P4 Reflection

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Name of studio: Graduation studio for Complex Projects

Relationship between theme of the studio and my project:
The theme of the studio is to develop the South Chicago (Fig.1), to help Chicago achieve its Global ambitions. The main problem in South Chicago is: since the South Works of US Steel shut down in 1992 (Fig.2), South Chicago has lost its economical anchor and declined. Some new external strength is urgently needed to help the district to recover and to establish its new identity. Due to the economic crisis in the US, however, ambitious and large scale urban projects cannot be done here. SOM's ambitious masterplan for this site has already encountered with many financial and social obstacles.

![Fig. 1 South Chicago](image1)
![Fig.2 South Works in 1950s(left) and in 2013(right)](image2)

Under such a circumstance, our team choose the growing city strategy and decide to kick off this growing process with urban farming. The idea originated from the fact that urban farming is relatively low-cost and visible, and it can help eliminate many crucial problems in South Chicago such as food desert, unemployment and adolescent crime. With urban farming, the abundant vacant plots in the area can be quickly made use of. The mayor of Chicago has noticed urban farming as a way to develop problematic areas under crisis and launched new "farmers for Chicago" network for Chicago urban farmers in 2013. There are also many local urban agricultural organizations practicing and having increasingly high achievements. In our opinion, that recent movement provides South Chicago with a big chance.

After the urban farming being developed, not only visitors but also agricultural and life sciences research institutes will be attracted to come to build a research campus here. Later on, commercial and residential projects will also emerge thanks to the campus. In such a way, the area grows step by step towards a balanced and flourishing city(Fig.3).

For my individual architectural design, I concentrate my work on the agricultural research station, which is a "turning point" project in the whole growing process. It
runs an urban farm on the site and also provides field laboratory for students and researchers. It is set up by a university or a college, in collaboration with one of local urban farming organizations. It is the start of the planned research campus and hence it is pivotal to the growing process(Fig.4).

Additionally, this project is not only about the future but also about the industrial past of the area due to its specific location. It is situated right between the ore walls which are the only existing heritage from the previous factory. The strong identity of the rusted ore wall bind our projects together to form a whole network, and our farming-related projects literally give new life to the ore walls with plants and animals. It arouses an interesting conversation between the industry and the post-industrial agriculture.

**Relationship between research and design:**
In research, we found that South Chicago has a bad image and it is confronted with many issues, such as lack of fresh food, diet related diseases, unemployment, low education, violence, drugs, and so-on. The community is shrinking and no outside people want to come. Depending on this research, we ask: Why does this area have those problems? How to change the situation? We try to understand it from its history. In fact, "It was a friendly community." South Chicago has its own golden age. In 1901, U.S. Steel opened, which became one of the world's largest steel factories. It attracted many workers, who immigrated here. Later, due to the shifting market of steel, the factory closed in 1992. In 1994, all property are demolished and sold. The site became empty. Workers lost their jobs. The South Chicago declined. Besides, we do researches on the culture, economy, policy, infrastructure, and so-on to better understand the background.

Then we did research and analysis on the masterplan for our site made by SOM. It seems not an idealistic design but quite a practical planning. However, the problems it encountered with during its execution let us know that such a top-down urban planning is not a wise strategy in the crisis. According to all the researches, we defined our design direction: South Chicago requires new investment and new comers to activate the area and to provide jobs, but they don't come at once. We have to find a way to make the gradual change happen. The development should be step by step, and we should always keep the
As for my individual project, I did a lot of research on how a farm works before I designed the shape of the building. The shape, routing, orientation is very much based on the research.

**Relationship between methodical line of approach of the studio and the method chosen by me:**
The methodical line of approach of the studio is as follows: Firstly, do research & analysis in L, M, S scales, which is from the country to the city and then to the site. Secondly, study the SOM's master plan on the same site. Thirdly, define strategies/ ambitions for the entire site & neighborhood. Fourthly, make urban design and masterplan in groups. Finally, design a specific building individually.

The method chosen by me is based on the studio structure. Firstly, we as a group went to Chicago to do research and analysis on different aspects. We searched lots of information from literature and on the internet. As a summary to the research, three booklets were compiled, respectively called L, M, S Research Book. Secondly, we studied SOM's masterplan and we went to SOM's office to ask about their opinions and experience on that project. We also recorded the interview. Thirdly, we tried to find a practical yet interesting strategy to solve the problems in South Chicago. Finding a right strategy was not easy. It is very much related to policies, social needs, and financial supports rather than a graphical urban design. We chose to establish a growing city here. We made a guideline of the growing process, and we defined several pivotal projects as "seeds" to enable the process to follow the guideline, but we don't make a precise, top-down urban planning. We also did case studies to help us understand how strategies work. Fourthly, we made a masterplan with phasing according to our group strategy. We analyzed design of some agricultural research campuses as reference and we visited several urban farming theme park. Finally, I designed a agricultural research center, which is a pivotal project in the master plan. I designed the routing, the space, the shape, the structure, the material and the climate to achieve our urban strategy on a building level.

**Relationship between the project and the wider social context:**
The project reveals the complexity and difficulty of making a design on urban level in reality, especially in crisis. Architects are not allowed to design everything, they only coordinate and find a way or strategy to let other forces come together and work out their best.

Besides, as I did a lot of research on urban farming in my project, it can be an interesting example to show how urban farming is reintroduced in developed countries like the US while it is being hustled out from cities in developing countries due to urbanization.