Position of the building & relation to public space

The proposed master plan rearranges public areas and the relation of the UN plot to the surroundings. The proposed east river boulevard is of significant width and quality and is added as a seaside public space (lower level) in combination to that of the city side (higher level). This duplication of open space transforms the border of the plot overlooking east river into a transitional area of great potential because it connects to the attractive seaside area. The building is the connecting border-filter between the two levels of public space, through which visitors of UN plot are able to witness the functions and processes that take place in UNEC along with the existing buildings. These levels of open space are connected via the formation of an axis, in the form of a UN public strip that crosses the UN plot and the building until it reaches the boulevard. The meeting point of the building and the strip is the node where the public meets the UN so that it allows the building to communicate its interior functions to the people.

The suggested UN plot possesses two different types of open space, a paved one that refers to the buildings and follows the limitations of security check and a green one that is offered to public use in the form of a free accessible park that adds quality to public space and increases green spaces in the area.

Concept & Form of the building

In demanding building programs, such as this of the UNEC, the required spaces receive the priority of design, while the connecting areas usually fall to a second priority when compared to the actual building program. In-between spaces and circulation spaces are of primary importance for this design, because in these spaces people make informal contacts and are able to communicate without the limitations of formality that characterizes the building program. Through a compactness that aims in sustainability, the concept focuses in an arcade-like central axis, which as a backbone, crosses the length of the building in the form of a corridor. The appropriate tweaking of the building program relates more common functions (like meeting rooms) to this central axis and with the use of voids allows light and visual connection through all levels. The result is a constructive connection of all the functions through an inviting common space that communicates the diversity of functions within the building. At the same time all visitors and workers in the building are able to see and acknowledge that they are part of a living organism, a dynamic environment that lives through its users.

The longitudinal approach to the interior space is further expressed through the overall form of the building. A single mass makes a strong gesture and through its volumetric simplicity relates to the existing buildings with respect while at the same time makes a statement. The proportions of the mass are based on the existing 8.5 grid of the UN complex that also supports the existing canopy over the old FDR drive. Preserving this structure integrates the proposed building and at the same time eliminating unnecessary demolitions and material waste. Furthermore it pays respect to the existing plan and the value of its architectural rhythm in a subtle way.
Materials, sustainability & connection to the master plan

The connection to the master plan is realized in various levels. On an architectural-urban the position of the building integrates the functions to the suggested public areas achieving optimum connections and use of open space. Regarding energy, the building will participate in the energy grid through the exchange of energy and through the storage of water. Urban heat island effect is tackled through the use of appropriate roof materials and the use of vegetation in the open spaces. Pollution will be reduced through the general reduction of energy used to heat and cool the building through efficient HVAC solutions. The structural elements are made of steel and the envelope skin is based on triple glass protected from the sun with automated shading louvers.

Materialization as architectural language will reintroduce an industrial style, making a reference with a critical view on industrial architecture of the early 1900s. This happens as an attempt to detach form and function which has turned types into stereotypes to the public view, by using a type whose style was not intended for public buildings like the UN. Stereotypes have turned the International style to the eyes of public as a pre-required building language for formal buildings, which to its cheap imitation led to glass and stone towers without a character. The suggested UN building is an open building to all, not only people in suits. Typology in this case is a tool to invert clichés and expectations of a specific architectural language and bring a variety of people closer to the building via a more raw and sincere structure. Furthermore this typology will be in dialogue with the existing UN buildings of the International Style.

Reflection and position

The relationship between research and design is a close connection of theory and practice. Making steps in both aspects gave the specific project a theoretical foundation and enough arguments to base all the compositional choices made in the design. The research that took place aimed in two directions, one purely referring to the project site, and one referring to building typology. In the progress these two directions met, to form the foundation for the suggested building concept. The project site related research evolved around the various scales of New York City leading to an extraction of numerous information, demographic, social, infrastructural etc that affected the design choices. The subject of typology through the research process gave insight on the types and the stereotypes. Given the important public character of the UNEC building, the research on typologies, provided tools to support the type of the building and the goal of inverting stereotypes. Both researches and the method followed where successful to the extent that enough information was provided to base a design in solid arguments.

The relationship between the theme and the subject of the studio is located in the fact that materialization plays a significant part in the final expression of the building.

The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the studio and the method chosen by the student in this framework usually coincide as a result of tutoring and further guidance. The studio’s approach followed a step by step progress from larger scale to smaller scale. The subject is being dealt from an urban scale up to detailing, sides that are worked parallel until completion of the project. This method was incorporated in my working principles and was used as a guide to improve the design and take it from a conceptual level to that of a detailed, ready to construct project.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context comes through the understanding of the character of the project. A plot of that kind possesses unique qualities and may have a special place in the conscience of public view. Due to its functions, UN is involved significantly in the wider social status.
Making architecture nowadays is provided with an increasing variety of tools of reference. Literature, visual references, information through various means etc. provide a wide range of material to reflect upon. In that sense, a wider audience may have a better overview of what is being produced, what is projected through a trend and what is already regarded as architectural history, in the form of monuments and preservation worthy buildings. Despite that, architectural design process is not always conscious of the context and when typology comes into reference the result is frequently a repetition of a stereotype. At the same type there are numerous factors that significantly affect composition, such as finance, politics, education clients etc. These factors also affect typology in advance, making it an interactive and sometimes prejudiced system. Through my design I aimed in inverting these stereotypes through a critical eye and tried at the same time to treat typology with respect. This is because typology as an objective system with its own guides is going to inevitably lead to conventions affecting the freedom of design. Furthermore designing and experiencing space has to face constraints over its wealth which, according to my personal expectations would lead to its decay. A decay that would mean lack of happiness and vitality that may come through the design (as an architect) and the experience (as a user) of built space. By further understanding building typology and its use, it was put to use with a critical approach, to further enrich and alter the specific type of a United Nations building to the benefit of architectural quality.