ELDERLY HOME

NEIGHBOURHOOD CATALYST

ALAMAR / COMPLEX PROJECTS / HAVANA STUDIO

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TEACHERS

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The relationship between the theme of graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this frame work (location/object)

Alamar is a city to east of Havana, which is basically a residential area with large empty space. It was the largest social housing project in the world, however never realized due to the economical condition. Now the whole country is opening to world after the US Ban has been lifted recently. The old city center - Vieja and the new town - Vedado have been in the process of development for several years in terms of touristic sector, healthcare sector etc. But nothing happened in Alamar. As a city, Alamar have to live on its own. The question can be raised whether Alamar is able to meet the consequent challenges by itself.

Our studio was asked to investigate the question posed above. We began on a regional and sometimes even national scale and created one research books. We investigated (1) hierarchy of the city, (2) the link between each potential areas, (3) future vision on development of Alamar. The themes focused on the "future cross" proposed by our whole group. Characteristic for the "future cross" is that it is shaped by the main road crossing the city from the highway to the coastline (south to north) and the green belt crossing the city from east to west.

Research book

To increase our knowledge about the Alamar, we created an 'Atlas' of Alamar, carefully mapping out numerous aspects like infrastructure, zoning, meeting

points etc.

From our research we stated the need an potetial for creating the hierarchy in Alamar, but also acknowledged the fact that all the new interventions have to be bottom up approaches which work with each other to contribute the whole area. By proposing a gradient of different types of buildings over the areas which are close to the cross, we create centrality within each areas as a system to structure the whole city in a more logic way.

Our architectural propositions are all to fulfill a catalyst within this urban strategy. They are all new typologies for this area, which can work together to ensure their future. In my case I chose to design within the neighborhood. the chosen location is located along the green belt. The building is a elderly care center which can create certain centrality within the neighborhood. What's more. the new building, as a catalyst of the neighborhood, can be seen as a bridge between the elderly. It not only serves the elderly who need to be cared, but also provide day care center for the elderly who want to participate in some recreational activities held by the organization. The most important aspect of the project is to address the social problem: frail elderly. At the same time, it can also be seen as a critic on the reality in Cuba - new buildings scarcely address this kind of issue. By creating a multi-functional and diverse combination of nursing homes, daycare center, reflection room and library, cleverly organized in a public and accessible building, I hope to create a positive relationship between elderly and the neighborhood.

The relationship between research and design

The perspective form the Complex Projects studio is always to begin on a large scale(national, regional) and go through each subsequent scale in order to get a clear and complete overview of the situation and problems at hand. Logically, this the line our design studio followed. On one hand, a problem statement is easier to derive from extensive research on multiple levels, like our problem statement for Alamar. We founded this statement on the research on multiple levels: the physical part of Alamar and the mental part of Alamar. the different levels helped us to understand the problem at hand. In my opinion, there is a pretty clear division between the 'research' (roughly the first semester) and 'design' (roughly the second semester). Of course, when choosing a particular design theme, more specific research is needed, so research extended into both semesters. I believe that it could be beneficial to intertwine the research earlier with a more defined design task so these could be more mutually beneficial.
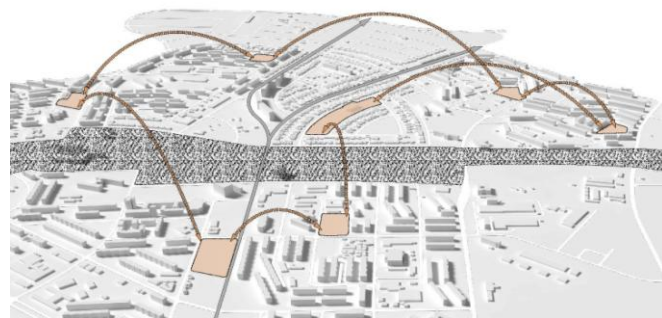
The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

The method of Complex Projects addresses multiple scale levels in the research. by doing this, it becomes very natural to always reflect your design decisions against these different levels. This can lead to new challenges but at the same time, it can pose a solution. By continuously posing my design in the urban context of our urban strategy, or the wider social context, design questions were sometimes easier and answer or similar solutions can be applied to the different scales. An example of this is the mutually beneficial relationships. We attempt to create them on the urban scale: the products from other projects can be used in the my building, the craftsman from other projects can offer temporary workshop in my building. As response, the products made by the elderly can also be sold or even be seen as souvenirs of Alamar.

