Transitional housing for refugees in Des Moines, IA: refugee, identity, space

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Transitional housing for refugees in Des Moines, IA:

Refugee - Identity - Space

by

Ricardo A. Romero Quintero

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

Major: Architecture

Program of Study Committee:
Clare Cardinal-Pett (Major Professor)
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Lynn Paxson

Iowa State University
Ames, IA
2004
Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the master’s thesis of

Ricardo A. Romero Quintero

Has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.01 REFUGEE/IDENTITY/SPACE

“A refugee is an uprooted person who fears persecution in his or her home country and is unable or unwilling to return.”

According to the World Refugee Survey 2002, 14.9 million refugees and asylum seekers are living across borders. But what could cause millions of people seek asylum? A possible explanation is the group of existing conflicts between political parties, within a common territory, sometimes driven by religious or ethnic differences. In addition, important changes in political systems such as the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and USSR, that caused territorial subdivisions and inherent socio-economic and cultural problems.
An example could be the Central Africa Crisis, which according to John M. Jansen has been portrayed by the press as tribal or ethnic, but in reality it goes beyond that. Rwanda and Burundi were German colonies until World War I, when Belgium took control of them until 1960. Between 1920 and 1930, Belgium implemented a racial-ethnic policy that privileged the upper class, turning the social distinctions into exclusive, hereditary groups, named Tutsi. The Hutu instead, were viewed as an inferior class. Between 1960 and 1962, during the fight for independence, the massive violation of human rights started. Most recently, after the massacre of 1994, caused by conflicts between political parties, 2.5 million people were displaced from Rwanda to Zaire in only one month, another 800,000 and 500,000 displaced to Burundi and Tanzania respectively. They arrived in a country without an adequate infrastructure to sustain them; Rwandan refugees further increased the existing problems that host communities had already. This also increased their pain, making them more vulnerable to subsequent health problems and psychological conflicts.

What kind of psychological problems could painful experiences create for refugees?

According to K. C. Cirtautas, the first few weeks are the most critical ones. In this time period, the refugee himself is almost incapable of comprehending the cause of his fate because he never expected it. The feeling of a "horrible dream" changes into the realization of the cruel fact. Cirtautas also mentions that a refugee discovers within himself tendencies and characteristics that he or she never expected (Cirtautas 1957). Those characteristics represent for the refugee a picture of detachment between his or her actual, self image and the one he/she had before the catastrophe. For example his/her facial expression reflects the change that has overcome him/her. In addition, the manner in which he/she walks, sits, talks,
reflects tension and distrust. After a while, when the refugee has settled in a new territory, and notices his/her changes, such as style of living, language, interests, job; he can’t recognize himself. This situation increases the refugee’s sense of loss that prevents him/her from appropriating the new space.

There is a deep relation between space and identity. According to Maja Povrzanovic, “one significant aspect of identity externalization applies to one’s domicile” (Povrzanovic 2001). Homes are saturated with images of their occupant’s identity. Home also constitutes a feeling of belonging. In the case of a refugee, who is occupying another person’s space, he/she feels as both tormented and tormentor. Identity could be defined as the moment in which one person realizes who he/she is and thinks about what others think in respect to him/her. Which is the image refugees think they project, the image they really show or the image others see of them? Povrzanovic also mentions that “the physical surroundings are points of fundamental importance when it comes to getting one’s bearings and finding one’s way though existence” (Povrzanovic 2001). Framing this in an urban context, the streets, the buildings, bridges, and the landscape in general, materialize points in our identity. In the case of refugees, once these “points” are taken away, their identities are weakened.

On the other hand, according to Jeffery I. Macdonald, in his book Transnational Aspects of Ju-Mien Refugee Identity, refugees create a new, transformed social space, that helps them reestablish their identity in a host country. Macdonald defines this social space as the system of relations (spatial, ecological, spiritual, etc) between one group and other ethnic group. This new space is often the result of the adaptation of traditional elements of the refugee’s
culture into the actual new context. For example, the monks adapted traditional ceremonies to the French calendar. However, this space was conceived as a transitional space due to the character of their legal status, taken as a nonpermanent one.

