West-Chicago Graduation Studio
Complex Projects
June 2015

Urban Lab
2050 MidCity Central

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The Chair of Complex Projects (CP) targets all scales of the architectural thinking, details, building, city, and region. Expanding the knowledge about design and dense urban areas development, broads the mind and thinking of future architects.

Cities are increasingly transformed by strategic interventions rather than stable long-term Master plans. Those interventions result in complex developments where multiple public and private interests must be investigated and negotiated simultaneously. The decreasing role of the Public entity, after the liberal policy especially in old Europe and US economies, has stimulated the emergence of public-private partnerships with the aim to develop interventionism. This gave rise to projects that redefine traditional urban and architectural aspects of our professional reality.

Transportation, universities, healthcare centers, architectural and urban interventions on outskirts or on former industrial areas and harbors are examples of Complex Projects. Those allow private interest to exploit commercial opportunities by dealing with public interest, which demands resources to improve and develop strategic city sites. However, to achieve balance, projects must have a way to manage and negotiate diverse factors. Due to this reality, the design becomes a communication tool where the designer takes a planner role, spokesperson or communicator, and eventually, an Architect.

As a result, the approach of the Chair challenges the strict distinction between Architecture, Urbanism, Planning and their traditional, perhaps linear roles. Studies on the emergence and development of urban areas through Architectural Projects give an understanding of the dynamics and the reasoning involved in these highly complex processes. The ultimate goal is generating analytical and critical thinking skills next to the traditional design, allowing future architects to successfully engage the multiple Complex Project demands.

- Prof. if. Kees Kaan
reflection

REFLECTION
The value of a “complex” research

It happens, from time to time, that an architect find himself struggling in the aim of participating in that natural process which is the evolution of society, through the redefinition of an element, such the built/unbuilt environment, that we believe more than any other relates and could actively affect the social patchwork that inhabits it. In such a perspective, the great dilemmas of the contemporary American city offers the best opportunity to stress out this tension and involve the graduating student in the definition of a design which is not only a mere fact of shapes or spaces, but the more deep achievement in understanding an ever evolving specific reality. And possibly to intervene, if needed.

Complex Project has been investigating the Chicago case for years. Emblematic representation of the American Dream and its controversies, the city nowadays seems stuck in a condition of no perspectives, striving between an endless but any longer sustainable iconic capitalistic development and the even more pressing shrinking economies that affect the political as much the societal dynamics of Chicago. Trying to comprehend such a conflict, the Graduating studio questioned this relation in its most effective representation, the Loop and the West Side, contingent parts of a unique urban reality, nevertheless as distant as desert and the sea.

Starting from the proposal of new infrastructural rings of public transports set by a local ONG, Complex Project Chicago Studio developed a series of analysis aimed to gain a deeper view over the critical condition of Chicago western neighbourhoods. Why the need of such an infrastructure? The expected achievements? Where are the roots of this initiative and, more than other, which degree of effectiveness will be obtain, and over which scale? A two-months-long research dug into those questions unravelling the complex dynamics at the base of the current abandonment, urban deterioration and social decay even beyond the apparent proximity with the city Loop, informing a wide understanding of the West Side context that would have become then the roots for a conscious design. An awareness that the original ONG proposal lacked since the beginning.

West Side or MidCity?

Indeed, could alone a new transit line, the Lime Line, solve all the major critical issues of Chicago West Side just running across all the western neighbourhoods and linking the extremities of the existing transit network? Even if the first reactions could be extremely positive and elicit the natural enthusiasm for the changes led by the progress, the statement demands in itself a prospectus of analysis that no one ever produced, leading once again to a stalemate of uncertainties. How can such an infrastructure be developed without a vision of what could it be, not the line itself, but the very fragment of the city in the near future?
In order to answer to such a question, the Graduation has been planned around the idea of the “what could it be” of Chicago West Side given a period of 30 years. Following a trend intended to overcome the current impasse of a number of American cities, the design evolved within the multilayered frame of a suggested future scenario, an hypothetical “Chicago 2050”, informed by the raising values of the green and sharing economies as a countermeasure against the devolving effects of the capitalistic crises of our time. A scenario that is the physical translation of an alternative Manifesto for the emerging of new, sustainable, prosperous, public-focused, healthy American communities.