Furthermore, the Complex Projects graduation studio promotes positioning architecture within a broader social, cultural, political and economic context. this aspect gave me an important handle when it was time to choose 'what to design'. it had to make sense, it had to be needed. To simply impose a chosen program on a site that does not ask for it, was not an option. but y researching not only the site, but also this wider context, it was easier to find an answer and it becomes easier to defend this choice.

Linking the building with bungalows   Designing within the neighborhood

The relationship between the project and the wider social context

The architectural proposition has a large social value. 20 percent of Cubans over 60 are in fragile or needy categories. There are only 127 nursing homes, with 9,287 places, dedicated to caring for people whose families and the community cannot guarantee the necessary care, and Cuba also has 230

houses of grandparents, institutions that are dedicated to attending the elderly in daytime, with a capacity of 7 thousand 398 places, but it is totally not enough due to the calculation that the demand is estimated in more than 20 thousand. In the future, the numbers of elderly in Cuba is going to be increasingly larger due to the demographic analysis that it will reach the first place of oldest country in Latin America with if the current trend is maintained. Besides the insufficient allocation from the government to the elderly care sector, some new social players need to be able to take it over. Seen as burden by the families, the elderly is actually a resource that was underestimated. As a big part of the social structure, the elderly need to be cared better by the family, the community and the neighborhood, physically and mentally.

The project is firstly based on 'the manifesto', according to the group workshop that tried to define the identity of Alamar in the future. Following the strategy the project will be a complex containing three different main parts as a solution to the research questions, which is a nursing home for the frail elderly, a daycare center for the elderly within the neighborhood and some other public functions aiming to provide more value to the city. For example, a public library aiming to provide opportunities for interaction between elderly and children.

Because the investor of this project is a religious institution, which makes it necessary to include a reflection room in the project, as a center of the whole complex, to shape the identity of the institution. Meanwhile, the reflection room is also an important part of the elderly life, which is able to act as a public space for many uses, such as meditation hall, auditorium, open theatre, celebration hall and even a funeral hall. As explained above, all these functions are necessary and important for the project, but how to connect all the functions all together becomes more crucial issues than the functions themselves. By looking back to the research part, a lot of interesting moments came to my mind. But there is one thing that intrigues me the most, which is the lively street life of Cuban. When we walked along the street in Alamar, we experienced a lively street life there. The large space in front of the dwelling's entrance becomes a public space for people to stay. The little space of the staircases becomes a public space for local people to hang out. The empty space of the undefined area were turned into a recreational area by the local people in a creative way. Therefore my inspiration of building concept can also be traced back to the local street life, which gives rise to my design concept: corridor as public living room.

Acting apparently as a way of circulation, the corridor also plays an important role in defining spaces and featuring spaces. First of all, corridor is a necessary element to articulate different functions all together, especially for a elderly care center. The inner corridor proposed within the project also protect the frail elderly from outside, at the same time it can be regarded as a routing system along which the elderly are able to walk around the building from the private nursing home to the public library. Secondly, the wide corridor is transformed into a linear public living space in the project instead of being considered as a conventional space, which provide spacious area to meet the requirements of their daily use of space. Last but not the least, the corridor can be extend from the ground floor to first floor as a ramp to realize the circulation between two levels. At the same time, the ramp as an fascinating element also plays in the role of separating private space from public space. As you can imagine, by using the ramp, the people's movement flow is slowed down, compared to the staircase. It means much more interesting moments can be created by the ramp, for example more eye contact and communication.

As a conclusion, all the decision I made and all the developments of project are influenced positively by the research.I believe these methods could result in architecture that bring new life to the frail elderly in Alamar.