culturually responsive architecture

designing a community center in arboledas, mexico
culturally responsive architecture

designing a community center in arboledas, mexico

undergraduate architecture thesis
ball state university
college of architecture and planning

© 2006 Ben Banta
culturally responsive architecture

designing a community center in arboledas, mexico
Andrea Swartz (Professor)  Thank you for your patience in dealing with how laid back I can be at times. I feel like you really pushed my thinking about the issues in the project to a higher level. I appreciate all of the input that you gave throughout the entire year.

Arijit Sen (Thesis Advisor)  Thank you for pushing me to do the best job that I could do on my thesis. Due to your background, the input that you were able to provide about the topic was unique and helpful.

Family  First of all I want to thank my parents for the never ending support that they have provided throughout both this year and the past four years. Also, I want to thank them for the sacrifices they have been willing to make in order for me to have the opportunity for me to go to college.

God  Thanks for the strength, energy, and patience to make it through the project. Also, thank you for being by my side at all times and reminding me of verses such as 1 Peter 5:7. “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

Friends and Classmates  Thanks for the great times in studio throughout the project. I also appreciate the input that many of you gave me on my project.

Interviewees  I want to give a special thanks to the people I interviewed while in Mexico City. Their input was essential to bringing the project to fruition.
01_ acknowledgements
03_ abstract
04_ why this topic?
05-10_ thesis topic
    project statement
    introduction
    issues and positions
    research
11-30_ cultural inventory
    summary
    architectural manifestation summary
31-56_ final design
    community center
    location
    site information
    spatial organization
    design decisions
    perspectives
55-56_ reflection
57-62_ appendix / bibliography
    CAP presentation / display
    hispanic community center
    sources
As countries become more closely linked, traveling and communication throughout the world becomes more efficient. Global integration is providing new opportunities for professionals throughout the world to work in countries other than the ones in which they grew up. More specifically, in the field of architecture, it is now possible for an architect in the United States to design in a country such as France. Not just is it possible, but there are clients around the world that are willing to hire an architect from a country other than their own. As a result, questions have emerged as to what makes architecture of the place.

The thesis project explores the idea of how to better understand the values of a culture in order to inform and direct the design of architecture that is responsive to that place and people. The definition of culture used in this exploration comes from the book *Invitation to Anthropology* by Luke Eric Lassiter, which defines culture as “a shared and negotiated system of meaning informed by knowledge that people learn and put into practice by interpreting experience and generating behavior.” Cultural values are understood through the use of a cultural inventorying process derived using anthropology research methods. Those methods include, but are not limited to: interviews, observation, and comparative analysis. The cultural values are then translated into an architectural language which serves to inform and direct the design process.

The testing of these ideas in culturally responsive architecture was done through the design of a community center in Mexico City. The site is located in a middle class section of Mexico City called Arboledas. (fig. #1) A trip was made to Mexico City in the first week of December. This trip was the basis for the selection of a site and building type. The main criteria for the building type was that it focus on social issues and allow for both private and public spaces. A community center seemed the most appropriate program to explore given these needs.

Cultural values were derived from the cultural inventory by breaking the information down into three main categories. Those three main categories are social values, cultural history, and environmental context. This inventory process provided a better understanding of the shared and negotiated system of meaning of the middle-class Mexicans in Arboledas. (fig. #2) Those values then served to direct and inform the final design of a community center in the area.
why this topic? >> It was summer and I had been doing my internship at MSKTD & Associates in Indianapolis. I arrived home one evening to find a letter from the College of Architecture and Planning sitting on my desk. As I opened the letter, I realized that it had to do with the thesis project. First of all, it was amazing to think that I was that far along in the program. It seemed like just yesterday I was a first year student going to some of the thesis presentations and thinking to myself how long it would be before I would make it to that point. Now, it was my turn to choose a topic and soon begin a year long exploration. This was both exciting and intimidating at the same time.