In the West Side struggle to survive despite the shrinking dynamics of the eastern rich Downtown and the western wealthy Suburbs, reduced to nothing more than a border between these two realms, the Manifesto intervenes to carve in this leftover space a third strong urban fragment, oppoed and evolution of the two aforementioned, according to four main layer of the urban organization, hierarchy of movements, the system of open spaces and the efficiency of the whole organism.

In this perspective is therefore possible to reframe the role of such infrastructure in a no man area as part of a wider reflection over the current condition of the post-industrialized city, as the constitutive element in the quest for an effective shift in the American society. Thus not the Lime Line in se, but as the triggering component of a comprehensive urban, a social, economic revolution capable to explicit a new identity in an abandoned “border” land, a characterization though intended to express and anticipate a new generation of Urbanity emancipated by the actual definiton of the American city. The “complex” therefore will be no longer how to reconnect the West Side with the Loop, how to realize a new set of transit connections, but how to transform the West Side in something new, a powerful, potentially independent, alternative: MidCity

Given such a long-term perspective, then, the need for the pragmatic actuation of such a vision led to a more accurate definition of steps and decisions. First of all, the infrastructure: the reconsideration of the West Side in such a wider understanding claimed the revision of the originally proposed set of interventions, deviating the main focus from an axis coming from nowhere and reaching nowhere in a north-south direction towards indeed the possibility of rapidly linking through the same corridor the two major Chicago airports, the international gate and the continental hub. A new sort of more powerful, stronger, permeating dynamics could therefore invest the West Side, now as an effective infrastructural centre of Chicago economic flows and space for real changes.

In order to foster an effective chain of events, we envisioned the re-establishment of the collective dimension as the key for success. A strategy that aims to reconcile a society torn apart by the ongoing economic crisis, and through the idea of sharing strive to introduce a new way, more participative, more active, more sustainable to live the city, appropriate the urban realm, take advantage of the opportunities that it has to offers, create a different, prosperous path towards future.

The proximity becomes then a founding principle in framing such a transformation, and new concentrated urban realities arise in the form of defined, condensed districts, absorbing the deleterious waste of the present urban sprawl while regenerating with an overabundance of relations a framed existing tissue in the re-established dimension of what is urban and what is not.

In this process, the stage is set for the MidCity
Manifesto revolution, a space of utopic actuation and experimentation over the possible consequences of alternative sustainable and efficient economies.

A projection into the different, in the yet-to-come, intended to affect all the level of MidCity reality and open the stage for the student to trigger that participative tension as the redefinition of a society and its dynamics.

**Framing the shift**

Thus the complexity: we didn’t position ourselves in the existing pattern of human relations, issues and argumentations, we have not tried to “fix” an urban fact that is neither solvable nor desirable. Indeed, conscious of the chance offered by such a multifactorial decay, we took a position over the investigated present, and from this we have let germinate a dense set of visions as the most proper counter answers to the inefficacy of the contemporary American society. Facing the waste of the urban sprawl we imagine the dense, contained green city, to the massive speculation we oppose the sustainable urbanization, the enhancement of back-to-the-nature culture against the junk culture, the advancement of the collaborative “collective” instead of the consuming individualistic ego. A range of criticalities that define West Side (as a number of other American realities), a toolset of harsh turnabouts to create then something different.

Achieved such a background, how to cope then, to work with this projection into the future? Is the elaboration of dystopic urban lifestyles the key towards the proper design? The assumption of unthinkable technologies as the funding element of a new urbanity? The exasperation of the known typologies, or the creation of new ones?

Since the beginning, I’ve believed that such a process could have not been worked out without a conspicuous dose of pragmatism.

If 2050 it’s our destination, still the 2015 is where our MidCity revolution should start and so the big shift that we want to impress in the “American condition”. It became thus clear how then the matter is not the creation of something that “will fit”, but the definition of what “could start”. Taking advantage of the infrastructural set of physical transformations, I researched the possibility of triggering local processes of cultural evolution capable of framing the shift towards the idea of MidCity.

In order to do so, I assumed the cogent criticalities posed by the current economic crisis as the evident quest for new business models, capable to unlink whole fragment of the city from fickle one-man companies while providing the space for local economies to organize and emerge. An approach that aims to rethink the existing typology of the working space, reshaping its organization in order to grasp different dynamics, triggering an evolution of relations in a deprived area in the perspective of the MidCity 2050 Manifesto. From a context of pressing de-industrialization and lack of top-down opportunities, the solution is no longer to attract and set new companies, re-enacting the same uncertainties of the past, but the creation of new set of tools capable indeed to empower the initiative of individuals, to allow everyone the possibility to create and formulate their own path, or more pragmatically their own business.

