COMPLEX PROJECTS | CHICAGO GRADUATION STUDIO

The relationship between research and design

For the Complex Projects Chicago Studio, the main focus of research was the West side of Chicago: its outskirts. Three research locations were selected: Garfield Park, the Lime Line and Midway Airport. My focus was on Midway Airport, its function in the city and its relation to its surrounding neighborhood.

Chicago is a main transportation hub for the USA and Illinois. The city itself though lacks connectivity – more precisely on (public) accessibility, visual and functional seamlessness, and social coherence.

One reason for this is the city’s monocentricity: all infrastructure is focused towards the Loop, resulting in an ignorance of every alternative infrastructural potential, such as the states extensive green infrastructure and the potential of a collaboration between 2 important city nodes: the airports of O’Hare and Midway.

Transportation is a very important factor for connectivity, so the link between Midway Airport and the existing Lime Line was found and concluded relevant to be elaborated upon.

Introducing this North-South connection between the airports via an existing train line surrounded by an extensive park-like environment provides a main design approach for the future of the city, solving its internal connectivity issues, and incorporating the city’s outskirts. The park or woodland guides connection for the city; design solutions are provided in and with the park, leaving existing short term thinking city planning behind.

As mentioned before, transportation is an important factor to develop in West Chicago. A main transportation hub along the Lime Line is Midway Airport, and thus was a potential to develop. Midway is situated right in the middle of an average suburban neighborhood; a rather strange situation. Midway airport functions as an island in this city’s grid, with no functional or visual relation to its surroundings, and thus both city functions do not benefitting from one another.

Furthermore, recognizing the potential of seeing O’Hare and Midway as one airport gives the opportunity to improve their connection that can result in a secondary destination than the monocentric Loop, giving more diversity to the West.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACCESSIBILITY</th>
<th>SEAMLESSNESS</th>
<th>SOCIAL COHESION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 airports connected, functioning as 1</td>
<td>Park connects different functions (aesthetically)</td>
<td>The intervention acts as a destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public North-South transit connection</td>
<td>Airport-neighborhood relation is more public</td>
<td>Park incorporates local functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New ways of transportation, not only car oriented</td>
<td>Airport, train station (and neighborhood) share program</td>
<td>“Always open to everyone”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Midway airports functions as a bus stop” because of only national flights</td>
<td>The parks blends into the airport, train station and neighborhood.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More zoomed in onto Midway Airport, the project implies the connection between the train station, the airport, the park and the neighbors can use the complex.

Exploiting the green infrastructure as an important design parameter provided the overall shape of the project. The goal was to blend the building in the park environment, always giving the user the idea that it is in the park when it’s in the public airport environment.

The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)

The Complex Project Graduation Studio focuses on the finding design guides for an architectural object in an urban environment. The conclusion of extensive urban analysis states that connectivity should be elaborated upon, and so I have as described before.

The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

Because Complex Projects is a research studio, investigating a location in an alien urban situation is graded as very relevant. Thus we spent a lot of time doing that.

\[P1\]
\[P2\] “P1.5” was an informal and public exhibition to present our masterplan;
\[P3\] P2 was about the final masterplan and the first architectural design plans;
\[P4\] At P3 we showed a more precise plan of the building, and the first technical drawings;
\[P5\] P4 is the final design.

I was able to follow the approach of the studio quite well until P3. After that I started doubting about a lot of things and I was hard for me be clear on design decisions. Thus, I have gone in wrong directions every now and then. Because of this, the technical design was postponed longer than I would have wanted. Only a couple of weeks before P4, I was able to be decisive on plans, sections and circulations. Climate principles and detailing ideas have been part of the design process quite early on, but because of architectural struggles I have only been able to work them out at the last moment, regrettably.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context

As I mentioned before, connectivity was the main problem to attach in West Chicago. Especially the park and the Lime Line provide future opportunities for Chicago’s West Outskirts citizens. People with for example lower income can more easily find jobs in other parts of the town because of the quicker connection, resulting in a more extensive exchange of jobs and and people that can do those jobs throughout the city.

The park provides opportunities where people can meet and recreate. In the existing urban outskirts there is very little public space that is used. The North-South park being a destination will be a clear point of interest for recreation.

Thirdly, the North-South connection implements new ways of getting around. As the city’s existing way of getting around is solely the car, public transit and alternative – more sustainable – ways are possible in the park.

The airport – train station functions as part of the park, and thus indirectly touches upon the topics described above. People from around the city are able to use the airport for dinnertime, taxi services, public transit, architectural experience etc. Midway airport is no longer an alien in the city, but has blended in to make it usable for everyone.