For the next month before classes started back up I thought off and on about the topic for my thesis. The actual project that I would use to study the ideas developed more slowly than the topic itself. There was one thing that I was sure about. I wanted to be able to incorporate the eighteen years spent in Mexico City, Mexico into my thesis in some way or another. The thesis topic developed as a result of several experiences with architecture in Mexico City. I always found it interesting to see the close connection between a more modern Mexico City and foreign influence in order to accomplish that. While this had many positive aspects, there were aspects which I always questioned. As I went into my thesis year I wanted to use those questions as the basis for the development of my project.
thesis topic

architecture
values
design directives
way of life
ethnography
anthropology
customs
place
"shared and negotiated system of meaning"
understanding
spatial layout

culture
**project statement** >> The thesis project explores the use of a cultural inventory of middle-class culture in Arboledas, Mexico to inform the design of architecture that is responsive to that place and people. The thesis ideas were studied and tested through the design of a community center that serve the surrounding area. The projects program will be derived by using the cultural inventory. By doing this, the layout of the facility responds to that which is culturally significant. The goal is that the design be responsive to the culture and place on as many levels as possible. This means having the ability to respond to the needs and culture of the adults, youth, and children.

**introduction** >> Architecture throughout the world is a part of everyday life. From the smallest hut to the grandest music hall, architecture is about the users. Architecture must respond to those users in the context within which they exist. How does architecture effectively respond to those users, that culture, and that place? This is a question that has risen to the surface as a result of the growing number of architects working outside of the context which they are familiar with. Context is defined as both the physical and cultural attributes of a place. The physical context deals with the properties that are specific to that region in terms of environment, climate, geography, neighborhood, and community. The cultural context addresses the specifics of the people, values, customs, and way of life of that place. This raises the question that if architecture is for the people then how can an architect who does not understand those people design in a way that is responsive to their needs?

**issues and positions** >> More specifically, the main idea that this thesis attempts to address is the question: can architecture successfully respond to a culture by understanding the physical and cultural context within which it exists? If architecture is generally for people, how can it sensitively respond to their values and ways of life? It is through better understanding the values of a certain group of people and their culture that responsive architecture is created.

What exactly is culture and how can it be defined and rigorously investigated? In order to understand what to be responsive to it is first essential to understand the ideas of what culture is. According to Luke Eric Lassiter in *Invitation to Anthropology:* “culture is a shared and negotiated system of meaning informed by knowledge that people learn and put into practice by interpreting experience and generating behavior.” In order to facilitate an understanding of culture, it can be broken into three main categories which are social values, cultural history, and environmental context. These categories can be used to establish a framework for analyzing culture.
There are two more important questions provoked by the thesis idea. First of all, how can a culture or group of people be better understood? It is simple to say that they should be understood, but this question addresses the process by which the main values of a culture can be observed, articulated, and understood. The question does not search for the complexities of anthropological studies, although these studies can be of great value, but for an understanding through a cultural inventorying process. This process is made up of methods such as interviews, observation, and comparative analysis. At the same time it is of utter importance to understand the validity of each of those methods. Also, it is understood that knowing a culture and its complexities completely can take a lifetime.

Secondly, how can the outcome of understanding the culture be translated into architectural terms and eventually into a built form? What are the most important elements of the culture that must be addressed within the design? The degree to which architecture is responsive is directly related to the understanding of the given group of people. An example of this is the idea of how personal space impacts the design of a particular building differently in the USA than in Mexico. This impact has the ability to deal with spatial layout, spatial relationships, and the material selection of the space. The question addresses how those cultural ideas can make the transition from mere ideas into a culturally responsive architecture?

research >> The first study at the beginning of the school year dealt with precedent studies pertaining to the thesis topic. The precedent studies provided a better understanding of architects who incorporate the idea of understanding a place into their designs and what that means. Not all the precedent studies have the same level of success. The studies brought about an understanding that not all architecture responds to place in the same way.

