

Re-Thinking Vickery Meadow: A Case Study on Refugee Resettlement

PASQUALE DE PAOLA

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“We feel the need to highlight how positive outcomes have been achieved through the evolution of decision-making chains which link need - awareness - opportunity - choice - execution in a way that leads to a result where 'architecture makes the difference'.”

—Alejandro Aravena

In line with the thematic understanding of architecture as a “form of social action,” the work outlined in this poster explores the pedagogical role of design as a primary agent in redefining contemporary ethical issues. More specifically, this research examines the humanitarian situation involving the refugee’s crisis, with particular emphasis on the Syria’s civil war, which has created one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time displacing over 12 million people. Pedagogically articulated around the idea that architecture should, in Aravena’s words “improve people’s quality of life,” the work presented promotes a methodology that looks at dense urban living as a way to reduce marginalization and exclusion. Historically speaking, the US has had a long tradition of sheltering those fleeing conflict and persecution. Yet, while the Syrian situation has been extensively covered on news outlets, no tangible design strategies have been developed to qualitatively

accommodate those in need of resettlement. In order to address this void, this research endeavor specifically challenged our students to develop a set of strategies toward the design and development of a hybrid urban settlement in Dallas to increase the effectiveness of sociality, integration and legality while formulating remedies to issues such as urban sprawl, and architectural segregation.

To address the socio-political and programmatic intricacy of this framework, students began by gathering raw data and generating infographics to understand complex patterns and concepts. Particularly, they worked collaboratively to understand the role of the International Rescue Committee, which has taken on the challenge of helping solve the global humanitarian response in the Dallas neighborhood of Vickery Meadow. Building on this collaboration, students researched 4 major categories: 1) the history of refugee resettlement as it occurs globally, in the US and in Dallas TX; 2) the history, process and trajectory of the IRC at the global, domestic and local scales; 3) the physical, social and infrastructural conditions that make refugees resettlement successful; 4) the economic, safety and social concerns voiced regarding refugees and immigrant permanent

resettlement in the US. Accordingly, this framework aided the documentation process and embraced the growing needs of IRC Dallas as well as the displaced populations they serve while developing a design framework attentive to the community and local resources. As final part of this process, each student developed a design strategy based on typological adaptation and social inclusiveness in order to address specific programmatic challenges while also providing evidence for a program that would complement, serve and empower the IRC, its resettlement cases, and the needs of the community.

Primarily based on the understanding of architecture as a collective task, the work showcased in this poster attempts to integrate socio-political and ethical awareness into a discipline that seems to objectify aesthetic connotations over issues like segregation, inequalities, housing shortage, migration, and the participation of communities. Indeed, design for the common good should promote architecture as an “instrument of self-government, and of humanist civilization,” while fostering inclusion and integration. Without those two peculiarities architecture cannot make a difference.