1.02 FACTS (IOWA)

The United States of America is the world leader in offering resettlement to refugees - over 2.45 million since 1975. Between the years 1975 and 2001, approximately 24,382 refugees had settled in Iowa (DHS Online). The Bureau of Refugee Services (BRS), part of the Iowa Department of Human Services, helps refugees to become self-sufficient and productive members of this society. Along with the BRS, the Refugee Cooperative Ministry (RCM), part of the Lutheran Social Service of Iowa, provides many services to near 90% of the refugees coming to Iowa. Both BRS and RCM help provide refugees with jobs, education programs, health and legal services, English as a Second Language (ESL), counseling and referrals, community education, and various cultural activities. In addition, they assist refugees in obtaining initial housing, food and clothing for a minimum of 30 days. Since BRS does not own any property of its own, obtaining housing for refugees means referring them to landlords.

1.03 PROPOSAL

Can architecture help or intervene in this process of transit and settlement of the refugees? Can architecture contribute to the process of change across one of many variables? Perhaps
focusing on a housing development, as part of a direct spatial relation within the different services, and also being aware of other similar projects. A strategic location would be required in the urban context of Des Moines in order to provide adequate conditions needed for better resettlement and insertion of refugees into a new society. In addition, economic support by the government is decreasing day by day, which suggests the need for some kind of related economic activities that would provide some income. This could be based on a single main business or a group of different businesses and activities. Not only could this help refugees play a productive role in the society, but it’s also in agreement with the U.S. Government’s orientation towards “fast settlement” of the refugees.

The proposal is essentially to:
Create a responsive architectural project for refugees in Iowa. A transitional housing facility would be located in downtown Des Moines, along with all the necessary spaces in which the related services provided by both BRS and RCM would take place. In addition to the careful conception of the architectural and urban spaces, issues of privacy and multicultural diversity should both be contemplated.
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF PRECEDENTS AND STATISTICS

2.01 STATISTICS

Refugee housing in the United States is not a well documented subject. Most of the information available about it relates to projects either in Europe or in the same countries in which the catastrophes had occurred. However, by doing research on different kinds of housing, such as collective, shared, communal, cohousing, and housing for minorities, it is possible to combine the common factors, making it possible to define a critical framework. In addition to analyzing the information and facts about the process that an asylum seeker and his or her family go through in order to receive the refugee status, it is necessary to obtain and analyze the statistical information specifically relative to refugees in Iowa.

Estimated Refugee Arrivals by Ethnicity in Iowa FFY 1975-2001*

*All data excludes secondary migration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Region</th>
<th>Number of People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Africa</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td>1,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other ethnic groups</td>
<td>891</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Former Soviet Union (FSU)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>All ethnic groups</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Eastern Europe</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bosnian</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovar</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other ethnic groups</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Latin America</strong></td>
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Refugee Arrivals by Ethnicity in Iowa for FFY 2000 and 2001

<table>
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<th>Global Region</th>
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<th>FFY2001 Number of People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>136</td>
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<tr>
<td>All other ethnic groups</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Former Soviet Union</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>All ethnic groups</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td><strong>Eastern Europe</strong></td>
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<td>Kosovar</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Near East</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Iraqi</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other ethnic groups</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southeast Asia</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
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<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1341</strong></td>
<td><strong>1053</strong></td>
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Iowa Refugee Employment FFY2000/2001

Refugee Employment Services Coordinated by BRS

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<th></th>
<th>Arrival 2000</th>
<th>Arrival 2001</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Average Wage at Hire</td>
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<td>83</td>
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<td>Total Reported Placements</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>171</td>
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</table>

Refugees Who Arrived Via Another VOLAG and had Employment Services Coordinated by BRS

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Arrival 2001</th>
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<tr>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>Total Reported Placements</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>291</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Combined Totals of Employment Placements Coordinated by BRS

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<th></th>
<th>Arrival 2000</th>
<th>Arrival 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Average Wage at Hire</td>
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<td>$8.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Days to Hire</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Reported Placements</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(DHS online)

Close to one thousand refugees per year have come to Iowa since the year 1975. Nearly 61% of them were of Asian origin and 28% were European. However, of the 1341 refugees that came in 2000, 70.5 % came from Europe and just 9.7 % were Asian. Similarly, in 2001, 64.1% out of the 1054 refugees that came to Iowa were from Eastern Europe and 13.5 % from Asia. In the last ten years, there were 12,704 refugee arrivals in Iowa, which gives us a
yearly average of 1,270.4, and a monthly average of 105.8 (DHS online). These last numbers, in addition to the ethnicity groups’ information, were very important for the planning phase of the project, and also influenced the development of the architectural program.