The Tjibaou Cultural Center designed by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop is an example of these ideas of inventorying cultural attributes and translating those into an architectural language. Piano was asked to design a cultural center that would pay “homage to traditional kanak culture” in Noumea, New Caledonia. (fig. #1&2) It is in this project that Renzo Piano addresses the culture of the place. Renzo Piano went to the extent of enlisting an anthropologist and a specialist in pacific culture. He states this about the project: “It meant taking off the mental clothes of the european architect and steeping myself in the world of the people of the pacific.” Through this deeper awareness and understanding of culture he was able to design a cultural center that was effectively responsive to the people and place. It is clear that the
idea was not to mimic the formal language of the contextual architecture. The goal was to begin by understanding the people and using that understanding to inform the design. By categorizing the areas in which the design was responsive to the culture it is clear to see that this project addresses the majority of the cultural ‘system of meaning’ articulated earlier (social values, cultural history, and environmental context). This is not necessarily true of all projects and does not necessarily mean that all projects must be responsive to the same extent as this one.

In the Strawberry Vale School located in Victoria, Canada, Patkau Architects are responsive to the environmental context. The school, which is located in a wooded area, is responsive to the site and the environmental conditions. It has a strong relationship to the natural world and emphasizes the visual connection between the interior and exterior spaces. (fig. #1) This project uses basic North American building conventions such as a steel structure. The framing and cladding of the walls is done in timber which is the most renewable material on the North Pacific Coast. Also, in New Vernacular Architecture, Patkau Architects states that “in line with the desire for minimal intervention, natural forces have been harnessed for heating, cooling, and lighting the school.” This design is responsive to its users through an understanding of the environmental context.

Michael Graves’ Miramar Hotel is the third example that was studied. (fig. #2) It is located in El Gouna, Egypt. This design is not responsive to the culture in the same way that the project by Renzo Piano or Patkau Architects were. In this project, it is the fabrication techniques that are informed through the understanding of the culture. Visually speaking, the overall layout and design are uniquely Graves.

These examples show that the idea of understanding culture is being used to varying extents by architects today. The Tjibaou Cultural Center by Renzo Piano responds in a way that addresses the people, environment, symbolic, and the physical context. The Strawberry Vale School by Patkau Architects is responsive to the place, but focuses mainly on the physical context. Last of all, the Miramar Hotel by Michael Graves, merely responds by using traditional building techniques of the region. Not all architects go to the same level of sensitively responding to the people and place through the design, but their work continues to be of value in the research process. It is through understanding the larger cultural context of a place that architecture can effectively be responsive.

It is through the research in precedents that a better grasp of the thesis ideas were obtained. The following area of research dealt with anthropology. It became essential to define culture, which is
where the research in anthropology was pertinent. Luke Eric Lassiter, a former professor at Ball State University, is the author of the book *Invitation to Anthropology*. It is his definition of culture that was the basis for the thesis project. As formerly stated, he defines culture as a shared and negotiated system of meaning. This definition allows for further categorizing of the ‘system’ into the social values, cultural history, and environmental context.

The later portion of the first semester was comprised of the second and third design studies which focused on how to first understand the values of a culture and then be able to translate them into architectural terms to direct the design of the built form. The second study which is further explained in the appendix was an open air structure that grew from and represented the values of CAP culture. (page #) It began by focusing on the values of CAP and translating those into the built form. The most important values were openness, visibility, details, and structure. It was through the different elements of the final design that each of those were addressed. (fig. #1)

The third and final design study dealt with similar ideas as the previous study, but more in depth. This study, Hispanic Community Center in Indianapolis, is also further explained in the appendix. (page #) The project began by interviewing a Hispanic pastor about the values of the Hispanics. The interview served as a directive for the project and the site selection. The project selected was a Hispanic Community Center located on the West side of Indianapolis. (fig. #2) This area has the highest concentration of Hispanics in the city. It was through the interview, observation, and literature about Hispanics that the main values were derived. The main values used were relationship oriented, visibility, and identity. Each of these are addressed through the design of the built form. The value of this project was learning how to begin to take the cultural values and translate them into a built form.

