Graduation Reflection

Graduation thesis project, which began on September 2011, started with a preliminary thesis idea in a form of a graduation poster. I was interested to investigate the effects of Large Urban Projects (LUPs) in the city of Valencia, Spain and the way these projects influenced socio-economic and spatial development. I studied at Valencia 3 years ago and I was very interested about the city's transformations and development dynamics. However the study theme at the beginning was quite vague and broad and had to be narrowed down. As a result, I started reading academic and professional articles about LUPs on the topics of: the use of large urban projects in strategic spatial planning, positive and negative effects that such developments create, relation between LUPs and mega-events, clashes of private and public interests. Therefore I wrote a literature review paper summarizing the theme in read literature. Review paper was called ‘Counteracting the negative effects of large urban projects on local communities’. It helped me create a strong theoretical framework for my further graduation process. Meanwhile, I was doing a lot of analysis to find the most problematic spots in the city, and went for a site visit to interview people from the strategic planning department of Valencia, planning department of Municipality, director of Central Park organization (one of the new Large Urban Project currently under construction in Valencia) and a professor of urbanism at Polytechnic University of Valencia. I was inquiring about the most recent strategic plans of the city, areas which are drawing most attention from municipality as the problematic ones, existing state of the central park project and about the planning system of Valencia and Spain in general. Such information was important because I got to know the latest information from the first hands and I got to know more about the local planning system, about which I was not acquainted before. Moreover, I acquired some new contacts which I used throughout the graduation process whenever I saw it necessary.

After P2 presentation I already had a more detailed project theme and a preliminary intervention area for which I wanted to propose a strategy on how to make that area more successful and how to benefit from the proximity of the existing and future LUPs. However there was still a lack of local spatial analysis and research. So before continuing for a proposal of a strategy, I had to investigate the local context better. Some up to date relevant information and statistics were not available (like data from the National Census of 2011), therefore I had to use data from the year 2001 or try interviewing local contacts from municipality. Consequently, when I had a sufficient amount of data to identify local project site problems and argument my next steps for the strategy, I made a preliminary strategy proposal for P3 presentation with the key intervention areas. However, afterwards I still had to look back into the arguments behind the strategy and the context of the site to make it more integrated and convincing. Primary interventions and secondary ones had to be more accurate and strategic. Therefore for P4 presentation I looked into the latest spatial plans of development from municipality (General Plan of Valencia 2010), inquired people form the planning department about the prospect of it and therefore formed a critical opinion about the possibilities to achieve them in current economic state of the city. As a result I propose a strategy which allows spatial interventions and transformations in the site while taking in mind the economic capacities of public investment. This strategy proposes several key interventions which draw economic activity into the project area and promotes the processes of local development and re-development. I then focus on one
main key intervention out of four, which is crucial for the spin-off effect of the strategy and capturing the flows of people going to LUPs situated next to the project site. I now have a proposal for the preliminary spatial configuration of this intervention and probable effects it will cause for the neighbouring site upgrade. However I would like to do a more detailed proposal for this main project and better investigate the scenarios and ways to achieve it taking in mind all the stakeholders involved. As a result of this design I also would like to make renderings and other graphic material to illustrate my proposal.

Generally speaking, the master thesis project has undergone quite a methodological path form the beginning to the end, which was also a great learning experience and a personal expectation form the studio. The weak parts of the process were quite a vague starting theme of the project, a lengthy social analysis and learning process about the Spanish planning system which lead to a late narrowing down of the problem and location. What is more, I would still like to investigate better the theoretical side of the project involving themes of vulnerability, place making methods, strategic planning tools under scarce times of economy and case studies touching one or a few of these themes. However this project has time limitations, and I have to proceed with the existing resources.