2.02 COLLECTIVE AND SHARED HOUSING

According to Karen A. Franck, (1991) collective housing is housing in which some features and facilities are provided for joint use or shared by all residents who also maintain their own individual households. In shared housing, spaces that usually are part of the private domain, such as kitchens and bathrooms are placed in the shared domain of the household. Franck states that some early examples of houses with shared spaces in the U.S. were utopian communities, both religious and nonsectarian, located in rural areas between 1820 and 1850. Franck also points out the fact that some of them still exist, like the Hutterite communities in New York State.

A recent example of collective housing is architect Gwen Rono’s 338 Harvard Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This renovation includes ten units of one or two bedroom apartments and shared spaces, such as a large living room, a kitchen, a study and a garden (Figure 1). According to Franck, Rono’s goal was to encourage social interaction between residents while reducing cost at the same time.

In Russia, between 1926 and 1930 nearly 30 percent of the new residential buildings were housing communities. Anatole Kopp (1970) mentions that during that time period, the social
changes functioned as a “social condenser,” reducing the volume of building construction per household. A good example of the typology of this period is the building on Novinsky Boulevard in Moscow, 1929, by the architects M.Ginsburg, I. Milinis and S. Prokhorov. This collective oriented building includes a number of shared facilities, such as central kitchen, dining room, laundry gymnasium, library and garden roof (Figure 2 and 3).
1. Corridor
2. Entrance Hall
3. Living room
4. Bedroom
5. Communal dining hall and kitchen

(figure 3)
Therefore, she concludes, the most viable collective housing work has been developed in Denmark and Sweden. However, according to Franck, the traditional nuclear family is in the minority, in the Scandinavian countries. Franck suggests that the amount of collective housing in Scandinavian will increase in the future.

2.03 ASYLUM-SEEKERS HOUSING

In Europe the number of asylum seekers is higher than in the U.S. Travel from Africa or the Middle East across to the different countries of the European Union is easier. In contrast, most asylum seekers in the United States of America already have refugee status, which makes it easier to census, house and help them. In Holland, as part of the solution for this situation, a housing plan for asylum seekers was designed and built in 1999. The architects were Kuiper Compagnons, Wytze Patjin in cooperation with Jaap van Kampen and Schut & Kolova architects. They considered housing for asylum seekers not as a problem to be solved but as the provision of assistance. In addition, they contemplated what they called the problems of “privacy and possibility of independence”. The project keeps in mind its relationships with the existing community in which it is framed. Asylum seekers used to be located in a group of stationary caravans also known as mobile homes (figure 4). The new project gives residents greater possibilities for privacy, and at the same time makes use of medical support, schooling and other facilities on the surroundings (figures 5, 6 and 7).
A group of examples related to refugee housing are projects (models) developed by architects all over the world. These projects are posted on the internet, available to the public in general. One of the main websites belongs to Architecture for Humanity (AFH), who defines itself as "a volunteer, nonprofit organization founded for the promotion of architectural and design solutions to global, social and humanitarian crises". In addition, according to their website, "AFH creates opportunities for architects and designers from
AFH has promoted two competitions since their foundation. The first one was for a transitional housing project for the returning people of Kosovo (1999), where hundreds of thousands were without a place to live. In this competition, I-Beam, SYSTEM Architects and Shigeru Ban Architects (figure 8) were selected and shown at the 7th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice.

AFH’s most recent design competition was for the design of a mobile HIV/AIDS health clinic for Sub Sahara. According to AFH, it is estimated that three-quarters of the world’s AIDS population lives in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, the inability to access vast areas of
the continent with adequately equipped facilities, represents one of the major factors inhibiting medical professionals in Africa from treating this disease. The first place was designed by KHRAS (a Danish firm). In this project, the frame is designed to fit within a standard container and can therefore be moved easily using various modes of transportation (figure 9).

2.05 SHIGERU BAN

This paper loghouse was designed as a temporary solution for victims of the earthquake that occurred in Nagata-ku, Kobe in 1995. The design had to be cheap and easily assembled by
anyone and respond to both winter and summer conditions. The walls are made from paper tubes, the foundation from beer crates loaded with sandbags, and tenting material on the roof. (figures 10 and 11)
When the civil war broke in Rwanda in 1994, more than two million people became asylum seekers. The UN provided them with a solution for shelter based on an alternative material, which consists of a paper tube structure that allowed people to build themselves shelters at low-cost (figures 12a-12b).