This could be possible only with a new model of business, locally rooted, flexible, virtually over connected, expression and a concrete possibility of the raising sharing economy. Started as an objection to the current economic world crisis, the need of “alternatives solutions” to the lack of economic resources, means and opportunity is nowadays leading to the germination of innovative mind-set that find in aggregation a powerful instrument to answer to the pressing privations of our time.

Thus, following the raise of these new dynamics, I believe that this emerging evolution could
even be framed in a space that cannot any longer considered simply as a conventional workplace, but as an infrastructure that enhance indeed creative relations, promote connections, collaboration and progression delivering common tools to face the current condition and reinvent the future. A space of services, a hub of facilities, a place where, according to the sharing economy principles, nobody directly owns but yet can take advantage of everything. The research therefore led me to focus and eventually position my design in the “new” category of co-working.

The design strives to create and enhance bottom-up opportunities, constituting a structured environment of organised services and facilities where individuals, creative and professionals get advantage of the provided tools and eventually gather together, developing ideas, forming start-ups, starting a major business. Therefore, the design aims for a second goal within the frame of a shared facilities hub: to promote connection, enhance cooperation, trigger new networks of social relations. Only the combination of the two aforementioned elements could led to a successful prosperous intervention. With this mind-set stated clear, I reasoned on how to confirm the co-working principles as the instrumental elements for the characterization of a new typology.

The outcome is a building that preserve that apparent flexible genericness which is proper of the current state of co-working spaces and leaves room for possible re-interpretation through time. It starts from the appropriation of an existing former factory, converted in order to accommodate customizable working spaces, desks and laboratories, and it follows with the progressive realization of adjacent wings, as the enacted growing dynamics will require more space for more evolved services. Even apartments for creative workers are provided in order create a self-functioning complex. But what really makes the difference is the way through which the social relations are explored and enhanced: the connecting Spine, the interstitial system of customized platforms that constitutes the internal distribution system.

Key component of the whole design, the Spine is nothing more than an exploration of the possibilities offered through the radicalization of the principles that turned co-working in such a promising field. The otherwise “wasted” space of circulation is turned in a collection of opportunities, activities, environments, which trigger engagement, creativity, socialization, resulting in a condensed opportunity to gather, to come together, to share.

An approach, I believe, that could make the difference in defining a more solid characterization in architectural terms of such an emerging business typology, effectively shaping a type based over the space for creative relations and collaboration.

The building itself then becomes nothing more than the elastic prototype of a future category, rooted incubator molding the community that shall come, bringing together and practicing individuals in a new entity, that “collective” that the American cities are lacking of and that would be the key for the success of MidCity.
_WELCOME TO CHICAGO
  _THE LOOP ORIENTED CITY...
  ___WITHOUT DIRECTIONALITY

_ THE LIME LINE VISION
  _A NORTH-SOUTH AXIS
  _TRANSIT FUTURE VISION
  _TRACING A PROJECT

_WEST-SIDE, A DECADENT STORY
  _WEST SIDE, BECAUSE IT MATTERS

_CHICAGO 2050 MANIFESTO
  _THE AMERICAN PARADOX
  _AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW
  _CHICAGO REGION EXPECTATIONS
  _2050 MANIFESTO
  _2050 CATALOGUE

_TOWARDS A MIDCITY
  _WEST SIDE/MIDCITY
  _MIDCITY LAYOUT
WELCOME TO
CHICAGO
The history of Chicago, Illinois, has been crucial to the progress of America’s economic, social, cultural and political development. Since the 1850s Chicago has been the most influential metropolis in the Midwest. By 1893 Chicago was one of the most innovative progressive cities in America. The city was selected above all US cities to host the World’s Columbian Exposition to celebrate 400 years of American progress. Since then Chicago built one of the most successful commodity exchanges in the world. The University of Chicago has helped produce dozens of Nobel Laureates. Some of the most influential people in the USA are from Chicago such as Ernest Hemingway, Milton Friedman, Walt Disney, Harrison Ford, Robin Williams, Hillary Clinton, and Michelle Obama. Harold Washington was the first African-American mayor of Chicago and the first in the USA. The first skyscraper was invented here, and some of the tallest most innovative structures in the USA were built in Chicago. Architects like Daniel Burnham, Luis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and later Mies van der Rohe build impressive portfolios of work that have influenced architects around the world. One third of the fortune 500 companies in the Midwest are in Chicago, which contributes over $443 billion revenues to the economy. Until 2005 Chicago O’Hare airport was the busiest airport in the world.

