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Graduation Studio: Global Housing

P5 Reflection Rapport - Densification without segregation

INTRODUCTION

The studio “Global Housing” engages with pressing dwelling issues in developing territories, as well as with the increasing cross-cultural character of contemporary architectural practice. Ethiopia’s rapid urbanization rate, in the past decades, has given opportunity for economic growth, but on the other side it has resulted in an enormous shortage in affordable housing. Ethiopia is not the only country coping with this problem, but also other countries within the Global South are dealing with it. Within this studio research is made to analyze this problem and designing housing systems to accommodate the urban poor in the developing territory, in this case in Addis Ababa.

RESEARCH

In the first semester we gain a collective knowledge base by group work research about Addis Ababa’s history, development and identity, in combination with literature studies on various themes related to the process of urbanization. This research started with an analysis of the historic urban transformation and housing figures in Addis Ababa, followed by a thematic research on four themes (migration, built heritage, Infrastructure and mass housing developments) that are key to support any design within the context of Addis Ababa.

In the middle of the semester we made a field trip to Ethiopia to densified our research. Site survey, lectures and workshops at EiABC university have helped to improve our research and to establish the basis for the ‘Addis Ababa Book of Patterns’. This book of patterns was the last part of our collective research, in which we analyzed the patterns of inhabitation in Addis Ababa based in four themes: income generation, social spaces, boundaries and building techniques.

DISPERSED CITY

As a results of the high economic growth, Addis is growing very fast. In the last decade the rural migration has expanded, resulting in an annual population growth reaching now the 3,8 percent. The city is expected to have over 8.1 million people in 2040. But at the same time most of the population (80 percent) is living in slums and as a result of this Addis has become a dispersed city with a low density rate.

The government has introduced the condominium scheme to improve the situation. Not only to densified the urbanized area but also to provide affordable housing. Nevertheless, the condominium scheme has resulted in a missed attempt. The condominiums scheme often lacks in: income generating opportunities, (often away from the central of the city),

not self-sustainable social and economic networks and with its tabula rasa approach creating unfamiliar spaces resolving in spatial issues.

RESEARCH QUESTION

My project is situated in Merkato area. Merkato is the largest market in Addis Ababa and is said to be the largest in Africa. Due to its commercial and economic importance, the Merkato has grown to be the most populated area with a high density rate of people per hectare, but on the other hand with a low density rate of unit per hectare. Resulting in places with a lack of private space. With the course time the informal settlements within the inner city have densified, but in the case of the Merkato the densification has reached a maximum. The living conditions are deteriorating and spatial qualities are being lost. On the other hand, new commercial developments are endangering the identity of the Merkato. An imbalance is occurring between the informal and formal market, making it harder for the lower class to maintain income generating activities within the Merkato.

Research have shown that the tabula rasa approaches for the city urban renewal often result in social segregation and loss of important social networks. Small interventions within the existing informal settlements are insufficient to resolve the massive increase of housing shortage and the problem of decent housing. Within my project I have tried to come up with an urban strategy that fits the social and economic needs of the Merkato. Which concludes to my research question: How can a housing scheme contribute to maintain the identity of the Merkato and its cultural values, while densifying the area for future needs?

PROJECT & RELEVANCE

The projects consist of redeveloping the residential area and developing a strategy with a housing scheme for affordable housing that caters for the identity of the Merkato. Keeping the social and economic networks in place without segregation.

The urban tissue of the Merkato is made out of a grid stablish during the Italian occupation. In the width of the grid a pattern is found (width: 17m (0,5), 33m (1), 49m (1,5) and 66m (2)) while the length differentiates. My intervention consists of a phased growth urban renewal, that can start off in any point of the grid. In each step the project can grow through the Merkato's grid and spread out. In this way a large scale relocation program is avoided which are known to have a negative impact in the social structures. The Merkato's grid is 225 hectares and too big to have a monotone approach. Therefore, the intention is that my design proposal can coexist with other development, while growing organically through the grid. In the Merkato, three layers can be identified; production, commercial and dwelling. In the original plan of the Italians a zoning was stablished for each layer but in the course of time, while densification took place, a mixed cross of this different layers occurred, making the public realm unclear. Within my design proposal the three layers are taken apart and reorganized, resulting in clearer spaces and well-defined public and private realm.

The project itself consist of two puzzle pieces, that each time with a different composition, create a cluster. These clusters can differentiate in size and in some parts have branches, making perforations in the grid and creating different spaces that cater for urban life.

Seeking a higher density means rethinking the inhabitation patterns. Site analysis have shown a mix of important collectivity patterns that take places within the informal settlements, such as: sub renting (for income generation purposes) and the use of the courtyard as the main place for human interaction and a wide sense of community. In my design proposal I tried to imitate this patterns in a larger scale.

Due to the important economic role of the Merkato, a balance is needed between the informal and formal market. Different commercial spaces are introduced to obtain different commercial types, which will lead to income generation; activities that cater for different types of populations.

Due to the annual urbanization rate and the increase in population, the primary tool to improve affordability is by increasing the density. The current density of the Merkato is as high as 120 units/h while having 500 p/h at the moment. Within my design proposal I obtain a density of 300 units/h while catering for a density of 1000 p/h and keeping the relative life quality.

To conclude I can state that my design proposal stands out by keeping a balance between the identity of the Merkato and its culture values while densifying the area without segregation.