Research proved to be an essential component throughout the narrowing down of the thesis topic. The research consisted of the precedent studies and anthropological studies. That research was then applied and incorporated into the design studies which were essential to the development of the final thesis project and design.
**summary**  The first step in designing architecture that is more responsive to a particular culture is to begin to understand the culture. The process used to understand a particular culture was given the title cultural inventory. By developing the inventory it was easy to organize the information in a clear and concise manner. Also, the inventory helped to cover and obtain as much information about the culture as possible.

The information in the cultural inventory was compiled during a week long trip to Mexico City in late November of 2005. At this point in time the idea of an inventory process was fuzzy. Upon arrival in the city, interviews were scheduled with several people. The goal was to interview about eight people that lived within the Arboledas community. The questions asked in the interviews were not directly about architecture, rather more about the family structure and the social aspects of the culture. Through the interviews, it became evident that the best method for compiling and organizing the material was through the use of categories. Throughout the project, the categorization of the cultural material is referred to as the cultural inventory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>social values_</th>
<th>cultural history_</th>
<th>environmental context_</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>family unit</td>
<td>attachment to past</td>
<td>climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food</td>
<td>plazas and haciendas</td>
<td>location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>table</td>
<td>murals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sociable people</td>
<td>materials and texture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>color</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cultural inventory is divided into the three main categories that were mentioned in the thesis topic section of this report. Those three categories are the social values, cultural history, and environmental context. An extensive cultural inventory was compiled by using and organizing the information obtained through the interviews and observations. This compilation of information later became the basis for the design of the community center. The following pages will show a summary of the cultural inventory. The use of quotes and pictures both validates and provides a greater understanding of the middle-class culture in Arboledas, Mexico. The quotes from the interviews were translated from Spanish to English as accurately as possible.
family unit

“all celebrations, holidays, and family gatherings revolve around food” (Rosy Romo)

“every other week we get together with my family and it always involves food” (Rosy Romo)
food

"all celebrations, holidays, and family gatherings revolve around food" (Rosy Romo)

+i personally experienced this in that i typically met people and interviewed them over a meal (observation)

+food vendors and restaurants are located all throughout the area (observation)

+food=gathering
table

“the table is the primary gathering space during our family reunions – the men gather at the table while the women gather in the kitchen and socialize as they cook” (Rosy Romo)

“two essential spaces within Mexican architecture are the food preparation and eating areas” (Enrique Rodriguez)
sociable people

"we enjoy parties and any event that is an excuse to get together, socialize, and eat" (Hector Romo)

"i think it is important to mention that Mexicans are friendly and have warm personalities" (Isela Rodriguez)

"friendships are extremely important" (Victor Curiel)

"Mexican architecture is made up of open, comfortable, personal, and warm spaces" (Enrique Rodriguez)
attachment to the past

“we have a tendency to be emotionally attached to our past and our country’s history”
“there is a strong sense of admiration for the aztec culture”
(Rafael)

“Mexican architecture is a mixture of spanish and aztec influence”
(Victor Curiel)
-as a result of the spanish conquest of Mexico in 1519
plazas and haciendas

+originally brought to Mexico by the Spanish
+spaces empty into large open gathering areas
murals

“murals are used extensively throughout the city...they typically tell a story about a certain aspect of the culture” (Cristina Curiel)

“many of the murals are located in the center of Mexico City and serve as a form of expression” (Victor Curiel)
materials and texture

+the materials and textures are strongly influenced by the pyramids from the aztec period (observation)
“the use of color comes from the aztecs” (Víctor Curiel)

“cheerful and colorful places are important aspects that I look for in Mexican architecture – color is seen in many aspects of Mexican life” (Héctor Romo)
environmental context >> The environmental context section of the cultural inventory deals mainly with the climate and geographic information of the area as well as the site and neighborhood specifics. The site and neighborhood analysis is further explained in the final design portion of this report. While this is not culture specific, it is location specific. Vernacular architecture is shaped by these environmental influences, which, over time are assimilated as a cultural norm. Designing a community center that is of Mexico must also take into account the environmental factors that directly impact the design.