But in recent years Chicago like many American cities seems to be struggling. Chicago is becoming increasingly polarized and segregated. The gap between rich and poor is widening. Crime, drug abuse, and murder rates are rising. Factories and businesses continue to close, underemployment is undermining the economy. Political scandals and corruption is eroding Chicago citizen’s trust in government and big business. Of the 15 largest cities in the USA Chicago was the only city that its population was declining. Hundreds of schools have been shut down, gangs are becoming increasingly powerful. Foreclosures rates have increased 22% in the last ten years, and the city is almost bankrupt by one of the most underfunded pensions in the USA.
The Metro lines are all heading towards downtown Chicago, or the Loop. Evidently this is the focal point of the city, but the consequence is that there is no north-south connection between areas in the West. One has to go via the Loop or use the roads.
‘L’ TRAIN AND METRA NETWORK
The street network inform the rest city with no hierarchy. Slow connections are ensured through the whole Chicago, but are not enough to allow people from the “not-the-Loop” region to reach other place, and thus economic opportunities.
CTA BUS NETWORK
This scheme was introduced by Daniel Burnham in 1909. It contains a plan for the controlled fast growth of the city within a system of radial and circumferential highways, to relieve traffic congestion and beatification of the urban environment.
Chicago developed only the radial aspect of the interconnected city envisioned by Burnham. While, indeed, the connecting infrastructure was key for the city strength. An infrastructure of hybrid nature, serving both freight traffic and citizens' mobility.
BURNHAM INDUSTRIAL PLAN
CHICAGO 1909
... YET TO BE REALIZED

Even if the majority of the schemes where realised on the east side, never built corridors and junctions left the periphery without any strategy. Affecting the development specifically in the West side of Chicago.
THE INCOMPLETENESS OF THE ORIGINAL BURNHAM PLAN IS EVIDENT, WITH A SYSTEM ADVANTAGING ONLY A RADIAL MOBILITY TOWARDS THE LOOP, WHILE WHAT IS LEFT GETS A HOMOGENEOUS NETWORK OF LOW-SCALE TRANSIT, DISCOURAGING MOVEMENTS IN ANY OTHER DIRECTION THAN DOWNTOWN.
The Lime Line

Vision
Over the past decades, many infrastructural projects were proposed to complete, optimize or improve the public transportation structure of Chicago. The website http://vision.transitfuture.org/ has collected many of these (aborted) projects. One of them concerns the so-called Lime Line, a possible North-South train connection parallel to the Red Line of the EL but running along the west border of Chicago. The advantage of such a line is evident: the actual transportation system of Chicago is essentially radial, converging to the Loop. Moving North-South is only possible with the Red Line or the Metra, which serves the eastern neighbourhoods. Inhabitants of West Chicago need to make long detours to reach destinations other than the Loop – and this is a locational disadvantage. The Lime Line can potentially connect all neighbourhoods of West Chicago with each other and with the most EL lines in the city, greatly improving accessibility of inhabitants to jobs and places. The rail infrastructure lays there already, at least for what it concerns the western neighbourhoods, being essentially used by freight trains. Could this be the spark for a new development of the western neighbourhoods? The new service would need to address the nodes and crossings with other lines and change the value of the places from where the Line can be accessed. What would be the design of these nodes? What could be the consequence for the city and the neighbourhoods of the improved accessibility? At the same time, the Lime Line has not been realized (yet) although its evident advantages. Why? Is it still a realistic projects? Are the supposed advantages true?
THE LIME LINE
A NORTH-SOUTH AXIS

Before the Lime Line, Cicero Street enhance the basic quality of a relevant axis connecting the whole West Side in a continuos vehicular infrastructure 21 km long, running through 17 neighborhoods from South up to North Chicago. But the very essence of this axis (one of the many in the endless, repetitive grid of Chicago) is also the reason of its inappropriateness. The supremacy of a vehicular, heavy, truck traffic affects all the other kind of mobility, pushing public transport and pedestrian movement in the background. Thus, an axis only for someone...
17 Neighborhoods to be linked
A NORTH-SOUTH AXIS

