Reflection

Complex Projects

At the Technical University Delft, the chair of Complex Projects (CP) addresses all scales of design, from large scale (global, city) to small scale (building, details). The complex projects embrace large projects, like transportation hubs, healthcare centers, interventions on former industrial areas and harbours etc. For these projects it will be necessary to develop strategies on how the interventions on a site can transform the cities in time.

This graduation studio focuses on a large former industry area in South Chicago, Chicago. To develop strategies for this site, research will be done on all different scales to see what could be beneficial for the site, but also city, region and even global scale.

Chicago Southworks; The Creative City

The South Works area nowadays is en empty site, formerly owned by U.S. Steel, and is directly located next to a poor neighborhood. In this neighborhood many vacant houses and plots are found, mainly caused by the high criminal rate and low job opportunities. This has a negative affective on the liveliness of the neighborhood. In order to ensure a more vibrant neighborhood it is important to attract new people with the new development of the site to influence this.

The research done by all the students of the studio, resulting in three different research booklets for the different scales, formed the starting point to find a plausible strategy for the development of the site. For me the main issues to address were the poor state of the direct neighborhood and the extension of the Lake Shore Drive (LSD, motorway) into the site, forming a barrier between the neighborhood and the Southworks site and how this should be considered into the development of the site.
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Further research on what the city wants to achieve as a city led me to the strategy of a “creative city”, focussed on arts and technology. This is related to the wish of Chicago to attract more overseas visitors by improving their global position in culture and innovation. Different reference projects as interventions in a city and further research on the site conditions helped forming a phased strategy for the development of the Southworks site. The reference projects gave an idea on how these interventions can work, but do not necessarily have to look the same, while the site condition helped to determine when and where a certain intervention should take place in the phased strategy.
The empty site and vacant buildings and plots can be perfectly used for a development where different target groups, artists, entrepreneurs and students can learn, work together and benefit from each other. The artists and students can make use of the existing buildings, while the entrepreneurs can start with new businesses at the empty site. All these people will have the need for certain facilities, like supermarkets, restaurants, commerce, sports etc., which will also create new job opportunities for the neighborhood.

The Urban Fragment; The Creative Strip

In this fragment the LSD forms an important factor to consider. To be able to overcome the barrier it causes, it will be of importance to create certain flows between both sides, in such a way a will act as one neighborhood. The program of the designed “creative strip” between site and neighborhood should help to do so.

To find the program the research on landuse and program of the small-scale research booklet and the proposed landuse and program in the strategy for the site formed the base for the design of the strip. Different options led to several strips of program; education, businesses, commerce, leisure and culture, which will cross this road and enable the flow of users from neighborhood to site and the other way around.

In the first phase of the development the green strip is the first part to develop in the whole urban fragment, mainly because the green is already there, but doesn't have a useable function yet. By creating more defined green zones, with some program, like a restaurant, fitness centre, workshop and business space, this first attempt for this flow between both sides can be made. Together with the other program strips a junction of program is created at the LSD, which makes this the most important spot in the whole urban fragment.

The Building; The Cultural Bridge

With the envisioned junction in mind, where all flows will meet each other, the location for the proposed building is defined. This is the location where the most people will pass by. The building should because of its location in the strip and function, as a museum, become an icon for the neighborhood. This means that the building should be located at the LSD in such a way that it will be a recognizable object of reference.
By having a cultural program, the building should make a visible connection with the cultural strip. In the plan of development for the urban fragment this cultural strip is the only one that doesn’t continue into the neighborhood, because of the housing program in the extension of this strip.

The building should therefore ensure that also this strip has a flow from neighborhood to site and back. This will be possible by shaping the building in such a way that the park in the neighborhood finds a way towards the cultural park at the site. By aiming for this connection the building will literally bridge the LSD and give another possibility for pedestrians to cross the road in a safer way.

The form and image of the building should emphasize the bridging function of the building, which is researched by many options for the shape in mass models. The models gave insight in how the building can make a connection between both sides. This search ended in a smooth low shape above the LSD. With the idea of the shape, further research by design is done by trying different options for the structure, façade, routing and how they can work together in the form of drawings by hand and computer programs, with the goal to emphasize the connection between both sides made by this building.

Process and conclusion

In this graduation project it is very clear that both semesters have there own main focus point. The first semester is used to develop a strategy for the whole site, by using general team research and own more focussed research. The general research took some time and ended in some nice booklets, but looking back to what is used of this research it might seem that too much time was spend in collecting general information. A lot of this research has not been used, because of the width of the research. It did form the base to find some problems and opportunities to address in the project, what led to the more focussed research done by myself for the development of the strategy. This research was about the strategies Chicago uses or wants to use to help the poorer citizens and the way the city wants to put itself on the map. With this research I was able to develop a starting point for the strategy and used reference projects related to the same kind of issues to develop the strategy further.

Because the research and the development of the strategy took a lot of time, there was little time for the concept design of the building and direct surroundings for the P2. Because of this it was clear to see that this part was under developed and therefore led to reconsidering a lot of the proposed design for both the building and its surroundings.

From here on a lot of research is done by design, by designing different options and relation diagrams for both the urban fragment and the building, to find a solution in connecting the site and neighborhood in a clear way.

Especially the mass study took a lot of time, mainly because the main idea of connecting was not precise enough. When going back and forth between building and direct surrounding, with the use of diagrams in landuse and program, it became clearer what the building should do in the urban fragment, connecting parks, become the beginning of the cultural zone and emphasize the possibility to use the building to cross the LSD.

With this in mind the questions arise on how to construct this bridge and what kind of image it should give. The structure, facades and plans therefore are tested in different options, whereby the main ambition was to emphasize the connecting route in the image of the building. Because of this ambition the building become a smooth object crossing the LSD.

In the end I can conclude that the shape and image of the building clearly show the connection between both sides and more important clearly shows that the building can be used to cross the LSD.

Because I took the connection by the use of the building and clear visibility of the route as most important factors in the image of the building, it gave the building its specific shape, making it the iconic building for the Creative City as envisioned before hand.

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