Reflection P4, May 13th 2015.

Complex Projects, Chicago Studio Fall 2014 - Spring 2015
Delft University of Technology - Faculty of Architecture

Marc Souverein
1361384
The aim for this studio is to try and recognize certain problems/patterns and logics in a certain area. These problems are often generic and account in the same or different form to other areas as well. In this case the city of Chicago, IL acts as a study area to be a model for the rest of the American cities.

The research, starts from scratch from the S to the M, L and XL scale, which means basically everything. For this reason we chose to create focus groups to research different aspects. (Spatial impact of industry and infrastructure, Business and educational links to policies and Sustainable integration in the cityscape) In this case the research allows still for almost everything, because the frame for the research is not that defined enough in order to conduct real in-depth research and every group is research on all the scales, which means not enough focus. On the other side all the main aspects are touched so there are problems recognized on levels for example: education, industry, airport use/experience and social context, outdated political influences.

For this project the focus in the research phase was mainly on infrastructure and industry. This research resulted in a hypothesis to find and set up scenarios to create an Urban Strategy in relation to the new Manufacturing Strategies of the Federal government related to jobs and education. In This strategy the student will find a clear location to design a part of the Strategy relating to the found problem during the research phase. This resulted in this project on a pinpointed location right on four important axis cross sections: Infrastructure, (Metro, Bus) Politics, (Chicago district borders), Social (Poverty, low educational level, unemployment), Educational, (strategically chosen next to a STEM school) to design an educational facility for advanced manufacturing to boost the educational level of the unemployed population to secure a solid workforce for the regeneration of homeland manufacturing in the USA.
The choice of this location, was done after the initial research phase, but the step from strategy to site plan is quite big, so in the end it was still necessary to design a small master plan on this site which included more research on a local level. This was not calculated in the planning and also not officially required so the it was very unclear, which led to some loss in momentum during the start of the design phase because it is quite difficult not work in a master plan, we need rules to comply to and boundaries to design with.

For the building design an approach of relevant case studies/ typological studies and research by design was inevitable, because of the lack in brief/client and or context. On the other side the research on the users was also very much needed in order to define the program and spatial qualities of the plan. The research by design part was sometimes very useful in generating possibilities, but the convergence to a single best possibility was often not that clear. This was mainly during the starting part of the design phase in relation to the earlier problem of lacking context/rules. So the method of the earlier strategy phase conflicted with this method in this aspect, but it was needed for the design research for this type of building. Therefore the Master/site –plan was needed and generated, but the sequence and planning relating to these issues was compromised and adjusted. But still this lack of context dripped down in the convergence to the final design, which resulted in a process that was relatively hard where the pieces of the puzzle did not fall in place as easy as wanted, but the pieces needed to be created to make the puzzle. See diagram 1. Another point of discussion during the design process was the choice of the concept, also partly related to the process of the strategy, there was a difference in design method between de student and the teacher. While the student focussed on a more pragmatic approach because of the complex and differentiated program, while the teacher saw there was a lack of concept that would be the backbone of the project. Therefore the weekly meeting were sometimes a bit forced and also going in opposite directions. While one converges and the other diverges from a final solution discussions felt almost in parralel dimensions.

The Final project is a try to create convenient collaboration between the flows of power within the S, M, L scales of the city/country related to manufacture and education. Therefore the program was quite extensive, by not only being a school or educational facility, but also a meeting point on the educational axis on the south side of the city. The project should house all these functions and create logic of social coherence and tension, reflecting the problems created by politics. The in-between plaza where the small scale uses the park to as a place of social coherence reflects this tension/collaboration, and it is an arrival and departure point for all the different functions in the building. This way is creates a vocal point in the neighborhood and landscape regenerating this area’s vacant land in relation to manufacturing and job generation for the return of homeland manufacturing to the USA/Chicago. That has succeede in number of ways: Connecting convenient to metro and fast bus connections. The central covered plaza is an excellent spot for outside ‘accidental’ meeting and is the center were the internal ciculation between functions is build arround.
The part of further integration into the surrounding area could have been more elaborated bacause now it is mainly focussed on the design block, but the scale of the building could suggest more integration. On the large scale it is ver good integrated. This suggest that the M Scale is missing, but in furhter development of the Strategy’s points of interest this could be solved.