BORDER STUDIO: EL PASO/CIUDAD JUÁREZ

The border between Mexico and The United States is one of the most discussed borders in the world, because of the social, political and economic dependency between the two countries. The United States wants to have the low cost goods and products of Mexico, but wants the people to stay on the other side of the border. Located on this border are a lot of so-called twin cities, neighbouring cities in Mexico and the U.S., divided by the border. An example of such a twin city, and place of the project, is Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. Juárez is located in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, El Paso in Texas, United States.

RELATION BETWEEN RESEARCH AND DESIGN

The research done before P2 looked into the process of city branding and with the use of different case studies find out how Juárez can improve its image. There are a lot of ways cities have been developing themselves in order to create more visitors/ a better economy/ population growth, etc. Some cities introduce a new aspect to achieve this, like a museum or other attractions; other cities try to develop existing strengths in order to maintain the true identity of the city. In Juárez, the best way is to find the strengths of the city itself, find out what makes that city special in order to find that identity that characterizes it. While visiting and analysing the city and its surroundings, it became clear that there were still some strength in the city that identifies it. Ciudad Juárez is well known for its social gatherings in the big park along the border, people from both sides of the border come together to have BBQ’s there. Next to that, the Margeritha cocktail is invented there and Juárez is known to have the best burrito’s in the world.
**RESEARCH QUESTION:**

What needs to be done to re-establish Juárez’s true spirit? To reintroduce high ambitions, and to reach the level of prosperity it once had… And beyond.

Food and the social aspect of eating together is very important in Mexico, and the design addresses these strengths of the city and tries to improve and support them. The Mercado El Chamizal brings together the functions of shopping, eating and social gatherings into one place. It creates a safe place where people go and have the feeling of hope again and faith for a better future for the city.

**RELATION BETWEEN THEME OF GRADUATION LAB AND SUBJECT**

During the first part of the graduation studio (Msc3), the focus was on the research of the border in general, and a chosen topic that related to this research. The studio’s aim is to examine the hard and soft layers of the border between Mexico and the United States, understand the conditions between the two countries and the problems that comes with the creation of a border and the physical boundary of it. The existence of this border and boundary is a condition we are maybe not really familiar with, which makes it important that there is an understanding of all other aspects besides architecture.

The theme of the studio ‘the architecture of violence’ is because of the location of the project. Juárez became the gateway to Mexico, and over the years it turned out to be a convenient drug smuggling route. And because of this function, the two major drug cartels operating in the region got into a war over the control of the market and route. The war took a lot of lives, and it resulted in a city full of violence; people moved out of the city and downtown got demolished. The war officially ended in 2011, and nowadays Juárez is still not the flourishing city it once was. This project deals with the negative image of the city, and how architecture can help bring back the people that moved out of the city. What part does architecture play in a process of improving a cities image?

Ambition of the project
RELATION BETWEEN METHODICAL LINE OF APPROACH

The research done at the first part of the graduation was the basis for the design. Before the individual research with an individual research topic and question, the whole group of the studio did an overall examination of the border. This is all collected and will be bound together in a research book. With that as a starting point, the field trip to the site made every student choose their own fascination or interest to make it their topic for the individual research. At the end of this first fase (MSc3) the outcome of the research made everyone propose a building site and program to develop in the second part of graduation.

Group model of the proposed strategy, with the Mercado El Chamizal in the middle of the area, along the boulevard.

All these projects are combined into a proposed strategy for the whole area wherein all the designs are collected. During the MSc4 phase different options have been analysed of how to realize the proposal. This could be done because of the research done before. The analysis of the different types of markets made it understandable how to react on the surroundings and what could be the best way to develop the project. Different shapes were tried out with the use of physical models, to get a good understanding of the project.

Analysing shapes and configuration for the design.
RELATION BETWEEN THE PROJECT AND THE WIDER SOCIAL CONTEXT

Because of the global mobility we can go anywhere we want without any problems. Everyone can speak the same language and because of the mobility and awareness the earth has become smaller than ever. Everything becomes in a way the same because we are all reaction and providing to the same market. This makes it more and more difficult for cities to get people to come there, because they easily could go somewhere else. So in order to be attractive, cities have to promote themselves and keep improving their qualities.

This project deals with that issue in a way of how to respond to these problems. How can a city attract more people and how can architecture help that process? The project helps to bring people back to where they came from, the place they used to call home. Let them get faith again in their city and make a start for the redevelopment for the whole city. It is becoming the start of a new life for the city, a catalyst for development.

Firstfloor and ceiling underneath.
Proposed strategy of the area, with the Mercado El Chamizal located next to the boulevard, surrounded by the park.