Commute with Life

A library and markets hub of the border

Reflection for P4

Complex Projects graduation studio

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1. Relationship between research and design

The theme of Complex projects graduation studio this year is “Border”, and the site is one of the largest twin cities on U.S.-MEX. border, El Paso-Ciudad Juarez. During my research, I found that there are over about 10 thousands students and workers cross the border for school and work every day, which occupied a large percentage of 43 of the daily commuters on border. By this way, they obtain more job opportunities and better education resources.

However, also because of it, they are caught in a dilemma. On one hand, they want to learn more, a survey shows that the situation of lacking basic skills like English and basic science is very serious in Mexico. An interview of student and worker commuters also reveals their great demands of learning basic skills. Students need these basic knowledge to catch up with their class, and for workers, they want to know what they are doing so that they can help themselves. However on another hand, they actually do not have time for this self-developing learning. Every day they have to spend averagely 6 hours on bus and crossing the border, which means a terrible five-to-nine routine.

 Especially on the border crossing, they have to join the lines to cross the border and in maximum they could have a 2 hours delay here. This lost of time is directly linked to the lost of life quality. Commuters are too exhausted by the long-time transportation and have no time to join the basic life activities such as going to the active markets in Juarez, let alone developing themselves.

These kinds of “border” situation then lead me to a design assignment that I want to build an efficient system that can turn their terrible routine into a time-saving one along with quality educational and social services. So that the time lost situation of them can be converted to a time investment system.
Furthermore, my research on the border commuters helps me to define the functions needed in my project. For example, from research I notice that there are many mother workers cross the border everyday and have to leave their young kids behind; this then motivates me to design a children’s care center in my library, so that these mother workers can drop their kids there safely on their way to work.

2. Relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and my project

For my perspective, the subject I choose is very closely linked to the “Border” topic. Firstly, it reveals the two sides of a border city. On one side, it gives more opportunities and resources for the locals, on another side, the imbalance situation does not improved a lot because locals in Mexico still have to “pay” a lot for these advantages. Secondly, the group that my project focuses on is the border commuters. By combining programs of education (library) and social service (markets), the primary ambition of my project is to provide better life services to the student and worker commuters of the border, and improve both their current and future life quality.

Thirdly, the masterplan design of my project also pays a lot concerns on the situation of border crossing. Specifically, the first thing I looked into is the transport system of the border. My research shows that near the border there is a mirroring of two transport centers in the two cities respectively. The current commuting mode of commuters is that they drive or take buses from home to these transport centers and then transfer to another bus to border crossing. By this way every time they have to transfer 4 times plus the delay on border crossing. Based on this, the strategy I come up with is to build a dedicated commuter bus system with free access on border, so that they don’t have to join the lines or take another transfer on the border crossing. And my project would locate in the Mexico end of the system with a library-market program, which provides social functions and educational opportunities that the commuters and locals are demanding.
3. Relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the methods used in my project

In Complex Projects graduation studio, architecture design is always a combination of several public programs, and it is important to define the way in which these programs are organized and what the deep contents of these programs.

To define my project, the main methods I take are mass studies by models, plan and section diagram analysis and case studies. Doing mass studies and diagram drawings are very helpful to simplify the complicated situation and catch the most important elements. By doing a composition tests, I list nine basic ways to organize two programs, which gives many possibilities to make the complicated relationship of programs become simple. And then by mass studies and modeling tests, different types of space organization are compared and tested, which will lead to the basic concepts of plan and section. Moreover, analyzing references is the most important method of developing the project. Not only the quality of space but also the quantity of each program can be learned from cases. Based on the accumulation, the features of my project are also clearly defined. For example, by looking at cases of modern library, I detail my program on that besides giving more space for learning and children’s care, my library would uses more e-book resources to reduce the budget compared to physical book resources, which also can be seen as a new thinking of modern library.
4. Relationship between the project and the wider social context

The whole project gives opportunities to the commuters and locals in both substantial and spiritual ways. It concerns not only the present situation, but also the possibilities in the future. In other words, the project is placed in a continuous timeline to serve for the whole society. Furthermore, in architectural view, “efficiency” is becoming a very important word in the modern world, not only in areas like Juarez but also some parts in the first world. People have to live efficiently to obtain more opportunities and better life. Study and tests on improving people’s routine in an architectural way then become worthy, and it would be more interesting and have more potentials when linked with quality public space and functions. And my project is trying to find one of the answers. For the modern society, complex projects are required to solve the complex urban or social problems. However, these complex projects are also demanded for a simple and efficient use. And that is what my project concentrates on: giving an architectural solution to the complicated modern society that needs more efficient living mode.

Conclusion and argumentation

Currently, I am making both digital models and physical models to see if the space I have designed and created can be used efficiently or not. By using models, I can experience and modify the space easily and effectively. Also, going deeper in detail would be very helpful for me to develop my project and make all aspects work in a whole system.

As the premise of my project is the operation of the dedicated commuter bus line, the ambition that providing an efficient living mode for the five-to-nine commuters would be hard to fully achieve if the masterplan system fail to be fulfilled. However, as my project locates in the transport and city center where most of the commuters would pass by on their way to border, the ambition of my project would still partly work if the masterplan design fails. Also, for the other locals, my project would still work positively and provides efficient and quality services. Furthermore, the form of my project is also an activation for the local culture. The hanging library actually gives shades to the museum plaza and the sunken markets plaza, which would become a very nice public space for social and cultural activities.