Water proof – Social housing in Sri Lanka

Team: Milinda Pathiraja, Paolo Tombesi

Duration: Fall Semester

Content: The objective of this teaching unit is the interrelated exploration of three themes: 1) the potential role of architectural design as a vehicle for industrial organization and restructuring; 2) the currency of reinforced concrete as an architectural and construction material in fast-urbanising economies; 3) the social, technical and compositional attributes of low-cost housing as a building typology.

Consequently, the development of a low-rise, high-density proposal for the redevelopment of Maligawatte, an informal settlement area along the Sebastian Canal in Colombo currently under accelerated development, will be used as an opportunity to:

1) reflect on the renewed importance of housing in the contemporary global architectural debate.
2) compare the use of concrete across ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ economies /industries, and evaluate its employment alternatives in low-cost and low-skilled construction environments.
3) understand the history and the reasons for the use of concrete in the post-independence period of the global South.
4) consider environment- and industry-friendly alternatives for the use of concrete in social building production activities, and inquire on how to envisage a ‘robust’ application of the material.
5) scrutinize the ability of building skeletons to provide support for environmental and formal strategies.
6) re-evaluate the role of architectural design as a contributor to policy-making.

Organisation: As this is a multi-year project, students will review and evaluate the output generated by the previous cohort of students, in 2017. On this basis, they will propose amendments to or declare support for those proposals, and the residential/industrial organization choices they underlie. Each student will then develop a portion of the land by furthering or re-interpreting the formal, technical and spatial guidelines determined through the previous exercise. The progression of the work will be facilitated by a parallel series of lectures dealing with Sri Lanka and with the history of specific concrete applications. Contributions from and reference to parallel semester offerings will also be sought.

Since Sri Lanka is used as an ideal-type example of a larger global reality, the emphasis of the teaching unit will be on analytical approaches to the problem.

Resources: Documentation of site, industrial context, social conditions and architectural references will be provided by FAR.

Language: English