ARCH576: Contemporary Real Estate Development and Adapting Architectural Professionalism

Tuesdays 9:30AM - 12:20PM (Spring 2015)
Instructor: Fang Xu, Ph.D.

Since the 1980s, an epochal restructuring of the political economy along with a far-reaching reconfiguration of social-cultural values have remodeled the form and process of the built environment in global and local contexts. Real estate development has experienced a paradigmatic shift. Within this profound changing process, all major actors involved in the building industry have their roles adapted. To practice in a new socio-economic climate, architects face the imperative to recognize the migrating business model of real estate investment and production, refreshing their fundamental understandings of the design profession.

This seminar exposes students to a set of texts that illuminate contemporary real estate development and architectural design practice as contextualized in broader social, cultural, economic, and political processes. It integrates several bodies of literature in geography, architecture history, and urban studies, which focuses on four intersecting thematic topics. First, the abstract political-economic structure of building provision has been reconfigured in many aspects, manifesting grand processes that are theorized as “globalization”, “neoliberalism”, or “flexible accumulation”. Second, geographical outcomes of the fundamental political-economic transformation are discernible in urban and suburban landscape as large-scale residential and commercial developments take forms of Planned Unit Development (PUD), Mixed Used Development (MXD), or Common Interest Development (CID). Third, in the new paradigm of real estate development featuring entrepreneurial government, knowledgeable clients, and diversified consultation professionals, architects need to deliver integrative services beyond “giving form” to be involved in an expanded design process including strategic programming, marketing, and post-occupancy evaluations. Fourth, with elitist ideology of Modernism losing its credibility, the belief systems of contemporary architecture are getting critical revisions. Given the contemporary cultural fragmentation and pluralism, architecture design needs to be freed from self-referential aesthetics and to engage in a dialogue with consumers of architectural space.

Literature include book sections or journal articles by geographers, urban researchers, and architects including David Harvey, Paul Knox, and Anna Klingmann. In addition to reading and discussion, students perform case studies of accomplished development projects to implement their theoretical explorations. Possible field trip activities involves CMK companies, a Chicago-based real estate developer (http://www.cmkcompanies.com/). Final project of the course includes both verbal and graphic presentations concerning evolving architectural professionalism in response to emerging real estate development patterns.