(figure 12a)

(figure 12b)
2.06 PRECEDENTS CONCLUSION

The projects in this chapter differ in many ways from the project I’m proposing. However, some of these examples represent antecedents to the refugee housing subject. Furthermore, they represent the interest of the international community for architectural solutions to problems of a humanitarian nature. Projects such as the log house by Shigeru Ban, encourage the research, ment, and application of innovative ideas during the design process. For example the use of nontraditional materials that allow for the economy as well as an easier material assembly design. Finally, some of these antecedents facilitate the understanding and appreciation of the shared spaces concept and its importance for any king of community. As a result, shared/communal spaces constitute an essential aspect of a social, motivated, architectural design.
CHAPTER 3. THE PROJECT

3.01 DESCRIPTION

The project is a center for refugees in Iowa, which not only will welcome them but also will provide them with transitional housing and access to a group of different services, such as medical, educational, health, legal etc. facilitating their resettlement in the U.S. The center will be managed by both the Bureau of Refugee Services (BRS) and the Refugee Cooperative Ministry (RCM).

According to the number of refugee arrivals per month (105.8), the project should be able to house between one hundred and hundred and twenty refugees at one time. Since refugees may come as single individuals or in a family or group of some kind, housing units should be either flexible, in terms of number of occupants and/or designed with different areas in order to house between 1 to 6 people (a family). In addition, the individual units should allow the users’ privacy and provide direct communication with the common areas. The housing design should allow for the possibility of partial or total sharing of common spaces, such as kitchens, bathrooms and dining areas. Moreover, the project should include spaces designed for services and recreation for different ages, in addition to administrative offices, classrooms, and ancillary spaces. Parking and adequate spaces for the linked business should also be included.
The idea of having economic activities included in the project is supported by both the need for income and an orientation towards self-sufficiency. Some of the possible businesses that could be considered for including in the project are: laundry or cleaning service, child care, a small grocery store and or a restaurant, these last two possibilities could also make use of the produce, like vegetables from another aspect of the proposed project designed for the implementation of a community garden. A community garden would also be in harmony with the Iowa’s farm tradition.

An important factor in the process of understanding the background of refugees is to help them to identify the unique characteristics of their identity. Therefore, the production of the space within the project could represent the refugees’ recognition of themselves as well as their active participation in the re-creation of the new context, in which will frame themselves for the next thirty days of their lives. This new space will be conceived as a transition that will not cause a drastic transformation but facilitates refugees’ adaptation to a new society. It will be oriented to reduce, at some level, the refugees’ cultural shock. The space should then suggest protection, tranquility, diversity, change, and improvement. In addition, it should represent some kind of transition between cultures, between urban and rural, between the sense of loss and the reconstruction of an identity.

It won’t be necessary to relate the space to one or all of the actual main ethnic groups in particular (African, Asian and Eastern-European), because the political situations can change, making necessary to adequate the space to the new conditions. On the other hand, the flexibility of the space should allow refugees to include elements that make part of their
identity in their new personal space. These elements will be created by them and also will make part of their belongings. It would be necessary to identify if their background is rural or urban, in that way, the activities in which they will be involved will have a closer relation with them, facilitating the process reconstruction of their identity.

3.02 PROGRAM

Living Units (100 people)

Common Services: Kitchens
                Bathrooms

Classrooms: ESL (2)
                Technical (computers)

Workshop

Offices: DMACC
                Bureau of Refugee Services
                Lutheran Social Services
                Catholic Council for Social Concern

Reception

Daycare

Playground

Greenhouse

Community gardens

Parking (staff and store’s customers)
Des Moines' downtown has been the object of different urban development plans. The most recent one divides downtown into the Court Avenue district, and the eastern and western gateways. Part of this recent project is the Western Gateway Park (figure 14), which will host the new library and a higher education center. I propose making the refugee housing project part of this plan for the rehabilitation of the Des Metro area. This will be beneficial for the downtown community because it will bring more residents. In addition, the location near a large group of public office buildings and private businesses, such as Meredith Corporate, Wells Fargo, and Principal Financial, will facilitate job placement for the refugees (figure 15). The site's location will help maintain the privacy of the refugee families and at
the same time will facilitate their access to public transportation and to the state and federal offices they will need to interact with in this early stage of their relocation.

