THESIS REFLECTION

PERSONAL INFORMATION

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STUDIO

Theme: Usage of catalyst buildings as a generators of urban development
Teachers: Hrvoje Šmidihen, Karel Vollers, Mitesh Dixit

Argument of Choice of the studio: Forming a strategy from a broader viewpoint that explores the functioning of a region, city and building. The formulation of a problem statement after conducting thorough research which results in a thoughtful and meaningful intervention is what appeals to me in this studio, as well as the gaining of a broader base through research on all scales and viewed from different disciplines.

TITLE

Title of the graduation project: Arena de Ciudad, Ciudad Juarez
The relationship between the studio theme and the thesis proposal

The graduation studio Borders-the Architecture of violence researches on border conditions at rigid borders, where two worlds collide. The focus of the studio was on the border between the United States of America and Mexico. This border with a long history of conflicts, alterations and discrepancies has unfortunately caused for a mostly negative perception of the border area. This perception has caused for further fortification of the border and a greater dividing of the region. The area is rather complex because of all the legislation, infrastructure and different systems intersecting in the border region. This brings great potential in culture, economy and production with it.

In the west of Texas on the border lies the border city of El Paso. Divided by a wall and a concrete ditch of fifty meters wide Ciudad Juarez is situated on the other side of the Border. Because of the installation of this rigid border, out of fear for the other side, a distance between both cities is created. The isolation of Ciudad Juarez in the last years have caused for what used to be a city centre vibrant with activity and tourists to now be desolate. A lot of bars markets attractions and recreation were forced to close and have left empty voids within the city. Promenades and pedestrian areas have fallen in decay. This all leads to the urge to reconnect the cities. By reconnecting the city centers, which have a true distance of less than two kilometers, we can start the merging of the cities. The downtown area of El Paso has a vibrant cultural and economic life. Which is very attractive for people from within as well outside of the city. By making the center of Ciudad Juarez and the border itself attractions/vibrant areas we create a desire to cross the border in both ways. Thus stimulating the local community and changing the perception of the area.

The project proposes a very public and attractive program in the form of a new bullfighting arena in the city center of Ciudad Juarez. The project is located on one of the major connecting spines between the two city centers and is easy accessible from both cities. This spine links the downtown area of El Paso to the border bridge and the bullfighting arena in Ciudad Juarez creating a strong connection between them. As a part of an overall masterplan to reconnect the cities the project aims to do this on all scales, from a very local stimulation of activity and reestablishing of the community in Mexico to connecting the border cities and with this the border region as whole.
The relationship between research and design

The research in the graduation project has been on different scale levels. The border region has been extensively researched by the whole studio which has resulted in a dense atlas where the whole region is unpacked on different scales. Thus giving an overview of hard an soft data of the border region. By intersecting and juxtaposing these unpacked layers we came to understand the functioning and the issues. As a studio we then started to form a proposition for the whole border area to become a new political/economical zone which acts as a mediator between the two countries which strives to merge the region.

One of the major priorities in this plan was to reconnect the border cities as incubators of this reconnection. This is one of the focal points of my design process. Concluded out of the research as one of the zones with the most discrepancies and alienation Ciudad Juarez/El Paso was chosen to make an intervention. To further grasp the conditions which had to be dealt with, analyses of both city centers were made. Out of which can be concluded that both the city center/the community in Ciudad Juarez needed more cohesion as well that it had to be connected to El Paso and the U.S. Thus a public program and one that is deeply embedded in Mexican culture was selected; the bullfighting arena.

To get a grip on the program and functioning of a bullfighting arena Case studies on building typologies and references of building types were used as well as journals and books about the process and stadia of a bullfight.

To embed the arena in its surroundings there had to be dealt with local conditions and existing structures. One is the connecting spine to the U.S another is a stream/market line over the existing plaza which had to be dealt with. Through multiple design studies this line was given its expression.