Mexico City has a mild temperature. Many people believe it to have a hot and humid climate, but in all reality it is the opposite. There are many areas of Mexico where it is hot and humid, but the elevation is what gives Mexico City its mild climate. The city sits in a valley at approximately 7,400 feet above sea level. This location and the rapidly growing size have been the major cause of the pollution problem. As a result of the city being located in a valley, it experiences what is known as thermal inversion in which the pollution becomes trapped in the valley. The average temperature at midday ranges from 65 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit with low humidity. The year is divided into a rainy season and a dry season. The rainy season is typically from June to September during which it will rain in the evening most days. The dry season, on the other hand, is from October to May.
summary >> One of the difficulties in discussing and understanding culture is the fact that much of it is not tangible. In other words, it can be difficult to express the ideas of the culture in a tangible or visual way. That is where this portion of the project proved to be helpful. After understanding the important values of the culture, it was essential to begin to understand how those currently manifest themselves within the built environment. This is where Mexican architecture books became useful. The following images of architecture in Mexico convey six main themes in which the cultural values are interwoven. The images are the architectural manifestation of the social values, cultural history, and environmental context in Mexico. The six main themes that were set-up in this portion of the project became the basis for the design decisions of the final design for the community center.

“the following are what i consider to be characteristics of mexican architecture:
-textures
-material usage (stone)
-colorful surfaces
-water features (define social spaces)
-spaces flooded with natural light
-large walls that bring importance and power to the place
-murals (tell a story)
-tall spaces (provide a cooler environment)”

(Victor Curiel)
exterior gathering spaces
cultural inventory: architectural manifestation

blurring interior and exterior
color / pure geometries
Arboledas

community center

color

light

density

‘courtyard’

private

architectural language

public

responsive design decisions

sensitive

stone

stucco

texture
Community Center >> The selection of the project that would be used for studying the thesis ideas was a part of the overall process. The goal was to make the trip to Mexico City and through interviews and observation develop a project that would be adequate for exploring culturally responsive architecture. It quickly became apparent that the best project would be one that was public in nature, while also accommodating some semi-public functions. By beginning to understand how sociable the middle-class Mexicans in the Arboledas area were, it became evident that a community center would be a perfect addition to the community.

The specific programmatic requirements of the project were derived using the cultural inventory and the understanding of the culture. It was not enough to merely choose a building type and program and then respond to the culture through the design. Responsive architecture seeks to respond in every aspect possible which is why the program was informed and directed by the cultural values. After understanding the cultural inventory, it should be apparent that the program is responsive to the culture.

Community Center Program >>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function Program</th>
<th>Area (sq. ft.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Floor</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information desk</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main gathering 'courtyard'</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-size gathering spaces (5)</td>
<td>1,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafe</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-purpose room</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-purpose storage</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food preparation / gathering</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generators / storage</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom (1)</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day-care (2)</td>
<td>1,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness / social center</td>
<td>1,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrooms</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Floor</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billiard / social</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storage</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrooms / showers</td>
<td>980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community center support</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms (3)</td>
<td>2,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-size gathering spaces (6)</td>
<td>1,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programmatic Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23,250</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unassignable 10%</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,325</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>25,575</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Site Information**

The site for the community center is located in the middle class area of Arboledas, Mexico. The area is a mixture of both residential and commercial properties. The proposed site is located on a main avenue which has commercial pockets along it. This site was chosen because it fit well into the area and was adjacent to a park that could be used by the community center. In reality, two different sites were selected. The main site, which is approximately 37,000 square feet, is the proposed site for the community center while the second site, which is located three houses to the North, is the proposed parking for the facility. Designing in Mexico is interesting because the density of the city makes parking extremely challenging.
1. main gathering 'courtyard'
2. cafe
3. multi-purpose room
4. multi-purpose storage
5. food preparation/gathering
6. generators
7. classroom
8. information desk
9. day-care
10. fitness / social center
11. family size gathering
spatial organization >> The overall organization of the community center responds directly to the context within which it sits. In terms of design, the building is broken up into two main portions. There is the more private portion which houses the classrooms, fitness center, daycare, and restrooms. This portion of the building responds to the lot sizes of the surrounding residential area by being broken down into three smaller portions, thereby making the scale more human. (fig. #1) The second portion of the building is the public portion which houses overtly public spaces such as the multi-purpose room, entrance, and café gathering areas. This portion addresses the scale of the commercial properties in the area by breaking with the residential organization and lot sizes.
interior gathering spaces

