The project elaborates on Garfield Park area in Chicago, the key negative characteristics of which are low level of social capital, social integration, sense of identity and attachment to the area, which result in relatively high criminal and unemployment rates. Field trip to the site strengthened the impression of estrangement. In order to undertake a research, all the group members were assigned a particular topic related to socio-economic, physical or cultural issues in the area. I was analyzing education, namely, quantity of schools, their type and location; level of attendance, performance and drop-outs; relevance to existing situation on labour market.

The importance of education for the Garfield Park area cannot be overemphasized. It lays both in realm of personal development of individual profiles of the residents and refinement of social skills further facilitating integration in conventional behavioristic paradigm.

From the acquired statistical data it is apparent that average performance of students in elementary and middle schools in East and West Garfield park exceeds state standards. Nevertheless, high school students show performance below average. The major contributing factor to this is seen as the fact that older children are less influenced by their parents and teachers and as a consequence are more vulnerable to unhealthy influence from the marginal street culture. Another factor could be the segregated school population which is deprived of positive examples from different cultures and social classes. By this, the importance of educational and cultural possibilities in the area is emphasized.

Moreover, a strong dependance between current opportunities for education and career was revealed. The main current employment in the area is in service sector with relatively low wage level. However, there are other job opportunities given the proximity to four industrial corridors, but majority of the residents lacks necessary skills to match those workplaces. Given the complicated socio-economic situation in the neighborhoods, there is clearly a market for vocational training, nevertheless there are only two schools that provide such service.

Together with findings on other socio-economic issues (community, crime, segregation), the aforementioned data resulted in a strategy focused on a development program for stimulation of educational and cultural opportunities in the area in order to enhance social cohesion, communal identity in the area, social and human capital. The program considers the area in terms of intersection of various functional and spatial layers. School attendance districts as a part of one of the layers are suggested to be the most convenient indicator to define local community. The boundaries of the school districts indicate the nodes on which a number of architectural interventions should be developed. The projects apart from their direct functions are supposed to become catalysts for informal communal life, attractors contributing to sense of identity and attachment to the neighborhood. The particular functional programs of the projects should be related to the current situation in the area in order to effectively use existing resources and trigger the development of local services and industries.

The functional program of the building I am working on is cultural-educational center. In my design I am seeking to clearly state public character of the building, providing comfortable and non-binding environment for people to meet and interact freely, but also serving as a place of interest and association for the residents. I see my building consisting of spaces of different level of privacy: from classrooms for private lessons to open spaces for intersection of different flows of people. The project should start with formally developed and programed core, while other parts of the system would be defined...
but less programmed, that consequently would leave space for spontaneous civil activities to develop organically.

Given its location, I would like to connect my project to the existing nearby metro line and relocate the station to make it part of the building. Educational and transport functions will be separated by different levels and entrances. The ground floor contains educational spaces and its volume serves as a plinth; it is situated slightly below the ground level; the side of the building facing the street will be occupied by commerce. On the roof of this level is situated an open public square - the most important element that brings public character to the project. The square includes the platform and is deliberately put on a plinth to create visually and spatially separated and finite architectural form. People can reach there through the core or monumental open stair on the corner of the building - one more crucial element of the building to indicate its public nature. The next level is hanging over the square, complementing the articulated architectural composition and additionally marking and enclosing the space. The upper levels include cinema hall, theater hall and service rooms.

The project is expected to have positive effect on personal enrichment of the residents, level of social involvement and association with the neighborhood. Preferably, part of the program is to be defined in the future by the residents actively involved in center performance.