

REFLECTION REPORT ARCHITECTURE

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Studio:

Global Housing: Cross-cultural Methods and Positions / Addis Ababa
Chair of Architecture & Dwelling / Chair of Methods and Analysis
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Title:

*'Towards a socially inclusive Addis Ababa:
articulating a new urban renewal strategy'*

Teachers

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Introduction

The studio of Global Housing engages with pressing dwelling issues in developing territories dealing with the rapid growth in urbanized areas. For this subject the studio aims to investigate design methods and strategies to provide housing for the urban poor in the developing territory of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Within the research phase different problems in different parts of the city have been articulated. My site of intervention is the centrally situated Kebele 01, which is one of the relatively more established neighborhoods, but not resilient to the pressing real estate value that urges high density developments.

Research and Design

Research shows that current tabula rasa approaches for inner city urban renewal are often resulting in social segregation and loss of important social networks. At the other hand small interventions within the existing informal settlements have shown to be insufficient with regard to the massive increase of housing shortage and the problem of inadequate housing. I have tried to come up with an alternative urban strategy that shows the possibility to act between these two divergent approaches.

The aim of the graduation project is to answer the following research question:

'How to include existing socio-spatial patterns of the neighbourhood within an urban renewal strategy that increases the density and ensures technical durability?'

This graduation project exhibits a strong relationship with the research and design and I believe I have achieved my main aims that had been established at the P2. The transposition from the research to a concrete design proposal has taken form on different scale levels.

Phased growth

Firstly I have created an alternative for the current urban renewal approaches by proposing phased, instead of forced, urban growth. The provision of basic infrastructural features of electricity and

water penetrating into the kebele neighbourhood is an essential part of the first phase. This intervention, next to two relatively small scale implantations of clustered dwelling blocks, are acting as a catalyst of the renewal process where also the local dwellers can benefit from. Next to the theoretical research about the negative effects of large scale relocation programs, also the site analysis has played an important role in the decision to come up with this alternative approach. The site of intervention is a relatively well established neighbourhood that includes different social services, like schools, spaces of commerce and spaces of production. In stead of demolition, I suggest to take advantage of what is already there.

Collectivity

Secondly the design proposal is a reconceptualization of local patterns of inhabitation. Site analysis has shown a form of collectivity that is based on the sub renting of plots within the compound, which were formalized during the Dergue period. This method of sub renting plots is a way of income generation but also activates the vital social network in difficult conditions. In the collective open space social activities like doing the laundry, drying fruit, and having coffee, are taking place. Due to the climate, shaded places gain more value in these collective, -but also in the public, spaces. At the same time privacy plays a very important role and is different in hierarchy than in the European context. While in Europe the bedroom is the most private area of the house, in Ethiopia it is the the kitchen. The kitchen should be closable and possible to air at all times.

Social Diversification

My research into social exclusion as result of urbanization which has taken place on a global level, has lead to the objective is to improve the area without evicting the inhabitants, which does not imply that new inhabitants cannot come to live in the same neighbourhood: quite the opposite. Precisely this moment of inevitable renewal, would be the time to devote careful attention to find a way to facilitate cohabitation of these socially mixed groups. This puts forward the importance of diversification of the housing type stock within urban renewal projects, so that the existing underprivileged inhabitants can live together with relatively more wealthy future inhabitants, as we see in the condominium blocks.

Affordability

Finally I want to point out the practicality of this project. With respect to the condominium housing scheme, the proposed housing scheme has to increase the existing density and ensure technical quality and a durability at least on the same level. Despite the drawbacks of the 'Grand Housing Scheme,' it did activate the building sector and a lot of knowledge has been gained about concrete construction methods. Therefore I have decided to use this knowledge to be able to build with a similar efficiency. Adding to this a separate bamboo construction, defining the collective space in the courtyard, to support the new industry for which new bamboo trees are being planted at this time.

Method

The cross-cultural character of the graduation lab has put forward the challenge to find a balance between local cultures and techniques at the one hand, and global developments at the other hand. I believe when an architect is acting in an unfamiliar context, it is his or her responsibility to gain a thorough understanding of the local conditions. To understand the existing socio-spatial patterns in Addis Ababa and in this neighbourhood we have:

- Analysed existing housing figures in Ethiopia

- Analysed the existing context and existing socio-spatial patterns.

Besides this focus on the local, it remains important to use the knowledge from global examples dealing with urbanization processes. With regard to this responsibility, we have made different case studies of social housing projects around the world from the last decennia.

Despite the effort of mapping and analysing the existing, for my experience it is inevitable that certain personal preferences or habits infiltrate your design. The iterative character of a design process is very valuable in this case. The theoretical knowledge of global developments as well as the understanding of local cultures are a continuous point of feedback throughout the design process.

A reassessment of my P2 design proposal regarding the local patterns of inhabitation has lead to a drastic rescaling and simplification of the dwelling courtyard block. While my first proposal did put effort in creating different collective spaces, the spaces had to be shared with too many people with respect to the collective spaces of the local courtyards.

Now I have created a model with stacked courtyards and collective spaces that are not shared by more then 5 households. The new building model with a modern, closed language of the exterior, which both reflects the value of privacy and safety in Addis Ababa, as a more international style. At the same time this introverted typology provides shadow in the courtyard and prevents overheating of the exterior façade.

Relevance

I believe this thesis project can make an important contribution to the debate of slum upgrading and mass housing in a wider context. Institutions like UN-Habitat have made a big contribution to the understanding of the extreme living conditions of almost one billion slum dwellers all over the world. However the debate regarding these urban transitions in academic institutions still seem limited with respect to its relevance. Transitions like these have significant social impacts and could amplify existing forms of exclusion, but may create new opportunities of inclusion as well. The rapid growth prevailing in cities of the 'Global south,' requires quick response to the excessive demand of decent affordable housing and new infrastructure, but is currently leaving behind the essential question of the social and qualitative criteria.