P4 graduation reflection

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Graduation studio: Complex projects, Havana

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Introduction

Since the Havana studio started many things have changed already for Cuba. The relationships with America has been improved which will eventually lead to the lift of the embargo. Entrepreneurship is not illegal anymore which is the a step from a socialistic to a capitalistic system. And the revolutionist Fidel Castro has passed away whereby truly an end of a era has come. But Cuba is at this moment still a socialistic country which is according to the world far behind on development.

The political and economical changes will hopefully stimulate Cuban development. But it will be important how the country is going to deal with the development. Some aspects developed in its own way during the revolution. One of the main key points of Fidel Castro’s regime was good and free healthcare for everyone. Nowadays is the Cuban healthcare system one with the highest life expectancies even though it has at the same time one of the lowest costs. This is mainly due to the focus on prevention. Primary care focuses on keeping people healthy instead of making them better again. Although the healthcare systems has its shortcomings, such as bad facilities and endless waiting lines in the hospitals, is their preventative approach worldly known and a study case for many countries.

My project focuses on enhancing the existing preventative approach by qualities we can learn from the western world. The project aims to strengthen the Cuban healthcare philosophy by combining it with public architecture and therefore integrating it better in the society.

The relationship between research and design

Before we went to Cuba we presented our P1. This was the ending of the group research and the our first ambitions for the project. My first ambitions was to focus on the economical changes in Cuba. Fidel Castro has always said that Cuba will not abandon socialism, but it looks like it will be inevitable. An explosive growth of tourists will explore the island with all its accidentals and work as a catalyst for change. The question was how Cubanidad can survive or evolve in these political and economical changes; how can economical development be harmonized with the current Cuban culture.

During the excursion my interests changed. I noticed that the western world influenced the Cuban lifestyle in a unhealthy way. Fast food was setting the new standard and had a status symbol. Furthermore I realized that many people, especially youngsters, had overweight. Considering the changes will the American influences only become stronger. Further investigation acknowledged my observations and changed my graduation theme. It was a complete new direction than my fascinations at my P1 presentation, but it was a relevant topic which was besides Cuba also relevant on a global scale.

The relationship between the theme of the graduation studio and the subject.

The graduation studio basically had as only given the city Havana. Our research would form the base for your own graduation project. The studio had a secondary theme ‘water’. But for me this was of no relevance to our projects. Cuba and Havana have so many interesting topics where you could deal with which were, to me, of more relevance than water. The fact that Havana was chosen as a graduation studio was, according to me, because of their political changes, not because of water issues. Besides a water seminar there was no specific focus in the design studio on water.

Our research formed the base for our own graduation theme within the contextual boundaries of Havana. My topic is highly relevant in Cuba and has been, besides education, the main focus of the revolution. Therefore the relationship with the location is strong but also politically strong, because new political changes will challenge the Cuban healthcare system.

The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation studio and the chosen method.

The studio was divided in three different phases. The first phase was group research on a national scale. This would form the base for the graduation studio and our individual fascinations. The second phase was to zoom in on Havana and doing research by making a masterplan for the city. Where after we would choose
our site within the masterplan and develop an individual architectural project. By making a masterplan for the city we would become more familiar with the city. Before we went on excursion we all had an intention for a specific site in Havana. Cuba is however a country which is difficult to understand without a field study. Many cultural aspects are difficult to understand without experiencing them. Because Cuba has been so isolated and basically off the grid, it was also difficult to get all the information. Although many of us stayed close to their primary topic, I changed my theme and location during the field trip. But this was only possible because of the research which we had done before. Only because of that I was able to change my mind and reflect on what I found interesting. The field trip therefore was an acknowledgement of previous research and an enrichment.

During the design phase the main focus was contextually. My site and my program have a strong contextual connection. I had chosen the specific site because of its existing qualities, spatially but also in combination with my program. In my design I therefore started an exploration of a building(mass) which would enhance these qualities and therefore my program. During this exploration I learned new aspects of the site, program, social values and greater context. Which basically resulted in an iterative design process of learning and remodelling. With every new configuration I valued the qualities and improved the design. This has basically led to a circular process, because after many configurations has my final design many aspects of the first P2 starting point. But the iterative design process has given the first starting point many more qualities and more important has made many qualities, perhaps than still unconsciously, become articulated.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context
Prevention in healthcare has become a stronger focus point in healthcare. Health is not longer defined as the absence of ill-health. But the World Health Organisation defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. Technological development in our healthcare has decentralised the importance of our well-being. The change in the definition of health has been changing and now includes an awareness of the interrelationships between social and psychological, as well as medical, factors. (Steemers, 2015) The way in which an individual functions in society is seen as a part of the definition of
health, alongside biological and physiological symptoms. Health is no longer simply a question of access to medical treatment but it is determined by a range of factors related to the quality of our built environment. (CABE, as cited in Steemers, 2015) Cuba as with their primary care always been focused on ensuring good well-being. Their philosophy is for many countries an inspiration.

Due to the improvement of our technological healthcare system are we getting on average older and older. Our lifestyles are becoming less physically active in combination with increasingly unhealthy lifestyles. Increasing health risks are nowadays mainly due to unhealthy lifestyles. Prevention has become therefore more important and an area which has lacked in development because of a focus on technological development. Therefore is the western world investing and improving their primary care to ensure a better well-being and therefore longer life predictions.