By constantly investigating the design and relating the different scales of the design the project has become an actor on all of these scales linking them together.
The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the studio and the method chosen by the student in this framework

The Msc 3 research studio started with collecting data about the region and finding a way to begin with the design process. After collecting and selecting data an atlas was formed with both hard data (infrastructure, airports, gassiness etc.) and soft data (wealth, mortality, criminal activity etc.) was composed. This was done on three scales that of the Eco region, the city and a square kilometer within the city. To get a better understanding of the region and form our own perception a two week trip was organized driving along the border visiting the border cities and local communities.

After selecting a theme and location for the intervention in Msc 4 further personal analyses were done and research into the subject of the proposed project. Followed by concept studies, proportion studies, research into references and investigations on every building part. By constantly doing so and intersecting these investigations a coherent plan with well argument design decisions and a strong narrative is constructed.

Relevance in wider social context

The project finds itself in a critical situation. A city trying to get itself out of a grimy past and in a difficult situation with its neighbors. We started out with a wide view looking at the region, networks and legislation and forming a strategy about the area. Using this as a starting point for the project constantly going back and forth between scales and building/regional strategies the project is embedded in the wider concept of the region.

The project starts out at a very small scale strengthening its direct surroundings and looks to play its role in a wider urban and regional context. It finds itself at the junction between an urban intervention and architecture and blurry the line thus adding to the debate where architecture stops and urbanism begins and the position of the architect within this context.
The arena has to act as a catalyst of urban activity and development and therefore has to have an 
public character and accessible to anyone. Thus instead of proposing a arena as a building on top of 
a plaza it takes it form as a plaza.

arena

stierenvechten geworteld in mexicaanse cultuur

door het niet maken van een fort binnen de stad maar een plek voor iedereen waar iedereen van
profiteerds is het zeer lokaal bruikbaar, als plein/openbare ruimte maar ook een plek voor
evenementen en regionaal in trek

incubator catalyst

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conditions at rigid borders, where two worlds collide. The focus of the studio was on the 
border between the United States of America and Mexico. This border with a long history 
of conflicts, alterations and discrepancies has unfortunately caused for a mostly negative 
perception of the border area. This perception has caused for further fortification of the 
border and a greater dividing of the region. The area is rather complex because of all the 
legislation, infrastructure and different systems intersecting in the border region. This 
brings great potential in culture, economy and production with it.

In the west of Texas on the border lies the border city of El Paso. Divided by a wall and a 
concrete ditch of fifty meters wide Ciudad Juarez is situated on the other side of the 
Border. Because of the installation of this rigid border, out of fear for the other side, a 
distance between both cities is created. Ciudad Juarez has been, in recent history, a city 
on the down. With high murder rates and a lot of criminal activity. This has caused for a 
worser perception and the alienation of the population of both cities that used to be one. 
Currently the Ciudad Juarez has risen from this dire situation, with declining murder and 
criminality rates and better education.

However, this period has left its scars. The isolation of Ciudad Juarez in the last years 
have caused for what used to be a city centre vibrant with activity and tourists to now be
desolate. A lot of bars markets attractions and recreation were forced to close and have
left empty voids within the city. Promenades and pedestrian areas have fallen in decay.

This all leads to the urge to reconnect the cities. By reconnecting the city centers, which 
have a true distance of less than two kilometers, we can start the merging of the cities. The downtown area of El Paso has a vibrant cultural and economic life. Which is very 
attractive for people from within as well outside of the city. By making the center of Ciudad 
Juarez and the border itself attractions/vibrant areas we create a desire to cross the border 
in both ways. Thus stimulating the local community and changing the perception of the 
area.
The project proposes a new bullfighting arena in the city center of Ciudad Juarez. The project is located on one of the major connecting spines between the two city centers and is easy accessible from both cities.

how can we connect to a different country without a cohesive community

making the local community cohesive

research in project:

Bridge, arena's programme
research on promenades/city spines
local inventory of local identity/ functions not to extract this from the area and put it in the arena but to stimulate the existing, using as a catalyst of activity where the community can profit.