

P4 REFLECTION PAPER

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“The Chair of Complex Projects (CP) targets all scales of the architectural thinking, details, building, city, and region. Expanding the knowledge about design and dense urban areas development, broads the mind and thinking of future architects.

Complex Projects investigates settlements around the world that are ambiguous in their development and embedded in the process of globalization. Students and teachers are encouraged to look critically at their surroundings; to gather, organize, and question the complex forces that ultimately manifest themselves into our built environment. In Complex Projects we are interested in the study of different urban conditions; core or peripheral, dynamic or stagnant, traditional or without history, anonymous or famous; these are the contemporary postmodern realities we must confront as a profession.”

(<http://www.tudelft-architecture.nl/chairs/complex-projects>)

STARTING POINT

Rather than starting a project from a given program, this project started with a comprehensive research into a complex, for me unknown, city. This research, combined with a fieldtrip gave a broad set of facts, impressions and issues. For me, the fieldtrip was the major key to decide on the what to look further in to.

Before going to Havana, we made a research booklet with an extensive, but rather superficial research about numerous topic, specific to Vedado. A very typical neighbourhood in the City of Havana, with quite a homogenous structure. Urban fabric, land use, greenery, etc. are clearly organised in the area of this case study.

That’s why the fieldtrip was the most important aspect of this study. The impressions, which are impossible to grasp through internet or books, became clear when going there. As soon as I got a good sense of the place and noticed a big inequality between locals and tourists, I decided that this would become my thesis topic. Socially, architecturally and economically, the differences interested me and enabled me to connect the research done for the booklet to the actual situation.

When walking around in Cuba I was mostly interested by the residential character of the site. I picked a site that expressed this use mostly and got a tunnel vision on a particular site. Upon arriving back in Delft, my mentor Paul mentioned that the contrast I wanted to tackle didn’t really express itself on this location. He challenged me to find a different site where the same topic is directly visible.

After switching sites, I felt like I had to start over and try to find all the expressions I got in the neighbourhood on this new spot. The clearness of the problem in this case helped me pin down the same issue of the whole neighbourhood, rather than one particular situation.

RESEARCH VS DESIGN

By looking at different cases worldwide on how to tackle big differences between user groups, I was able to select a combination of programs that facilitated the intended interaction. Upon presenting this combination, it became clear that the project would only be occupied during daytime and didn't facilitate interaction in every possible way. The studio methodology of presenting every 5 weeks made it possible to quickly highlight the weaknesses of the studies. These benchmarks became more important as major design decision had to be made.

In the research, I decided to go for a rational way of looking at the sizes and configurations of the program components. As the number of components grew and programs blended into each other, I stepped away from the pragmatic research of components, and looked into connecting them by public space. I think this is a clear result of the ideology of the studio: adapting the research to the decisions that are made. It's a fluid process of switching between design and research.

Most of the design decisions were made by testing them in models, both physical and digital. When I got stuck in the process, it helped me a lot to shift between scales. Zooming out or in helped me to see the overall concept while staying precise.

METHODICAL LINE OF APPROACH

From the beginning on, I wanted to make a strongly conceptualised project with a high feasibility. The methodology of the studio however challenged me to push the concept so far, that the feasibility had to suffer under it. It took me quite a while to switch from a 'ready-to-build' project to a more visionary, conceptual one.

This visionary approach reflects itself in the prototype aspect of the project. A set of interventions is set that makes it possible to repeat a similar project on a different site. In this aspect the homogenous structure of the whole Vedado neighbourhood can be addressed, and a network of case studies is formed. The network then makes a stronger base to tackle the initial issue of inequality.

Looking back, I feel like the switch to a prototype-like project helped me a lot. Holding on to the short-term, high feasibility would have prevented me from thinking in a wider social context. In the beginning I only looked at this specific case and forgot about the actual problem I was trying to solve.