Although some companies are locating their offices in suburbs such as Wes Des Moines, approximately 60,000 people work in Des Moines downtown every day. There is a system of skywalks that is nearly three miles long that connects different parts of downtown. Activities such as the art festival and the farmer's market, which has more than 150 vendors, attract visitors to downtown. Several projects are currently taking place in downtown, some of those are:

Des Moines Gateway, which seeks to revitalize the entrances into downtown as well as increase its economic growth.

Des Moines Higher Education Center that will provide education and training spaces for approximately 450 people.
Iowa Events Center, which conformed by Wells Fargo Arena, Hy-Vee Hall, and Veterans Memorial Auditorium, provides the city with a multipurpose facility.

The Principal Riverwalk is 1.2 miles long and ties various development areas as well as different leisure activities.

Central Public Library which will be part of the western gateway park is also under construction.

Downtown D.M. can be defined as the urban contrast to Iowa’s rural image. According to Mario Gandelsonas, Des Moines’s significant urban moments play against the background shaped by the conflicts between the foundation grid, the one-mile grid, and the topography irregularities (Gandelsonas 1999) (figure 13).
GANDELSONAS
DES MOINES

(Figure 13)
This site represents evidence of Des Moines's downtown unique geometry. It is determined by two directions thanks to the juxtaposition of the foundation and the Jeffersonian grids. 14th street, which goes north-south, connects with Grand avenue that has a 17° rotation angle, creating an irregular shape (figures 16 -17).
Several buildings from the early, middle and late 20th century frame the context of the site. New corporate facilities and low income residential buildings give this part of downtown not only variety in terms of land use but also interesting contrasts in the urban fabric (figure 18).

3.04 DESIGN

In order to provide adequate area to all spaces included in the program, the use of the two lots located in both sides of 14th street was indispensable. However, most of the services are located in the eastern part of the site. Also, due to the need for direct sun light (east –west - south) in both the greenhouse and the Community Garden, the major volume (housing units) was placed on the northern side. Furthermore, western gateway park is immediately south, allowing a generous southern exposure (Figure 19).
The greenhouse, the store and most of the space used for the community garden are located on the west lot, allowing the private areas (units) to be located near some of the shared areas such as kitchen, bathroom and dining, as well as common areas such as classrooms. The offices are located on the first level, along the east side of 14th street. Some of the offices that are considered semipublic have access from both the interior and exterior of the building. The classrooms and workshop are located on the same level, getting north light (Figure 20). The daycare and the laundry area are located below the mezzanine, which provides an interior play area for young kids while at the same time overlooking the main access (figure 21).
1. Living Units
2. Classrooms
3. Offices
4. Greenhouse
5. Store
6. Employees’ Parking
7. Outdoors Play area
8. Community Garden

1. Access / Reception
2. Mezzanine
3. Offices
4. Enclosed Walkway to Greenhouse
5. Daycare
6. Living Units
In order to respect the users’ privacy, all living units are located on the second floor and above, apart from semipublic areas. Shared areas, such as bathrooms, kitchens and dining, are easily accessed from all living units located in the same floor.

A combination between two different kinds of living units would allow refugee families to stay together, no matter how big they are. These units can hold from one to six users, if linked, as well as a group of sixteen, which would be located in the same level (figure 22).
Figure 23 shows how a system of movable walls (in red) designed to create a direct communication between two different living units, as well as more utilizable area—in the case in which these units were functioning independently.

The greenhouse is located west of 14th street, facing south, gaining the necessary solar exposure. Its shape represents a tent, which in some cases was the last space that functioned as shelter for refugees before they came to Iowa. An enclosed walkway serves as a link between the greenhouse and the living units. It represents a transition between spaces, and perhaps between life conditions (figure 24). This walkway would not only be a circulation space but it would also include a seating area and shelves / cabinets for the display of refugees’ art or craft work.
3.05 DRAWINGS

Downtown

Site Plan
First floor
Mezzanine

Second Floor
Skywalk

Greenhouse
Building section (east-west)

Greenhouse section (south-north)
Building section (south-north)
Elevations

WEST ELEVATION

EAST ELEVATION

NORTH ELEVATION

SOUTH ELEVATION
3.06 IMAGES

Skywalk

Grand Avenue

Greenhouse

Atrium
Greenhouse  Community Garden

Skywalk  Aerial view
CHAPTER 4. SELF CRITIQUE

During the design process, it is important to stop and ask if what has been accomplished fits with the proposed objectives. For that matter, it is also a good idea to take into account other people’s points of view and expertise. Based on the feedback received during critiques and conversations with the committee members, I have grouped several changes or improvements that not only make sense, but also complement the design in a positive way.

