I could obtained the first-hand materials for the most related aspect efficiently by observation and communication with local residents. These first-hand materials on local life are the starting point for my design and make my mind to keep and integrate the local lifestyle into my design hypothesis.

The second part is case studies of two housing figure which are most relevant to urban poor. One is the local housing figure for the urban poor – informal housing (*Fig.01*). Informal housing, which is so called “small houses and sheds” as the most prevalent housing figure for urban poor, though there are many obvious problems of informal housing such as its extremely poor physical quality, it is of great reference value for me because it roots deeply in local environment and derives from the local lifestyle of urban poor. By researching on the informal housing I am able to understand what are the essential things really matter low-income dwellers’ livings.

The second housing figure is and the current housing figure adopted by local government --condominium housing (*Fig.02*). It refers to multi-storied housing units for several households where communal areas are jointly owned and managed. By both document research and site survey

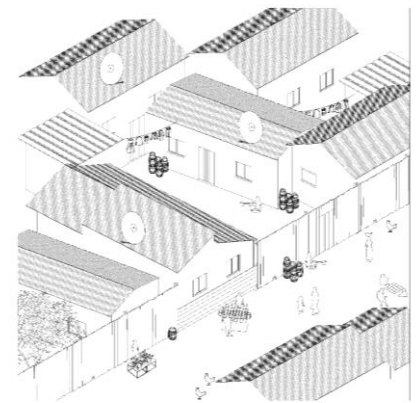


Fig 01. The informal housing
source: own illustration

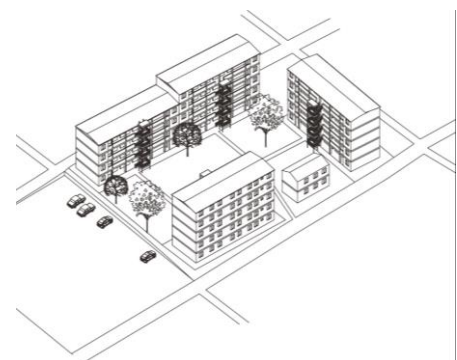


Fig 02. The condominium housing
source: own illustration

on several condominium project, I get a more comprehensive understanding of this “top down” housing figure. It should be admitted that this top-down approaches is successful in many aspects, such as delivering housing at low cost and improving physical living environment of slum dwellers. But when it comes to improvement of living conditions of the low-income population in the long run, these approaches are problematic because it is not correspond to the local lifestyle and the clearance of the former context also destroys the existing social network. The research of condominium provides me a good model to work on, for my design hypothesis I can adopt its good qualities and work out solutions to avoid its shortcomings.

3. The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and my own method in this framework

The methodical line of the approach of the graduation lab contains four phases:

(1) Phase One: Design research & projective mapping

This main purpose of this phase is to build a collective knowledge base on Addis Ababa’s housing figures and how they evolved through time since the establishment of the city as capital of Ethiopia. The research should deliver an account of the entwined relation between Ethiopia’s demographic and political changes, and the socio-spatial practices that took place in Addis Ababa.

The housing figure that assigned to our group is the modernist experiments between 1950s and 1970s. Our method of analysis is case studies on three representative modernist apartment in aspects of function, reaction to the landscape and material (Fig.03). Through horizontal and longitudinal comparison of the three buildings we learned further about both successful and unsuccessful part of introduction of this external model to the local environment.

(2) Phase Two: Problem statement

In this period we students will reflect upon four interdependent social issues that are vital to develop housing policies in Addis Ababa. I chose the issue “housing for the urban poor”. There are many aspects can be studied on this issue but we focus on two representative figures – informal housing and condominium on a specific aspect – the uncontrolled individual expansion into the collective realm (Fig.04). We consider this phenomenon as an epitome for the essential demand of urban poor in terms of housing and it indeed became the core issue of our design.

(3) Phase Three: Site survey

The site survey was taken to further understand the existing social-spatial pattern in Addis and testify the core problem defined in phase two. I visited several places and got a lot fresh materials on different

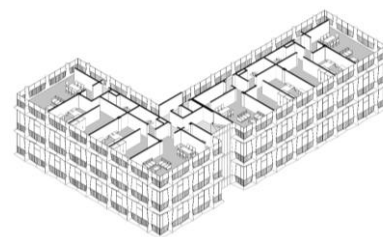


Fig 03-a. The floor layout of Bedilu Building

source: own illustration

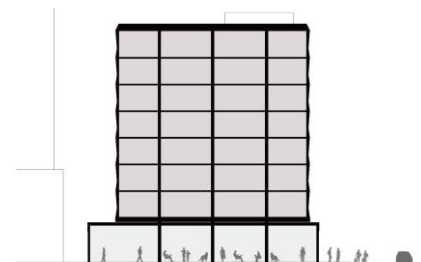


Fig 03-b. The ground floor of Bedilu

Building opens to public realm

source: own illustration



Fig 04-a. The individual extension (red line) in informal housing

source: own illustration

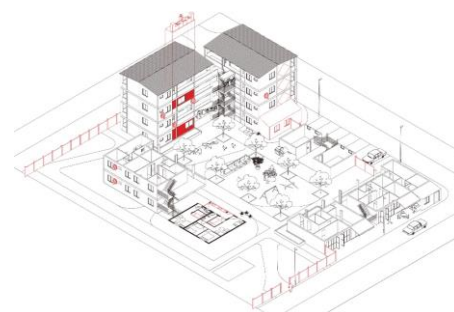


Fig 04-b. The individual extension (red line) in condominium building

source: own illustration

housing figure and cultural and physical environment. In the end I chose a typical area of informal housing – Kirkos Sub City (*Fig.05*). as the site for my design because it has the qualities that should be preserved but cannot be accomplished by current slum upgrading approach, so it is a suitable site for me to experiment new approach.

(4) Phase Four: Urban strategy & design hypothesis

The studio's design method is from large scale to small scale, firstly come up with an urban strategy, based on which we could put forward our design hypothesis. So I followed the methodical line by determine my urban strategy – in-situ slum upgrading (*Fig.06*). at first and then start to study on appropriate housing typology and building technology. Although the detail of the urban strategy may change through time, its principle should be firm and unchanged in order to guide the logic line of the design and integrate the design into a whole one.

4. The relationship between the project and the wider social context

The main goal of my design is to put forward an alternative housing figure that could be another option for slum upgrading. Different from the condominium approach, this alternative approach can preserve the existing social network and local lifestyle of urban poor, in addition, it can be developed incrementally (*Fig.07*). which give people enough time to prepare and react to new house, new life. Though it maybe not as economical and fast as the condominium approach, it provides another choice to people which respects their life better.



Fig 05. The Kirkos Sub City and the site of my design (red line)

source: own illustration



Fig 06. In-situ slum upgrading

source: own illustration



Fig 07. Incremental development

source: own illustration