

Reflection on the complex projects Chicago Graduation Studio

The Lower West Side Industrial Corridor & A proposal for a new Chicago Public Library, regional centre.

Regional Library at the Lower West Side Industrial Corridor

Research Themes, Urban Strategy & Project proposal

During the MSc 3 research we looked into the Lower West Side area in Chicago with the use of three 'lenses'. These lenses focused on three area's of research notably:

- Innovative (emerging) Living- Working relationships
- The link between education and manufacturing
- Reshoring and future industrial perspectives

The Lower West Side, along the south branch of the Chicago river and is in close proximity (3.5 km) of the Loop (Chicago's downtown area). In its history the area was one of focal points of industry and has seen several waves of immigration by various groups of people from all over. In a range from western to eastern European and from north to middle American nationalities. The Lower West Side has so come to be known as a 'port of entry' for these groups of immigrants. Each group left all of which left their mark in the area in diverse ways, from modular facade ornament delivery in the 1920's (Bohemians) to anti eviction opposition graffiti in the 1970's and 1980's by the Mexicans.

The aim of this case study was to obtain knowledge and make an effort to start to understand some of what is going on in Chicago. And about how to intervene the best in a socially diverse area which was very dependent on its former industry. By doing this we could make some grounded claims to what extent certain directions would be viable for the future of Chicago and the Lower West Side.

As a result of this research and insight in the (past) workings of the city as an organism, sprawling, shrinking, sub urbanizing etc. We came with a proposal for the reinvigoration of the Lower West Side area as a more inclusive part of the general Chicago area. The basic premise of this new Urban strategy was that to change the current relationship the Lower West Side industrial corridor has with the neighbourhood from a mutual dislike to a more socially beneficial one. By introducing key projects, to propel the inclusive relationship between both entities (neighbourhood and industrial corridor). The following design project or key project, should strive to test and prove the hypothesis that was made in the urban Strategy. In our case to find a viable (new) form of interaction between groups of people who do not interact.

In American community life, the library takes a very central role as a third place and as a place where people can fall back on. Because of this central place in community life and the many opportunities it gives as a third place to meet and greet.

Chicago & The Lower West Side: Living and working

The research we conducted to uncover Chicago's role in the grander scheme of things and the role of the Lower West Side in the Chicago context. We went into the different changes in the living – working spectrum both historically and in the present, seeing what forms of social control, companies tried in the past and what is being done today as to be able to determine what could be a viable next step in the development of the Lower West Side area and especially the development of the bond (or current lack thereof) between the industrial corridor and the neighbourhood. The research took on several

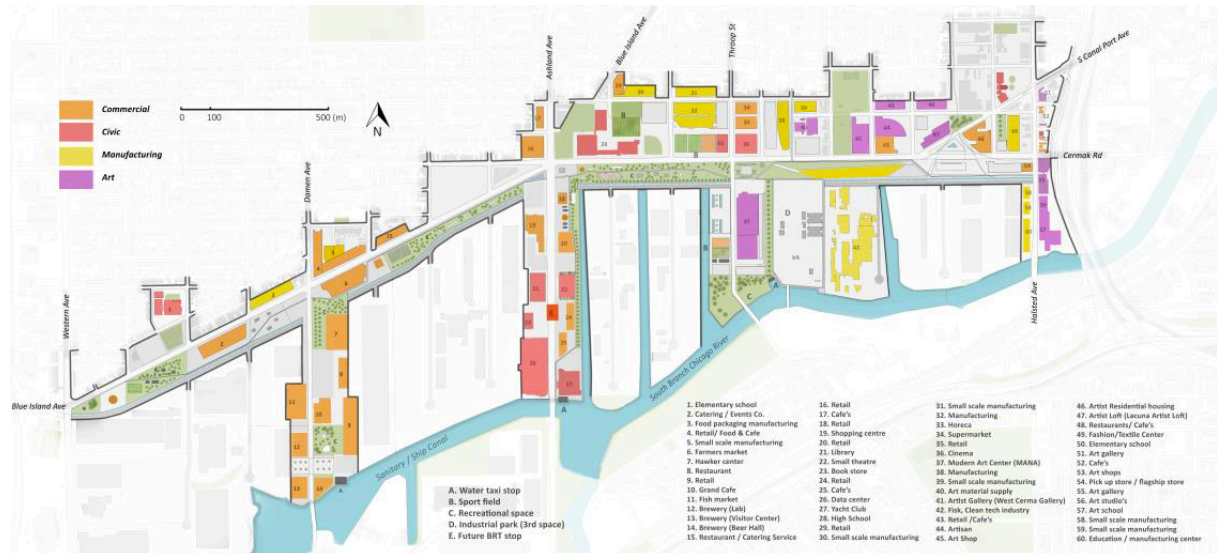
In hind sight I could conclude that the initial lense of emerging innovative living – working concepts, however interesting, was still quite broad and within pilsen there seemed not to be a lot of very innovative concepts. To gain better footing we chose to create an overview of idea's on the matter that emerged throughout Chicago's history some of which were implemented others were not. Next to this an overview of the actual growth and decline of Chicago's neighbourhoods through time was created. The totality of information gathered was humbling and perhaps the several 'chapters' of the living –working book can be seen as separate investigations. Also the way these investigations related to the socio- spatial relations is still for some degree unclear and there could have been an elaboration in this respect.

