P4 Reflections

R³
Rehabilitate*Reintegrate*Reshape

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The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the case study chosen

The studio investigates the contemporary shrinking condition of many American cities of which Chicago is an iconic case. The causes of this have to be found in multiple aspects comprehending societal, political and economical reasons. In parallel and consequentially to the fleeing of part of the population to suburban areas multiple areas inside these cities are facing a steady societal degrade.

The section of the studio that I chose is looking at the creation of a new infrastructural line in Chicago, the Lime Line, which will connect the city from north to south solving connectivity problems that are marginalizing certain areas of it. The question that arose was: “Is this new line the chance for Chicago to brake its shrinking?”

In the first part of the project, starting from researches and reflections, that the whole studio did in the research phase, my group and I answered “yes” and from this we started looking at how this new line can improve and be tactically used not only to brake the shrinking of the city but also to catalyze new settlements. We saw in the Lime Line the chance to give a new identity to the west side of the city, that now is lacking of a clear definition, differently from the two areas that are delimitating it: the Loop and the suburbs.

The process of attracting and giving attractiveness to the area deals with working with the actual peculiar fragmented neighborhood identities, which this long rail line will cross, giving them a stronger character.
The relationship between research and design

The first part of the studio dealt with the analysis of the west side of the city and by doing this we got substantial information about the physical environment, the programmatic subdivision and the infrastructural connection of this area of the town in relation with the broader scale of Chicago, the State and the country.

As stated in the first paragraph this led to a proposed strategy for the whole west side, but then with an individual research and related outcomes I chose to deal with how the degrade of part of the west side is triggering one neighborhood to be one of the most dangerous of the city, and to a way to use its physical state of vacant lots to propose a new model of growth and urban planning to deal with this issue. To do this I composed a manifesto of five points to create the conditions to generate a new centrality in this degraded area sowing the seeds of a new perspective for this unsafe peripheral place. The points of the manifesto were formulated after a research that I made on existing conditions that characterize parts of existing cities with urban qualities that make them to be considered as centralities.

Researching deeper in the inner causes that led to the unsafe identity of this neighborhood I discovered that the 60 percent of the crimes are drug related. This brought me to the following step of my graduation project, the choice of the building. I thought that dealing with the criminal ad then unsafe condition of the area has to be taken from its roots. That was the reason why I chose to design a building that deals with the issue of drug abuse proposing an alternative to it in order to get a brighter future with wider possibilities. I decided to design a rehabilitation clinic for people with drug addiction problems. Then I decided to make this building a prototype for this typology that has never been investigated deeply. This is the reason why the majority of rehabilitation facilities have no peculiar and distinguishing characteristics to be recognized. After researching into existing examples and having an interview in a real rehabilitation center I got the tools and ingredients to shape my building. However I wanted my building to get deeper in the drug issue dealing more with the complete process of reintroduction in society, designing dwellings for people who are out of the rehab but not yet in their homes.

The social context and the street life are what young folks are facing everyday also during their spare time activities, and this is making easier for them to get closed to bad temptations. I decided to create an alternative place where these people can gather out from the street and do cultural activities they usually do in streets, like sports and art. This way combining different urban cultural activities an urban culture can be created by this synergy. This is why I called this place “the factory of urban culture”.

5 POINTS

01. MIXTURE OF FUNCTIONS
02. PUBLIC ACTIVATORS
03. SOCIAL MIXTURE
04. DEFINITION OF SPACES
05. HIERARCHICAL ROAD SCHEME
The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

Complex projects finds the tools for the project development in societal, political and economical researches to understand the complex reality in which nowadays architectural design is set. In the first part of the year the studio taught me how deeply get into its methodology with the initial subdivision in groups of research.

This way I elaborated a mindset that helped me to get deeper in the development of my masterplan, using the data gathered in the research months but also using the same methodology to get into the themes of safety and peripheral condition I needed to work with.

Getting to a smaller scale the focus on the building design was driven by the same approach. Before starting programming the building I needed to gather information about programs and needed spaces that comprehended getting actually in real contact with the theme of my design.

The method learnt at the beginning and then used throughout the all process is the key for me to get to a design with strong and solid bases behind.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context

Starting from the large scale, the idea of finding the potential of using important infrastructural lines as chances to create new axes of development works as a proposal for cities that are facing a shrinking trend, in order not only to brake it but also to create points of attractiveness.

Shrinking cities face areas of great abandonment and decay. New urban developments in these areas need to deal with this aspect and have to create the conditions to generate new centralities in peripheral parts of cities, in order to reverse the actual trends and to get safer qualities. This is what my masterplan aims to pursue.

My building faces the issue of the lack of a proper typology for drug rehabilitation centers. My proposal deals with the issue of the reintegration in society in all its steps, in order to follow the patient throughout the process. These centers, often located in places outside the urban environment can have a chance also in urban areas to be closer to the people who need them, becoming the symbol of a place where a different perspective for the future can be found. This reason, and the one of preventing the problem to eradicate it, is the explanation why community centers integrated in this typology can be the way to offer alternative gathering spaces from the temptations of the streets.