CHICAGO

‘Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans.’ – D. Burnham

Chicago is a unique city of the U.S., but in the meantime it is defined by what we can consider the typical characters of an american city, especially when speaking about its neighbourhoods. Undeniably, as well as in other american cities, the qualities of life and the architectural features in the Chicago suburban area are transforming. The strict border between downtown and the neighbourhoods is not so clear anymore, or better, it becomes blurred when the cities are shrinking.

To investigate this phenomenon it has been necessary to start from the macro-scale of the region until the human scale. During the development of the study of Chicago, a continuous zoom in and zoom out has been the key process to identify and describe the situation and the problems of the city of Chicago. The methodology for the analysis had a journalistic edit. This posed a specific focus on the real quality of the city, its infrastructure and its architecture.

In Chicago politics and taxes shape the citizens’ lives as well as they shape the architectural interventions. The strenght of the community make the people really involved in the transformations of the city. Even if we are speaking about a population of more than 2.7 milion people, each individual person wants to know about the future of his district. This aspect asks for a continuous shift from a top-down point of view, to a bottom-up one.

Understanding the actual situation of Chicago and in particular of the West side of Chicago is an essential step to project its future. Numbers and data show which are the most possible realities for the development of this area. When designing the future impact of a new infrastructural line it is important to analyse also other parts of the city which has already been subject to a comparable intervention.

The masterplan idea develops a new dense cluster in the west side of Chicago which hosts the new infrastructure line (lime line) and exploits its potential. My project wants to follow the conditions described here above and offer an architectural answer. The result needs to merge qualities of european architectural solutions to an american environment.

The Urban Mountain is intended as a building that deals with the big american cities and their symbolic and iconic architectural approach, but gives at the same time a bottom-up answer. A new typology. An unusual situation in downtown. This unusual building with its shape, program and functional use of the building works as a strenght itself for the creation of a future new cluster in the West side of Chicago. This kind of intervention can indeed foster the process to develop a new identity. The intention is to create a building for the locals but able to attract also people from other parts of the region.

The building can be analysed through three main aspects:
  _The symbol
  _The program
  _The landscape
SYMBOL: URBAN MOUNTAIN
People identify themselves with the place where they live in. The image of a building is really important because the view is the sense from which buildings are mainly perceived by people. Juhani Pallasmaa (2000) claims that today’s architecture is primarily or even dominantly based on the visual. In his opinion buildings are ‘. Images of immediate persuasion’. Architectural interventions become often an occasion to create new symbols for the city. New typologies have to embrace new needs but also to add a value to the place where they stand. Chicago is made by symbols. Buildings famous all over the world not just because of what they host inside but more for their architecture. Mid City is the new super dense downtown of west Chicago. Locals and tourists will name the buildings in this area based on their program, shape or materials. Dealing with the existing downtown of Chicago the idea is to create a new symbol different from the ones that characterize the Loop. Morphology and typology needs to create something unique.
The **iconic buildings** are the collective identification with the nation, the city or even just a district. **Local and non-local people** know these buildings and while people that live in the area make them part of their life, tourist consider these buildings as a must see. A building to be iconic need to have a simple and strong shape. The triangular shape chosen for the **Urban mountain** has been kept clean and simple to make it a strong icon.
PROGRAM: LABORATORY OF FUN
Obviously, the office isn’t supposed to be an eight-hour-long play date — it’s a place where people need to accomplish work. The big question, then, is whether workplace fun makes employees more or less efficient at their jobs. On this topic, the research is fairly mixed. Some scientists say workplace fun predicts high job satisfaction (and those who are happy at work generally tend to be more productive). Others found that, among workers in the hospitality industry, having fun improves employee retention but reduces productivity.

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Architecture always try to answer people’s need. The design of a working place often become more a design for a living place where people can feel comfortable and also have fun. Mixing the different spaces can give for sure an answer to different needs but one program can limit the other. The dimension and the fast connection can also allow people to easily reach buildings others than their working space. Creating a ‘leisure machine’ in the middle of a new downtown can offer that kind of space for fun immediately next to the perfect working environment. This ‘leisure machine’ is open to locals and non locals, but meanwhile for non locals it can become a unique occasion, it can be part of the daily life of locals.
Leisure is a political, economic, social, and architectural issue. After offering the best working environment it is really important to channel workingclass free time away from idleness and unacceptable forms of leisure (such as crime, alcoholism and political revolution), towards new constructive and productive uses. Society evolves and the working facilities follow the change. Time and efficiency needs to work together as a new dimension in cities. The emphasis is not just on jobs for all but on leisure for all. Leisure needs to be easily reachable in every moment of the day giving a possible alternative to the frenetic rhythm of working.

Theme parks have always been a district outside the city center. They have been cause of horrible traffic congestions and huge parking lots. Theme parks such as Disneyland or Disney World became magnet of tourism and the place where locals can spend their weekends. In contemporary society where zero car and zero carbon in highly valued, the theme park needs to be easily accessible by people. These places need to be part of the city and so they need to develop in vertical direction and spread themselves in different connected areas.

The leisure time has changed as people habits did too. The efficiency which characterizes our working facilities needs to find the same results in facilities we use when we don’t work. Architecture can create laboratories where people go to have fun together or alone, places where people can spend 1 day or 1 hour depending on how much time they have to enjoy. This kind of building needs to be well connected to the infrastructure and right in the center of all the urban life. Vibrant areas which shapes new urban public occasions.
Theme parks work as villages. They have usually one main gate and they create primary and secondary axis of circulation. The theme park system always works as one main director composed by different parts. All the different attractions are connected between each others and their location is often choose by theme decisions. The paths are studied to accommodate the visitors and to guide them through the park.