Alongside Cicero Street, nevertheless, the almost underused rails of the former industrial Chicago Railways Belt are lying untouched, rusting with the time. Could this be the possibility to seize an abandoned, excluding piece of urban land and turn it in the opportunity for the public realm? Would a new transit line fit the current condition of the site, and change the future of the whole 17 neighborhoods of West Side touched by the Line?
A TRANSIT FUTURE VISION

“A vision to connect West Side and make it easier to get to jobs”, solving the actual “transit desert” with an operation called Transit Future.

The scheme, originated in the offices of the Center for Neighborhood Technology, the Chicago no-profit specialised in infrastructure, is aimed to implement the existent transit network with the “missing links” taking advantage of what is already there, “A logic, due act for the citizens of Chicago”.
Everything starts facing an embankment, few meters high, that cuts the city western neighborhoods in two different realm, for more than 21 km.

Nothing more than a freight line, one of the busiest in the city, living proof of the American Dream back in the day of the economic boom in the Midwest, and now almost underused, as all the factory insisting on the tracks have been dismissed or demolished.
The project fosters the creation of an “urban train line”, runned by CTA or Metra, on the existing rails of the Chicago Belt: with “few operations” of reconversion along the 21.5 km freight tracks, plus the construction of the service stations, and the Lime Line could be a reality.

More than 4 CTA lines, 5 Metra trains and 20 bus routes will be then linked and connected with the new axis of the Lime Line, completing a partial infrastructure network and totally revolutionizing the mobility and the directionality in West Chicago.
TRACING THE PROJECT

There’s no actually a proper, defined project for the Lime Line: the NGO that laid down the schemes is stuck in some bureaucratic step in the aim of building a more pragmatic debate over the proposed asset of infrastructures. Nevertheless, it possible to extrapolate some rough data to show the characteristics of the new Line.
ENOUGH SPACE TO BUILD AROUND THE RAILS
NEW TRAIN STATIONS

CTA LINE
METRA TRAIN

21,5 Km

ENOUGH SPACE TO BUILD AROUND THE RAILS
NEW TRAIN STATIONS

THE VEHICLE
THE STATION
THE TRACK

would connect with LIME LINE

4 CTA RAIL STATIONS
5 METRA STATIONS
20 OTHER BUS ROUTES
If compared with the nowadays operating bus the performances of the L Line, there would be with no doubt huge benefits in terms of time saved; even the network will result reinforced as for the number of crossing lines. But beyond of the immediate rationality of such a logic relation of cause and effect, is this reinforcement really as direct as it seems? Or are there some more elements that suggests a different approach, maybe a different enthusiasm towards such infrastructure?
A SIMPLE MATTER OF SPEED

Average Speed (mph)

Current bus

A TRIP ALONG THE LIME LINE

Trip minutes
80
60
40
20
0

Lime Line
Current bus

Riding BRT would **SAVE**

the average commuter **257 hours**

per year, compared to current buses.
“THE LIME LINE IS THE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT WILL LINK THE WHOLE CHICAGO IN AN EQUAL, DEMOCRATIC WAY”
BUT IS THIS ENOUGH TO REALLY ENHANCE NEW DYNAMICS OF SYNERGIES WITHIN THE CITY?
WEST SIDE,
A DECADENT STORY
WEST SIDE, BECAUSE IT MATTERS

Even if pheriphery, West Side for itself account almost the 20% of the whole area of Chicago. It assumes thus a bigger role than just a border, as indeed a massive fragment of the city, which dimensions and extensions should be represented by a proper identity, or at least the possibility of an overall identification, while nowadays West Side is nothing more than a disparaging term for the western bordering sectors.
WEST SIDE
CHICAGO
1/5
ABANDONMENT
LAND Voids / Empty Lots
WALLED / ABANDONED STREETSCAPE
ENDLESS PARKING LANDSCAPE
IMPACTING HARD INFRASTRUCTURE
INFRASTRUCTURE WASTE LAND
IS THE LIME LINE WHAT MATTERS?

It become obvious how the Lime Line would then be an almost insignificant element in this puzzle of decay and dereliction. Partly due to its route, in the middle of empty, once industrialized land, partly due to the absence of strong element of attraction all along the line or the extremities, Lime Line risks to born as a transit infrastructure connecting nothing with nothing, from the urban sprawl in the South towards the same urban condition of dispersione and sprawl in the North.