The spatial organization for the facility revolves around the importance of plazas and haciendas within the culture. The community center was laid out in a way that all the spaces empty out into a large central gathering space. (fig. #1) That large central gathering space is flanked on both ends by the most social functions: the fitness center and the multi-purpose room. The goal was not to mimic the traditional plazas of Mexico, but to use their concept on a smaller scale. This allowed for the elimination of small hallways which in turn provided an open feel throughout the building. Located off of the main gathering space, there are small family sized gathering spaces. These are located throughout the facility and provide a more human scale which allows for more personal and intimate conversations while still being a part of the greater whole.

The vibrancy of those main social spaces is essential for their success and was achieved through the use of architectural tools such as natural light, colors, and openness. By bringing in as much natural light as possible, the spaces are warm, bright, and comfortable. Also, the use of plants provides an excellent environment.

exterior gathering spaces

The beautiful weather in Mexico City allows for people to be outside during the majority of the year. As a result, exterior gathering spaces are also essential to the design. The massing of the facility was designed to accommodate different size gathering spaces throughout the exterior. (fig. #2) These exterior gathering spaces allow for socializing and are culturally responsive through the use of elements such as water features and seating areas. On the more private portion of the building, the massing creates niches which were designed to allow food vendors to set up their stands within them while remaining adjacent to the sidewalk.

blurring interior and exterior

The importance of blurring the interior and exterior comes from the connection with the outdoors. Again, the weather allows people to be outdoors much of the year which is why it is essential to provide that connection to the exterior. Upon entering the main entrance of the community center, there is a gathering space which is depressed into the ground. This serves to define a smaller gathering space within the main ‘courtyard’ and is completely open above to the sky. (fig. #3)

As well as this gathering space, the design of the glazing and the use of glass mullions serves to blur the interior and exterior throughout the facility. An architectural language was set up to blur the interior social spaces with the exterior. This also allows people to see into the facility which makes available views of the activities that are occurring within the vibrant spaces of the community center.
**blurring of spaces** As well as blurring the interior and exterior it was important to blur the spaces and functions within the community center. By understanding the culture, it made sense to overlap spaces and not merely use the wall as a way to formally divide what is occurring within the spaces. It was essential to allow the spaces to bleed into each other and interact. This was achieved through several methods.

The first method is by taking spaces such as the billiard balcony and cafe and allowing them to pierce their way into other spaces creating an overlapping of activities. (fig. #1) The second method to blur the functions of the community center was to pay special attention to the entrances of the different functions. The use of sliding doors allows functions to be completely open to the main ‘courtyard’ unless there is a need to close them off. The third method was to begin to create an architectural language to identify the points of interaction. The wood slats used throughout the facility are not merely an aesthetic decision, but a decision that responds to the culture. The wood slats are placed in certain areas to encourage the interaction of smells and sounds permeating from one space into another. The best example of this is in the food preparation area. The food preparation area is pulled out into the main gathering space and the wood slats allow for the interaction of smells and sounds between that space and the gathering space.

**color / pure geometries** In designing the community center it was apparent from the cultural inventory that color and pure geometries are an essential part of Mexican architecture. It is the colors that relate to the Aztec culture and give the middle-class Mexicans in Arboledas a sense of pride and attachment to their past. The use of colors and the pure geometries in the design are architectural tools that were used and constantly at the forefront of the design decisions.