In between the carousels there are service facilities for the users such as bar, restaurants or shops. Most of the time the hierarchy of the flows is controlled by squares placed in specific parts of the park.
VERTICALITY AND **FUN**

When accommodating a typology used to deal with a *desolate landscape* in a dense urban fabric, the program such as the circulation need to adapt themselves to the context and the need of the users. The new challenge is the **verticality**. Not all the activities touch the ground. The horizontal circulation is cut by vertical movements. To make this ‘machine of leisure’ working all the activities need to be considered as autonomous attractions in which the user can enjoy. Every branch of the building is **independent from the others** except from the info/tickets points.

The ground floors need to be connected to the outside activities but also the starting point for the laboratory of fun. There the **user can choose** how he wants to experience the mountain and so which tickets he needs. The vertical connection allow to skip entire section of the program to reach the one the users want to enjoy. Moreover the roof allow people to reach different parts of the buildings through balconies.
The context and the new kind of use make this typology really different from an amusement park. Dealing with leisure as a program can achieve different results. Leisure centers differ from sport centers mainly because people don’t need specific skills to play. The main differences between a traditional amusement park and the laboratory of fun are two: **time** and **spaces**.

The areas are arranged in order to host different activities, but at the same time they don’t work as fixed carousels next to each others. This boxes can be **changed and adapted** through the needs. The hanging structure can allow the floors to be modified moved or removed. The **flexibility** of spaces is controlled by moving walls which can create different activity containers. The users can experience this building as single or as a group, promoting new meetings or strengthen old ones.

The user can actually choose how much time they want to spend in this building. The activities all together can require a **day** or two but a singular activity can last around **1 hour**. The street invade the building making it a collection of different autonomous activities. This building is not intended as a weekend attraction but more as a **daily pill of fun**.
LANDSCAPE:
ROOFSCAPE
The natural conditions of a place are understood as being based on features in the topographical landscape, including a cosmological and temporal perspective that includes continual changes of light and vegetation in the annual cycle. These characteristic rhythmic fluctuations contrast with the stability of physical form. Buildings need to be flexible in time and they need to be able to gain from the change of seasons. Norberg-Schulz claims that the genius loci is a place in nature that we have to interpret when we are changing our built environment. Nature, Norberg-Schulz feels, is the basis for people’s interpretation and it is in relation to nature that places and objects take on meaning. He discusses the way in which morphological and cosmic connections are given a physical expression in society’s dwelling and living.
Seasons create completely different environments in Chicago. The city changes its’ behaviour due to this change. While in July the average reaches 29° the city has also a lot of snow during winter.

Average total snowfall and days with fresh snow in Chicago:
- 8.2 days January 27.4 cm
- 6.1 days February 23.1 cm
- 4.3 days March 14.2 cm
- 0.9 days April 3.0 cm
- 0.2 days October 0.8 cm
- 1.7 days November 3.0 cm
- 7.1 days December 21.6 cm
- 28.5 days Year 93.2 cm

The O’Hare Airport has more snowy days, 72cm a year, than other places in the Chicago area that record snowfall. Chicago’s Midway Airport averages 68cm days annually with snow, while the Botanical Gardens have 57cm days. Of the three locations, Midway Airport gets the most total snowfall, at 94cm yearly, while the Botanical Gardens has the least amount at 84cm.

This chart shows how buildings are often used in a certain period of the year because if linked to a program that works just in specific seasons. The use of the shelter as a field allow the building to be used all over the year just changing the way people use it. Meanwhile the inner part of the building works as a cover area which control the climate but in a minimal way. The building wants to create in people awareness of the climate and the seasonal change.
High rise cities can offer to people two completely different perspectives. Citizens can move through the buildings walking on the streets and see the massive impact of the buildings above them or they can go on the roof level and see the city from above.

The vertical dimension of buildings creates indeed new ways people can live the context. The roof level aquired in time a unique value and everything situated in that place became luxurious and expensive. Usually semi private or private activities attract people on top of buildings.

The Urban mountain wants to be accessible as a standard park offering inside public attractors and completely free path outside. In and out keep a continuous connection completing each others. The shelter itself becomes as a natural built environment.
The roof of the Urban Mountain is intended as an extension of the surrounding green boulevards on top of the built environment. This allows to create a privileged spot where everyone can enjoy both the view of the city and the green open air areas. Meanwhile the boulevards work both as public path and as a green productive environment the Urban Mountain can be considered as a field which changes based on seasons and people uses. In winter the layer of snow creates ski pistes meanwhile in summer mountain bike tracks can be close to picnic, relaxing areas. This green canvas brings people to the roof level without losing the connection to the ground.
CONTROLLED GREEN

Park intended as green areas where people can spend their free time has being a huge fail in the West of Chicago. Garfield Park in particular is not only an area in which the green is barely there anymore, it has become a dangerous area with an extremely high rate of crime and drugs.

The idea of green areas where people can safely spend their free time and which can also work as social connectors need to be a controlled green. There needs to be a border which defines when the green area starts and when it finishes in a way that people feel like in a protected area. The activities that stay around a park make it also continuously controlled and never empty or unsafe. Using the shelter of a building as green park make it at the same time connected and free from the building generating an environment in which people can feel out from the built environment but at the same time protected by it.