P4 Reflection

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Studio

Theme
Complex Projects - Chicago studio
Main mentor
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Title

Title of the graduation project
Mid-City Central: a new perspective on airport-centered communities in the 21st century

Reflection

Objective
The aim of the reflection is to look back and see if my approach worked, to understand the “how and why”, and subsequently to learn from this. The reflection will contain an answer to the main research question and to what extent the approach did or did not work. The following aspects have been included: the relationship between research and design, the relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the specific subject chosen within this framework, and the relationship between the project and the wider social context

Urban strategy
Overall, the project consisted of several phases where we worked on different scale levels and had different focal points where research was concerned. On an urban level, we questioned the relationship between the design location Midway Airport and the rest of the city, as well as to its direct surroundings and to remote sites of interest, such as the main airport O’Hare. Our general conclusion was that the Midway Airport area had gotten disconnected and was in need of (re-)establishment of these connections by means of an urban strategy. We thus asked ourselves: how can we (re)connect Midway airport to its surroundings in such a way that the presence of Chicagoan suburbia and international
airport can become mutually beneficial? On the smaller scale of individual design this was a question that kept intriguing me. I was very much fascinated by this relationship, or lack thereof, between the airport and the suburban neighborhood rigidly surrounding it.

**Research question**

The question that I originally asked myself at the start of my design process, is how housing for the middle class blue collar society can be re-evaluated and redesigned as a part of the urban connection between airport, suburbs and the rest of the city. My aim was to come up with a viable and practical alternative to the current model of suburban dwelling in the proximity of Midway Airport Chicago and develop a model suitable to be applied to similar airport-residential relationships. As such the link between research on how Chicago functions as a city, and how Midway Airport is related to this is brought back into the design from the largest, all the way up to the smallest of scales. In hindsight however, it wasn’t so much the relation with a specific target group like the blue collar middle class society that needed to be evaluated, but more with the neighborhood as an abstract entity. As such I focussed on the development on a combination of functions and attractive features that would induce a diversity of people, be it local inhabitants, passers-by or international travellers. Working from the assumption that these different people can already be found in the area now, but do not have a reason to stay, or are invisible as they get into their personal cars and stay to themselves, not having a reason to be present in the public domain, it to me was a logical step to focus on making the flows of these people through the area visible and attractive to connect to.

**Individual design**

Since the airport is located in such a highly residential-oriented neighborhood, to include residential area into the design seemed like a way to improve the connection and integration of airport and local community. With single-family housing being the predominantly preferred way to live in the United States, this residential development was envisioned as a new model of the existing single-family housing model. Of course, to become a truly progressive and resilient airport it would be most obvious to adjust this model to best fit its new, airport oriented environment. As a result, I investigated the characteristics of the single-family dwelling and how it could be adapted, as well as the characteristics of the airport and through which addition of functions it could best connect to all target groups. For the development of the dwellings specifically, I focussed on how they could maintain their independent nature within a larger project and how I could ensure a private garden or other connection to an outdoor area for as many dwellings as possible. Besides that, a vital part of the project is the added value that an airport nearby can provide to the dwellings specifically. Instead of only hearing the planes fly over every so often and never actually seeing any of the action, and not being within actual walking distance of the terminal or any of the other related functions, with this project I aimed to enhance the accessibility, proximity and enjoyability of the airport through dwelling. For example, interior and exterior green pockets between the four buildings can provide not only enjoyable functional connections between program, but can function as a sightseeing platform for airplane spotters.

**Social context**

With this project, by embracing the airport ambiance on the one hand, and through technical advancements such as extra sound insulation and air filtering on the other hand, the landing strips could become an experience ranging from the most wanted penthouse view, to a day out with the kids, to the decor of a barbecue with friends. As airports are becoming more important in our daily activities and are shifting towards a more central role in city dynamics, the most significant part of a city, being its inhabitants and their dwellings, should adapt accordingly to remain a healthy and attractive city. Through designing dwellings next to an airport, I attempted to re-evaluate dwelling as we know it now and assess how it could be a part of a potentially more dynamic, perhaps even nomadic future.