**textures** As well as color and pure geometries, textures were also at the forefront of the design process. The use of materials is fairly simple, but full of texture and patterns. The main functions within the community center are painted stucco. By using stucco, there is a purity that is perceived at a distance and a detail and texture up close. (fig. #3) Also, the use of stone in areas provides a different texture from the stucco. The stone is used on the walls within the more private portion of the building as well as the water features on the exterior. The textures of the stone and stucco are complemented with textures of wood used for the roofing beams. All of these materials are then contrasted up against the smoother texture of the steel used for the light balcony and the glazing that provides the blurring of the interior and exterior spaces.
rotate report 90 degrees for community center perspectives
"I think a community center in Arboledas should consist of large open spaces where the people can gather." (Victor Curiel)

final design: culturally responsive community center arranged around main gathering
“Mexican architecture is made up of open, comfortable, personal, and warm spaces.” (Enrique Rodriguez)

vibrancy of main social space

final design: culturally responsive community center
“Friendships are extremely important.” (Victor Curiel)
+ food vendors and restaurants are located all throughout Mexico City. (observation)

vendor spaces

final design: culturally responsive community center
“we enjoy parties and any event that is an excuse to gather together and socialize.” (Hector Romo)

final design: culturally responsive community center
billiard area blurred to exterior
+water features define gathering spaces and are used frequently
(observation)

residential side water feature

final design: culturally responsive community center
“Mexican architecture is a blend of Spanish and Aztec influence.” (Victor Curiel)
“every time that we get together as a family it always involves food. — us women gather in the kitchen” (Rosy Romo)
“two essential spaces within Mexican architecture are the food preparation and eating areas.” (Enrique Rodríguez)

final design: culturally responsive community center
reflections >> As I reflect upon the past year of studies in architecture, I am proud to see where I arrived. The journey had its fair share of ups and downs from my hard drive crashing to the feeling after having given the last presentation in the College of Architecture and Planning. I am extremely content with having selected this thesis topic. It taught me that the best research and explorations result from picking a topic you are passionate about. Culture has always been one of those topics for me. Growing up in Mexico City with American parents has given me the opportunity to look at the world through a different lens. Also, the experiences gave me the passion to explore culturally responsive architecture in Arboledas, Mexico City. Despite the difficulties, I am confident that the year long exploration will impact the present as well as the future.

So what happens next and how will the exploration be used in the future? The world is growing faster than we can imagine and everyday it becomes more and more international. Global integration is providing architectural opportunities within foreign countries, yet that integration is causing cities to become indistinguishable. In an attempt to respond to the people of those countries, architects must develop a process for responding to other cultures. The thesis project was the first step in that exploration of being able to identify the key values within a culture and then using those to direct and inform the design process. The cultural inventory (social values, cultural history, and environmental context), which was refined throughout the year, provides a clear and concise manner for organizing the cultural information. I am confident that wherever God takes me in my career, I will have the opportunity to further refine the inventory and acquire a greater understanding of the most effective way to translate the cultural values into a built form.

As is the case with all projects, there are always successes and failures. The strongest and clearest part of this project was the cultural inventory. It was through the interviews that this portion was developed and it proved to be effective. I found that going through the process of interviewing people was extremely beneficial. It was not merely a part of to the people that will use the designs on a daily basis. Therefore, it was
the process, but it was a chance to delve into a culture I took for granted and gain a better understanding of it. If architecture is for the people and the users, then it seems to me that the basis for good design is to be able to understand those people. There is definitely a difference between good design and responsive design. Aesthetically pleasing designs are nothing unless they are able to get to the root of responding the research regarding how to better understand a culture that was successful. The final design was by no means a failure, but it was much harder than I thought it would be to make the translation from values into a built form. I wish I could count the hours that I sat thinking about how to successfully respond to the culture that I had learned so much about. Not just successfully, but how to do it and remain sensitive to the place and people all at the same time. In addition to that, if I had more time, I would have liked to put more furniture and people in the images. The project was about the spaces and people, which could have been conveyed more effectively through the use of those elements.