Even the lack of communication plays a major role in confining the project in a limbo of incognizance, extreme wariness and distrust.
Towards the urban sprawl

From the urban sprawl
THE LIME LINE

ACCORDING TO THE INHABITANTS
THE LIME LINE IN ITSELF, EVEN IF AS THE LOGICAL LINK TO COMPLETE THE BURNHAM PLAN OF RADIAL, CONCENTRIC INFRASTRUCTURE, IS NOT ENOUGH TO COPE WITH THE LOCAL, DEEP DECAY OF WEST SIDE, AND SEEMS TO BE DOOMED TO BE A CATHEDRAL IN THE DESERT OF A SHRINKING URBAN SPRAWL.

WEST SIDE NEEDS MORE THAN A TRANSIT LINE, THERE’S THE URGENCY OF A LONG TERM VISION
The starting point in the formulation of this strategy is the vision of growth fostered by the future Great Lakes megaregion. An area which is accounted for a growth more than 28% before the 2050, as estimated by the Regional Plan Association, according to factors such as connectivity provided by its strong network of infrastructure (junction for East and West Coast), the availability of basic resources as water and agriculture, an evolving educational system.

Growth will dramatically affect Chicago, which nowadays is increasing its number of inhabitants only in the inner suburbs, while indeed losing attractiveness for a specific class, which has almost halved in the last decades: the middle class.
West Side is the evident outcome of an industrialization process started almost one century ago and dramatically ended in less than 80 years with no other perspectives or escape strategies. Thus, even if within the city border, the outskirt drastically deteriorated, and whoever had the means moved closer to Downtown or in the outer richer suburbs, keeping a connection with the Loop while supplanting the “in-between” West Side area.
An evident combo that foster an urban sprawl beyond the city administrative borders, composed essentially of local low rise towns, as “living quarters” for the workers of Downtown. The Loop, as a high density business core, is not that affected by this urban dynamics. The only and biggest loser is whatever is in the middle, linking this two identities and being sucked by their gravity.

Therefore what is left is a deindustrialized empty land, a moonscape running all along the wester borders of Chicago.
SUBURBS
LOCAL LOW RISE CITY
LIVING VILLAGES
2/7  18-8

OUT OF THE CITY

PHERIPHERY
DISPERSED URBAN SPRAWL
DEINDUSTRIALIZED LAND
???

WITHIN THE CITY

DOWNTOWN
DENSE HIGH RISE CITY
BUSINESS CORE
5/7  8-18

+  

x  

+  

AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

Is thus possible to imagine a wider, different frame for this condition, or broadly this urban paradox affecting the American cities, capable to overcome the current stalemate while offering viable strategies to trigger a revolution for the American decaying peripheries?

A bunch of initiatives are emerging right now all across the States, asking the same questions and offering the stage for a rich debate over the values and the qualities that could make this shift to happen.
AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

The key principles of all these initiatives could be resumed in the quest for economic and social betterment based on the values of sustainable growth and sustainable economy.

Therefore, as expression of the rising Green Culture, the city become more than that a simple “built environment”, in order to achieve a environmental awareness and integration rarely experienced before in the American scene. The sharing attitude of a re-established collective dimension, as opposed to the capitalistic individualistic vision, would complete this socio-economic frame, making the shift from the current crisis to a new perspective truly possible.
Sustainable Growth

“Green” Culture

The city as a sustainable ecosystem, based on environmental awareness and participation

Sustainable Economy

Sharing Perspective

Enacting a collective dimension in order to resist the current crisis
According to the forecast for 2050, the population of the Lake region (where Chicago assumes the role of primary city core) is supposed to increase of almost the 30%, with new 16 million people to settles.

