

Free Zoning: Central Park Plaza, Buffalo, NY

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Now more than ever, buildings are outliving their intended use. Retail typologies change every 10-15 years. This rift is a major factor in the production of construction waste with significant ecological consequences. Architects, planners and administrators however are struggling to acknowledge and theorize the rift between the lifespan of buildings and their original use. Free Zoning reconsiders architectural design through the lens of these observations using the derelict strip mall Central Park Plaza in Buffalo, New York as a case study.

Having been vacant for years, Central Park Plaza is now infamous as a site of crime. Built in 1957 on the site of a former rock quarry, the strip mall thrived for the typical time span of around 15 years before it predictably lost its retail capability as new shopping typologies replaced existing ones. The City of Buffalo, however, still treats its demise as an unfortunate, unforeseen event. The repeated searches for a commercial developer only underscore the inability to understand the changed economic, social and political context.

How could the intrinsic tension between the physical longevity of architecture and the fast paced rhythm of business models be channeled into productive development? How could we reconsider wasted buildings aside from vacancy or demolition? Instead of relying on a single commercial developer, we propose to declare the site a zone of radical deregulation or Free Zoning as means to kick-start a process of continual construction from the bottom up

Numerous historic precedents show us how this strategy can spur of new growth and complexity. The former state-run Roman amphitheater in Lucca Italy, for example, became an inhabited part of the city fabric by the interventions of countless independent private citizens who moved into the obsolete structure in the middle ages. It was common in Roman and medieval times for buildings to be used as quarries for new buildings. Existing buildings were viewed afresh, in an ambitious act of re-interpretation.

Central Park Plaza on the other hand has no spatial value in its current form. Its value lies rather in its building components, its capable foundation and its infrastructural connections to city services. We declare the whole site a

building quarry of its existing building materials. Considering the site as a zone of deregulation will trigger a radical reconfiguration of these building components within the geometric pattern of the existing foundation.

Instead of relying on a single financial investment and economic profit which the strip mall has traditionally done, this architectural proposal would produce its attraction though flexible ownership and Free Zoning.

We propose the following measures:

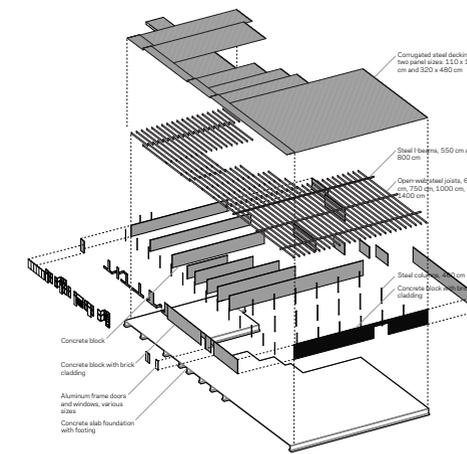
- 1) All building materials get demounted and sorted. They can be used for free for any new building activity on site.
- 2) The foundation is the most expensive building element to build as well as to demolish. We propose to use the existing foundation as a seedbed for new construction.
- 3) All uses are allowed. No zoning variances are required.

This model would not require any significant monetary investment. Instead of designing a new form or proposing a specific use, this proposal shifts architectural design towards orchestrating the legal and economic framework in which new form and use can emerge to address the pressing issue of obsolete and derelict landscapes.

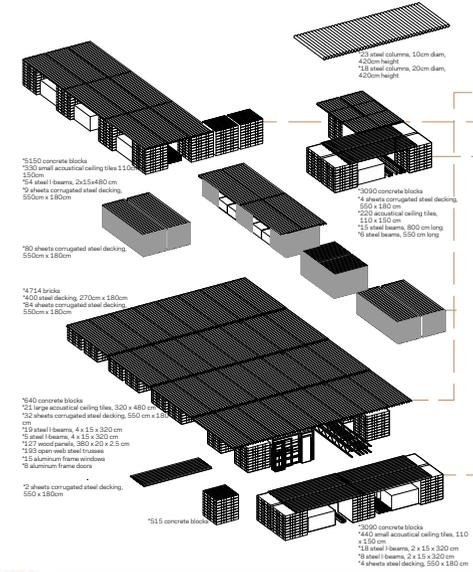
1. Central Park Plaza, As Is



2. Build-up of Existing Strip Mall



3. Building Component Inventory & Storage



4. Potential New Urban Build-up on Strip Mall Site Over Time