Overall, I am proud of the final product of this project. It was exciting, inspiring, and I now have a greater passion for the ideas in the topic that I explored. The report will soon be turned in and I will go through graduation. Following graduation, I may never touch the project again except for explaining and showing it, but I am certain that the ideas will follow throughout my career in architecture. I will constantly look for the opportunity to further explore and refine the thesis topic ideas. I guess after it is all said and done, having grown up in between to very different cultures, one could say that it was a search to further define and understand who I really am.
The objective of the second study was to push the thesis ideas by further understanding them and testing them through the design of a small scale open air structure. The site for this project is located directly to the northeast of Frog Baby. (fig. #1) The goal was to first understand culture within CAP and what makes it unique in comparison to the cultures within the different colleges at Ball State University. After understanding the culture, the ideas and principles were translated into a built form as a presentation and display area. The proposed built form serves to convey CAP culture to the rest of Ball State University.

Comparative observation was the main technique used to specifically understand the values within CAP. In comparing this building to the other buildings on campus it became apparent that CAP focused on the materiality and building components and how they all begin to interact. On the other hand, the majority of the other buildings around campus cover up the building components. (fig. #2) Also, it became evident that the majority of the education in CAP revolves around crits. Display areas in CAP are flexible while they are much more formal and organized throughout the university. The last of the priorities addresses the openness within the building. The crits in CAP are open meaning that anyone can stop to listen to the presentation. This creates the feeling that education is open to anyone in the halls or in the building regardless of them being in the class. This is extremely different in AJ, where the crits all take place behind doors and walls. There is not the same ease at stopping and listening to presentations.

These ideas and understanding were key in the design of the built form. The next question was how can those values be translated into a built form? The first idea was how the values of CAP drove the selection of the site. It was selected because the site is very public and the people passing by can be drawn into the experience. The ability to see how something goes together and the building components drove the idea of the visible structure. Visibility of connections allows the users to better grasp the way that the building components go together. (fig. #3) Openness was also a focus when thinking about the design for the specific display cases. The construction and detailing of them by using wood slats allows for people walking by to see through them and into the presentation space. It is through boundaries, visibility, spatial configuration, and detailing that the open air structure was able to better respond to the culture of CAP.
The objective of the third project was to look at the Hispanic culture in Indianapolis. The project strived to understand the Hispanic culture and how architecture can be responsive to it through the design of a community center. The process of understanding the culture was comprised of one interview with a Hispanic and observation. The site selection for the community center (Washington and Belleview Pl) was informed mainly by the interview.(fig. #1) It was from the information that was obtained from the interview, observation, and the literature that the main values were derived. The main values are as follows:

- **Visibility - ability to see the activities occurring within a space**
- **Identity - architectural element to display posters and pictures**

The task was then to take those values and translate them into the built form. The relationship oriented value directed the overall layout of the building. As a result of the Hispanics being relationship oriented, the entire facility is laid out around the main lobby or heart/hub area (fig. #2) with smaller gathering areas located throughout the building.

The second value, visibility, dealt with the ability for the users or people passing by to be able to see the activities occurring within the community center.(fig. #3) This was addressed by the placement of the different functions throughout the building and the location of glazing. The glazing in the spaces allows for visibility into the community center for the people that are driving past it. Also, the visibility within the spaces of the community center is important. One area of great importance was the kitchen. It was brought up in both the literature and the interview that food is important therefore the kitchen was incorporated into the lobby space so that the users could see the activities occurring within it.

The third and final value was that of identity. Through observation, it became apparent that the Hispanics value their identity. The area located near the proposed site is mainly used for commercial. It was interesting to see the signs on each of the restaurants and stores and how they spoke of the identity of the people. This was addressed in the design by providing a space upon which the Hispanics could display posters or signs about their home country.(fig. #4) Those signs could include the celebrations of holidays in their home country or even within the United States.

It was through understanding the values of the Hispanics that the most important aspects of the culture came to the surface. Those values were then translated into an architectural language and used to direct the design of a community center that responds to the Hispanic community.


Mead, Margaret. The Study of Culture at a Distance. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953.