Urban Strategy:

A story of two tales: Industrial Pilsen – Cultural Pilsen

From the larger city and nationwide scale of the initial research we embarked on the design of a Strategy to challenge the future for Lower West Side area. Taking on the premise of the divide that came to be after the decline of the industries in general and due to the mobilization of the individual as a result of the growth of automobile ownership, the number of workers associated to their own neighbourhood industries plummeted. The result of this is that for the Lower West Side only between 0-4 % of people living there are dependent for their job on the neighbourhood. To counter this we sought a strategy to try and mend this rupture. By essentially creating an 'extra' zone between the industries and neighbourhood, to 'mediate'. The strategy serves a double purpose, to create a distinct area's separated, for living and working. Next to this, the newly created zone offers an area where new emerging forms of social contracts (in reference to the old relationship between industries and neighbourhood) can be tested. The Strategy can be used as guideline to preserve the Lower West Side's duality. Although the relationship / intersection between the industry and the neighbourhood is addressed, the strategy does not specifically address the rest of the neighbourhood and its development because of several reasons. The main approach of the strategy is a viewpoint from the industry. This is not regardless of other social changes occurring like the increasing demand for housing, the fact that old factory buildings are being restored, the advent of a new arts sector and a growing gentrification all these changes do not address the gap between the industrial corridor and the neighbourhoods, in

other words that will continue to exist. Taking the industry as a vital part of the history of the neighbourhood and engraved as a part of its culture, the strategy is an attempt to secure the role of industry for the future, as well as a vision what the role of industry can be.



In a reflection to the process and result from this Strategic invention development it can be said degree of specificity of how the relations between the different functions could be are missing. It might be said that in the way the rules are formulated a maximum degree of freedom and movement in regard to possible building types and functions is allowed. Certain predetermined rules in how the building itself should relate tot the context, size, building envelope, etc. Next to this regulations on how the buildings energy demands and water demands are to be implemented. A further coherence in the totality of the scheme can be achieved by developing these further guidelines.

The Chosen Key project: A new Library for the Lower West Side and direct region

The Strategy intervenes in the neighbourhood by means of introducing a third entity between two world to mediate. This third type of canvas can be conceptualised as a third place canvas. The chosen key project: a new Library, is within American culture, becoming the multipurpose built form of the values underlying this third place / mediating capacity as outlined by the Story of two Tales – Urban Strategy.

The Library design in context.

In American society the Public Library took and keeps taking a bigger and more prominent central role. The Library is becoming a place where you don't necessarily go for a book loan but more to meet people, see friends, discuss, learn through the multiple extra curricular activities, rent office space, have company meetings or welcome as a community world reknowned people to lecture on anything and everything. Some of these services are for free and some are given for a minor fee but all are for and by the local community.

Within the Chicago neighbourhood, the Library has been an aid for people with no access to a personal computer, or who lost their job and did not know how to create a resume and motivation letters that can help them from one job to another. That is the role of the Public Library in the United States as of this moment.

Next to this president Obama set course with new policy, to make new forms of manufacturing available for all layers of society.

Next to what is happening to the Library in general, another major change in society is the increasing use of doorstep delivery and internet sales, which has its reflection in the m²'s of stock keeping capacity in close proximity of inner city area's. The Lower West Side's industrial corridor already has a firm footing with distribution centres for various market branches.

Preliminary results of the

A reflection on the outcome of the graduations design result and process will start with commenting on the fact that from the previous stage the Strategy does not really give a discriminatory list or guidelines as to how the building should fit in. This amount of freedom, can be seen as very beneficial for a hybrid building type that on itself is experimental, yet the designer needs to state his or her own framework of guidelines. Another point was the idea of a library combination with an industrial building as idea is workable but in practice due to building regulations, types of workspace and several other specifics. The way the two related in concept has during the process never really been a strong point of the design.

These are the main negative points that can be discerned from the process.

Another point can be that the location of the library albeit easy to reach with all forms of transportation, it will be a location that has to prove itself. People do not easily go out of their way for joining a lecture or extra curricular course. One of the rule of library location determination is to find a place as central as possible for the population that it serves. Although the building serves a potential community of about 240.000 people though the Bus Rapid Transport system, this will still be out of the traditional centre of the Pilsen neighbourhood.

On many other ways the library building is designed to be able to react to changing circumstances; Adaptability. Next to this Accessibility is one of the key concepts behind the way the buildings several functions are dispersed over the ground floor and first floor. With spaces for all ages to simultaneously make use of the communities Library.