Reflection
Graduation studio: global housing---cross-cultural methods and position/Addis Ababa

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1. The relation between the graduation lab and my design subject:
The graduation studio I am working on is: global housing—cross-cultural methods and position/Addis Ababa. The theme of the studio is focusing on addressing the pressing dwelling issue in developing territories with the increasing cross-cultural character of contemporary architectural practice. Positions breed especially from the local culture, environment, society and economic circumstances are required to be developed.

Under this background, my design subject is to create a new housing model for the urban poor based on the existing “production & living” pattern that can accommodate both the conventional social connections and the economic activities.

2. The relation between research and design:
There are mainly three research parts that have strong connections with my own design hypothesis. (1) The first part is taken place in the case studies. Three cases that all taking social-economic connections into account are discussed and compared to see what is the key factor that would make the housing for the urban poor work. They are the Aranya Project by Balkrishna Doshi in 1983 in Indore, India, New Gourna by Hassan Fathy in 1943 in Egypt and in-situ upgrading project Yerawada, Pune, India.

All the three projects appreciate the intimate social ties in the existing community and try to preserve this feature in the new design. While only the last project turn the idea of embedding on-plot income into reality. And the combination of this social and economic sustainability pay it back with a long-running and more prosperous project than the other two. So it helps me to establish the insight that the fulfillment of both social and economic sustainability is the major point to achieve the long-term benefits in housing for the urban poor.

(2) The second part of the research determines my design happens during the comparative analysis between the existing housing figures for the urban poor in Addis Ababa— the slum and condominium. In both figures, there is always a conflict between individuality (individual realm expansion) and collectivity (collective realm quality) from community scale to cluster scale and unit scale (Fig 1). But the reason behind this phenomena is different. For slum, the bottom-up forces conducted by people themselves can be concluded as the cause. While for condominium, the top-down strategy carried out in every place of the project leading to less flexibility for further adaptation. So after this comparison, I tend to think that the fusion of a top-down and bottom-up strategy should be taken here to provide a framework for dwellers to

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Fig 1-a. The individual realm expansion towards public space in slums. source: own illustration

Fig 1-b. The individual realm expansion towards public space in condominium (community scale). source: own illustration

Fig 1-c. The individual realm expansion towards public space in condominium (unit scale). source: own illustration
fill in as their own needs.

(3) During my site survey, the existing social-spatial pattern of “production & living” in Addis Ababa enlighten me to come up with my design hypothesis. As it seems to have the potential to become a strategy that may enhance the social ties by collaborative production activities and generate on-plot income at the same time (Fig 2). So my design hypothesis is to improve, transform and integrate the existing “production & living” pattern into a new urban housing model to achieve a self-sustainable community.

3. The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework:

(1) Phase One: Design research & projective mapping
Studio’s approach: In the first phase, we were allocated in group of three students to account for six housing figures that evolved through time in Addis Ababa to build a collective knowledge base for the following phase of the design. They are: a. vernacular house, b. palace compounds, c. informal housing, d. colonial housing, e. modernist experiments, f. condominium and commercial developments.
My approach: I participated in the analysis of vernacular housing. After categorizing six vernacular housing types based on their location, climate, material, dimension and construction method (Fig 3), we delivered a series of analytical drawings from the village scale, cluster scale to single housing scale to understand the conventional social-spatial practices in vernacular housing and the traditions as well as the potential in local materials and building technology (Fig 4).

(2) Phase two: Problem statement
Studio’s approach: Four independent societal issues in Addis Ababa were discussed to develop the critical reflection, determine the core issue and raise the research question on one of these issues. They are: a. arriving in Addis, b. housing for the urban poor, c. everyday trajectories, d. housing design towards an inclusive city.
My approach: The issue attracted me the most was the housing for the urban poor. Our group mainly focused on the two existing housing figures that caters for the poor people in Addis, namely slum and condominium. By comparing these two, we figured out that in both figures there were the uncontrolled individual expansion into the collective realm which brings a conflict between individuality and collectivity. So the research question base on these issues is as follows: how can we achieve a balance between the individual dwelling extensions and the preservation of public space?
(3) Phase three: Site survey
Studio’s approach: A field trip was taken to further understand the existing social-spatial pattern in Addis and testify the core problem defined in phase two.
My approach: The visit to Merkato (the biggest market area in Addis) unveiled me the existing “production & living” pattern which has an enormous potential to become the new housing model. And it also determined my site at exactly the same place where the most intense production activities happened (Fig 5).

(4) Phase four: Urban strategy & design hypothesis
From this phase, individual design begins and I started to explore how to realize those ideas I mentioned before into reality.

My idea is to create a new typological figure with four layers which are production, living, commerce and leisure. Although as a new housing model, a continuous dialogue between old and new is always there. First, because the new housing figure is transformed from the existing “production & living” mode, the conventional social-spatial pattern is preserved and improved. Second, by taking advantage of the topography and the central river of the site, an urban park that can serve the whole city is introduced to function as a decompressing moment for the most intense area in Addis. The preservation of the landscape establishes a bond with the past and helps to keep local dwellers’ collective memory. Third, both the inner border (Fig 6) and outer border (Fig 7) is specially designed to articulate with the existing fabric.

To sum up, my design is mainly about to provide a four layers new housing figure which bring in new qualities to the city but at the same time always integrate with the existing fabric.

4. The relationship between the project and the wider social context:
By revising the relation between production and living, the original living pattern is largely preserved and the social networks are respected. What is more, with a community-scale production activity, the poor are no longer be treated as the people in the margin of the society but as part of the chain to complete the industrialized pace in Addis which helps them establish their confidence, position and dignity.