COMMON GROUND & COLLECTIVE MEMORY for Southside Chicago Lakeshore

ARCH 574 _ Spring 2019 _ Prof. Sara Bartumeus

Project site + framework
The place where the steel for Chicago skyscrapers was produced, the last 580 acres of available land along the city’s privileged lakeshore, remains vacant. After the demolition of all the buildings of the US Steel Mill, only 4 immense ore walls along a channel stand still as testimonies of the industrial past of the site. The people in the adjacent neighborhood who once worked there want to preserve the walls in order to preserve their memories.

Since the steel mill closed its doors, more than 25 years ago, much speculation and many plans have been developed, but until today, due to a variety of reasons (economic, break up of partnerships, disputes over soil contamination), none has been implemented/developed.

Olympic 2016 games to being proposed as a site for the Obama Presidential Center.) The last two master plans--by SOM + SASSAKI (2010) [fig.4,5] and by Barcelona Housing (2017) [fig.6]--have envisioned transforming the whole area, larger than the Loop, into a mixed-use development with a park along the lakefront, combining working, living, education, shopping, entertainment and recreation facilities. While the first one proposed a high-density neighborhood with mid- and high-rise residential buildings looking at the incredible vistas to Lake Michigan and the skyline of the Loop; the second one--which has also recently been paused--proposes a mid-density and mid-rise, pedestrian friendly neighborhood inspired in the Barcelona Mega-block project. Although both plans proposed technological and environmental sustainable approaches addressing urban 21st century challenges, none really engaged with the ore walls and the industrial past of the site in their designs. On the other hand, the neighbors of the adjacent neighborhood where many of the industry workers continue to live (The Bush) did not feel included, neither in the plans’ design processes nor in the design products, developments that appeal to the high-end luxury market.

The studio will focus on a section of this post-industrial site located in Southside Chicago about 10 miles south of Chicago Loop between 79th and 87th Streets on Lake Michigan and connected to the Chicago CBD by several bus lines and the Metra system [fig.7].
Your project will take into account the boundaries and edges of the site and be located directly adjacent to and/or between the ore walls. The design challenge is how to integrate the walls—or at least one of them--into a purposeful and beautiful project for the community, one which the City of Chicago would approve and the future development of this site could adjust to (could absorb), no matter when, or what density and form it would take.

Studio goals
The goal of the studio is to embrace the potential of the area and reimagine the site, to reinvent one of the last Chicago post-industrial heritages by building on the history of the site and engaging residents nearby in incremental community improvement.

The studio’s reflection and outcomes aim to change the perception of the place; have an impact in the quality of life of the adjacent community and foster social cohesion with future newcomers and attract visitors to become a catalyst for further investment in the area’s development. Through this case study, the studio aims to explore strategies that tackle the broader questions of ‘drosscapes’ in modern American cities and the role that the design of the built environment can play in reversing that trend. Can we think of creative ways of making the only remnants of the plant, the magnificent industrial archeology, the protagonists of the current and future site’s story? How can our projects act as catalysts of activity in a site in ‘standby’ and improve the quality of place, landscape and current/future urban life?
Design challenges as potential design opportunities

Celebrate collective memory and industrial past. To incorporate the walls in the current master plan—or in any future plan to come—as landmarks of the industrial heritage. To design a landscape and architecture backbone that brings activity to the place and acts as a vertebral common space in the future development that brings social cohesion.

Enhance the sensory conditions of the site. To integrate the project with the bold scale, materiality, textures and colors of the built environment and with the atmospheric and natural conditions of the site (wind, water and vistas).

Engage the site boundaries. To ensure the physical connection with The Bush neighborhood currently separated from the site and the water by an infrastructure and guarantee the public access to the park and the waterfront.

Connect with other isolated pre-existing elements in the landscape. To establish relationships between the neighborhood and the water, the lakefront park, the gatehouse, a road built to provide access to a light industry factory (that was never built)...

Use time as a design tool. To design for multiple possible scenarios: for today’s transience condition, for a plan that will have to be developed in phases—even if the plan goes ahead, it will likely be a long time before the site is totally developed—or for an uncertain tomorrow.

Projects

The urban+landscape projects to be developed will be: a) site specific: designed to enhance the character of the architectural and landscape conditions of the site (ore walls, water, wind, vistas to Lake Michigan and the Loop); b) community oriented: inclusive and accessible to the neighbors; c) creative: adaptive reuse project with buildings/structures/landscapes [inside/in-between/above/along/attached to] the ore walls by proposing with creative programs and uses [climbing wall, elevated running path, overlook, performing and visual art factory, regenerative agriculture...] complementary to the ones of a community center and a museum to celebrate the industrial past of the site; d) acupunctural: specific and framed in their implementation but structural in their scope at a larger scale; b) incremental: approached and developed in phases and ways in which change in the site can start to occur quickly and show progress in the neighborhood; c) plausible: economically possible and implementable as a first stage of any future development of the complete area; and also d) environmentally and socially sustainable.

Integrative design process + methodology

At the intersection between urban design, architecture and landscape architecture, this urban studio searches for integrated design tools and responses to foster community and improve the landscape and the urban environment. This studio moves away from traditional top-down, large-scale master-planning to explore more contemporary approaches, such as the urban project (hybrid in nature and acupunctural, intermediate/small in scale but not in scope). It will also explore where architecture meets the people by engaging with the community. Today’s designers are called to design collectively, across fields and with people, to orchestrate, as form givers, spatial change with social impact.

Students in teams of 2 will observe & map the site (personal cartography) and listen & interact with the community (participatory dynamics) to sift & select a strategic design (concept plan) to be constructed & constructed (project development). We will also analyze the virtues and flaws of the master plans and precedents of contemporary creative adaptive reuse projects.

This studio will require 3 field trips to Chicago. Students will need to arrange their own transportation to Chicago’s far south side. Public transportation is difficult in this area. Dates are currently being arranged and will be announced when classes begin.

Studio key words: Trans-disciplinary (architecture, urban and landscape design), site-specific, post-industrial city, industrial heritage, creative adaptive reuse, collective memory, community engagement, inclusivity, museum, community center, design with time, vacancy, transience, drosscapes.