Urban regeneration master plan, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico

Comment of the Holcim Awards jury Latin America

The jury was impressed by the thoughtful and uncomplicated approach. The project has a great potential not to remain a singular action, but generate an impact for the local communities and neighborhoods and thus the entire city on an urban scale. Highly appreciated elements were the versatile focus, the inclusive approach to community workshops and NGOs, as well as the high aesthetic quality which validates the entire action of reunifying the society.

Project description by author

The increased violence in Ciudad Juárez that has resulted from its strategic position in drugs and arms trafficking and the current administration’s anti-drug trafficking program has resulted in 3,000 murders in the city in 2008 alone, becoming one of the most dangerous cities in the world. As a reaction, the federal government has launched the “We are all Juárez” strategy to radically improve the city’s social, economic and physical conditions. The strategy is composed of 160 government commitments to address the safety concerns of Juárenses. The Master Plan for the northwest sector of Ciudad Juárez is one of these projects, creating public spaces that provide economic, educational and recreational activities that will mitigate delinquency, reduce environmental risks and strengthen community networks.

The current social, economic and territorial conditions of Ciudad Juárez are a clear result of its border morphology. The intense textile industry that has risen along the US-Mexico border has served as the greatest source of employment – and the main economic engine of the city. However, the lack of proper urban infrastructure such as medical and educational facilities, public services, jobs and economic activities in the peripheral areas creates isolated low-income communities with unfavorable living conditions that provoke domestic violence. The involvement of the inhabitants since the first stage, based on participatory workshops we explored the current needs and wishes from the inhabitants. The community’s proposals were addressed and eventually solved programmatically as well as spatially. A link between the government, NGOs and the inhabitants was established, while the role of the architects and urban planners was to serve as mediators. The involvement of the inhabitants since the first stages of the project ensures the project’s preservation.

Relevance to target issues by author

Innovation and transferability – Progress

The project is based on building knowledge which not only would keep the costs very low but also would allow the participation of the community in the construction process. By doing this the acquired knowledge would be transmitted to others. It is innovative in the way that new public spaces are proposed that would not only serve as recreational but also as productive spaces that would reinforce the sense of community of the area.

Ethical standards and social equity – People

Due to the character of the project, its main focus was to improve the social conditions in the northwest sector of Ciudad Juárez. It is only by attending the social aspects that the crime and delinquency rates can diminish. With community workshops the needs and wishes from the inhabitants were addressed and eventually solved programmatically as well as spatially. A link between the government, NGOs and the inhabitants was established, while the role of the architects and urban planners was to serve as mediators. The involvement of the inhabitants since the first stages of the project ensures the project’s preservation.

Environmental quality and resource efficiency – Planet

The risk of flash floods in the area in combination with unpaved roads and eroded slopes makes it difficult for the inhabitants to feel safe in their houses. The consolidation of the existing water retention basins not only would prevent further floods in the area but at the same time it would tackle environmental issues by re-using the contained water. The consolidation of the existing water retention basins not only would prevent further floods in the area but at the same time it would tackle environmental issues by re-using the contained water.

Economic performance and compatibility – Prosperity

The project proposes alternative modes of financing the project, and of providing the maintenance needed for the public spaces. The community is involved from an early stage, based on participatory workshops we explored the different possibilities to strengthen their local economy. The series of economic and productive activities carried out in the retention basins would provide extra income for the inhabitants while it ensures resources over the project’s life for its preservation.

Contextual and aesthetic impact – Proficiency

The improvement of the context is an imminent result of the improvement of such residual spaces as the neglected retention basins. The consolidation of sidewalks and paving of streets as well as the introduction of vegetation would lift the neighborhood not only aesthetically but also socially. The disciplines of architecture, urbanism and landscape design are tackled by the project, creating a coherent strategy that goes from the general to the particular.