

The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen within this framework (location/object)

During our research in the last months, the devastating condition of Chicago became transparent. The decline of social communities and the constant increase of short term economic strategies has pushed the social inequalities to a new level. These condition is especially reflected in the urban environment. The non existence of public garbage bins due to their theft (and sale) is a symptom of the social and economic conditions of the area.

Thus, I propose a "Back to Basics" strategy. It tackles the basic needs of the city, creates autonomous working entities that benefit from each others collaboration. But most importantly, it sets a basis of basic principles that are adaptable for future evolution of the city, and hold potential in creating their own image.

My building, similar to the urban strategy involves the gathering (clustering) of people. It offers functions that are usually part of a healthy city centre underground. Thus, it is located in the centre of a new cluster and close to the newly established metro station. The building also acts as a place of refuge - in sight of the increasing extreme weather conditions in Chicago. It tackles the relationship of the widespread public artificial environment and the natural by working with thresholds. These thresholds are created by different use of a roof as well as height differences.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context

Communal

The project understands itself as an attempt to offer a space of transition of the dominating mindset of the individual ideology towards a communal one. The urban strategy thus densifies certain areas with preexisting potentials and working social centres. These densified can work autonomous, but gain from each others collaboration. With this, I hope to create an environment that allows for interaction and spontaneous ideas as well as a platform to share ideas, space and energy.

Public space

The projects experiments and plays with the thresholds of different climate conditions in public space. The main outdoor roof of the building acts as a transitional element between the inside and the outside. But also in the building, different climate conditions are given and can be adapted to the buildings use which encourages the use of public space.

Refuge

The poor economic and housing situation in the area make the people very vulnerable for the increase of extreme weather scenarios due to climate change. The building thus also acts as a place of refuge in crisis situations providing basic needs: shelter, food, worship and knowledge.

Historical Identity

The reuse of old building materials and the incorporation of existing building structures wants to preserve and value the historical quality of the past. (The non existence of this "wish for historical preservation" is shown in the fact, that the historical valuable building I incorporated in the design, was destroyed this summer)

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

The studio's method is: design by research. This includes constant jumping in scales as well as analysing the research outcomes, critically questioning it and weaving it into a storyline. The situation and scale for our project covered a large area.

In general, this process thought me to organise statements into context and themes. Along the way these themes may lead to new statements, thus the projects gains depth. In the end, the essential, hard task is to edit the findings into a clear structured storyline. This turned out to be a real challenge. Complex projects allows for a lot of freedom in research and design, but this freedom makes it hard to choose a red thread. The context of Chicago's built westside is so big and generic, that it was challenging to use previous design principles I had learned before. The idea of working within a context, preserving identity and history was demanding in this respect.

How and why did the approach work/not work

The decision which area to focus on and which theme to study took a long time. This was partly due to the given scale of the area through the studio, but also due to the lack of personal background knowledge of the American culture. To fully understand the problems, I had to read a lot about the social and economical framework to fully understand the urban research. The approach worked in a sense that I learned a lot. However, it delayed the building design. It was hard to step away from a generic research phase and enter the design phase which only included research on building technology.

The relationship between research and design

Research offers the basis on which to formulate arguments for the design. It helps to understand and create the context. This depth which will later underly the building will give it some kind of meaning and make it unique. The challenge is to pick out relevant research, but also to weigh different points of view. It is tempting to use parts of research as an almighty tool to prove a decision and hiding other parts that might compromise the same.

During the design process, research helps to inspire, to understand building technologies and constantly think about every aspect during the design, to not later try to fix things - leading to a holistic design approach. It should not however try to scientifically prove the rather intuitive process of designing. The aspect, which makes this intuitive process scientific is the process of documentation. It is however unavoidable to accept that some elements of design are based on personal taste, feeling and style.