4.01 STREET LEVEL

The street’s level should be lower, in order to divide the community garden from both Grand Av and 14th street, without isolating them with a fence or trees that could block the sun. The base plane of the community garden would then be elevated. This would also define the edge of the field, as well as interrupting the spatial continuity but not the visual continuity. As a result, the users would be protected from the street and also would have visual contact with it and the Western Gateway Park (figure 40).
4.02 EXTERIOR MATERIALS

In search of durability, the proposed materials for the exterior of the building are concrete and structural glazing. However, the typical gray color of the concrete might give a cold image to the building, which would not be in helping with the intention to create a welcoming place to reconstruct an identity. Consequently, different options for materials and colors for the facades are suggested. The first option for the walls' finish is brick, which is a material that has several advantages such as durability, in addition to its multi-tonal and textural possibilities (figure 41).
Another option is to use concrete but to use different kinds of aggregates that would offer various possibilities to vary tone, texture or color temperature (figure 42).
A third option is wood, which would give a warm look to the building, but not only it would have some durability issues, but it could be out of context, taking into consideration the project's location in the downtown area (figure 43).

One last option is to use regular reinforced concrete but use a different color of glass. This could contrast in a positive manner with the neutral color of the walls (figure 44).
4.03 STORE’S RELOCATION

The store is located in the western part of the green house and publicly accessed from Linden Street. Its location is motivated by the necessity of direct sun light coming from the south on the green house. However, the store represents one of the main links between the existing Iowa community and the refugees. Therefore, it should be oriented in such way that facilitates interaction between these two groups. After all, in this stage, refugees are in the process of becoming part of the larger Iowa community. Consequently, a more convenient location for the store would be one oriented to the major traffic flow, in this case Grand Ave. Figure 45 shows two different options in which the store faces Grand Avenue Avenue. The first one (top) faces Grand Avenue as well as Linden St. It has a frontal approach from both
streets. The second option (bottom) shows the possibility of having the store with an immediate access from Grand in addition to being in direct visual contact with it.
Although, the stairs that face southwest use a system of horizontal and vertical shading devices, the skywalk doesn’t respond in the same way. Due to its orientation and the existence of different uses in its interior, it is necessary to control the heat gain, and insure that the interior temperature is comfortable not only for its occupants but for the art work that would be displayed on the north side. During the night, the lighting design should allow people in the exterior of the building to observe the art work (figure 46).
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

What kind of useful knowledge can result from this thesis? Perhaps the reaffirmation of the idea that the world refugees who come to Iowa have more in common with Iowans than we are aware of. Both refugees and early settlers might have come to this land driven by different causes, but with the same purpose; to have their own space, a space to settle, to grow food, and to raise their children. Refugees have lost their space; therefore, they have lost part of their identity. Our fear of diversity or of cross-cultural relationships, stops us from welcoming them. It would be ideal if we take this opportunity and try to combine our knowledge with their knowledge.

The architectural space that will frame the cultural interaction between these two communities (refugees and Iowans) shall be a space that in a way helps reduce refugees’ cultural shock. In order to be capable of providing common elements between refugees’ backgrounds and Iowa’s image, this space should hold both rural and urban images. It is crucial to understand the term “flexibility” not only as an element of design but as a strategy for the execution of an adequate transitional space (s).

Perhaps it would be valid to affirm that in this case architecture serves as the construction of space as well as the reconstruction of identities.
APPENDIX

The CD-Rom contains six digital animations that show different approach possibilities to the project. In order to view these files it is necessary to have Quick Time Player.
ILLUSTRATION CREDITS:

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Figure 13: From Gandelsonas, Mario. X-Urbanism: Architecture and the City. Princeton

Figures 14-18 (aerial photographs): From TerraServer USA. Online [Available]
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