Could be the West Side a space to answer to this expectations? Could this new need be the opportunity for West Side to really become something different?
+28.3% projected growth for 2050

16 million people
In order to incorporate the growth of the region, Chicago can utilize the west part of its city. The relation between the west and the adjacent areas must therefore change. In order to trigger this change, the west must offer certain qualities in order for people to have a need to go the west.
CHICAGO REGION EXPECTATIONS

MidCity, or simply West Side, can incorporate this growth, using a process of radical transformation that will cope and get rid of the urban sprawl that characterizes this part of the Chicago City. It can be the perfect place to attract again, within the urban borders the types of people that now find their refugee in the wealthy suburbs of the hinterland, by a re-organization of some basic infrastructures, an oriented program on healthcare, education, culture, leisure and few more elements.
In order to achieve all the stated goals, MidCity has to become something more: it has to overcome the current dynamic of mere gentrification, while indeed triggering an urban, social, ethical revolution in the approach towards the American urban condition and life. MidCity should not be a new Downtown or another middle-class one family house suburb: it has to express a new, completely different, sustainable, shared scenario.
MidCity will be positioned in between the inner suburbs and downtown of Chicago. Mixing the high living standards from the suburbs with the diversity from downtown. Making MidCity the perfect place for the disappearing middle class in Chicago. Through its strategic position and program, MidCity will become a new urban centre for Chicago and an alternative for the Loop.
In order to break the linear grid structures, where conditions are equal at every turn, MidCity Central must have a more diverse distribution of qualities and goods; not every place has the same shape, position or reachability. This will result in much more differentiation in comparison with the surrounding urban fabric, which is seemingly homogenous. The structure of MidCity should be diverse and create different conditions and characteristics in terms of position, connectivity and size.

Supplementary a hierarchy in the organization of the area will pose to be an effective tool in order to create different types of streets, plots and squares. Since MidCity is built upon different values than the current city centre, the organization and hierarchy differ from the suburbs and the Loop; the car is pushed backwards, leaving other values to come forward.
TRANSITION

CITY-SCALE CONNECTIONS

LOCAL-SCALE BRIDGES

INNER STRUCTURE

MAIN BUILDINGS

PLACE
CIRCULATION

MidCity Central takes a pivotal position in the public transport system of Chicago, as this system becomes the main connector of the area.

Within MidCity Central moving on foot, bike or by (small) public vehicles and trams replaces the usual car centrality of American cities. The main attention will be on both individual and communal types of transport, which offer different qualities to both the infrastructure and the travelling preferences adopted. This allows the MidCity streets to have different dimensions, textures and utilities in comparison with the car based asphalt boulevards of the contemporary city. Also the relation with private property and buildings will change, since the stream of traffic becomes less linear and less continuous.
LAND MANAGEMENT

As the asphalt streets and parking lots become non-essential in MidCity Central, more spaces open up to incorporate greenery, water and biodiversity. One of Burnhams’ main concerns for Chicago was the lack of parks which results in unhealthy environments. The MidCity infrastructure has the capability of having a second layer of green, much closer to the inhabitants and possibly becoming an integrated element in the living environment.

It should not only become an important element in the streetscape and parks, but must be integrated in the buildings as well; dwellings, office- and civic buildings must continue the green tissue found in the public realm. The characteristic of the greenery must be diverse, having multiple layers alike the structure and organization. Diversity is the key.
Capitalism shall search for an urban model which supports the most profit, the way of the least resistance in order to reach the highest possible accumulation of capital.

Efficiency in MidCity central will be of a different order. The green space, the outline of infrastructure should enhance the living quality of Chicagoans in that area, but there will always have to remain a form of effectiveness. The implementation of greenery and the shunning of the car is not meant as a form of green-washing, but must always serve a goal. The new efficiency is about the relation between the built environment and open space; the way MidCity inhabitants use this particular space. Not efficiency in terms of speed and capital value, but that of the quality of life and usage of resources.
2050 catalogue
BUILT ENVIRONMENT - RULES

A series of prescriptions are delivered affecting the way in which a building for MidCity should be conceived and designed, according to the principles of sustainable design, waste reduction, energetic closed loop, self-sustaining and overall efficiency. Not all the rules have to be achieved by the single building, but a minimum of three out of all the possibilities hereby stated.
REGULATION

BUILT ENVIRONMENT
SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

ALLOWING DAYLIGHT DIFFUSION

DAYLIGHT THROUGH ORIENTATION

DAYLIGHT THROUGH CUT AND SUNWELLS

EXPLOITING NATURAL RESOURCES

PASSIVEHOUSE

EFFICIENT PLANTS

ENERGY

VERTICAL WIND TURBINES

WINDMILLS

Biomass

SOLAR COLLECTOR

VERTICAL PHOTOVOLTAIC

PASSIVEHOUSE

THERMAL MASS

AIR EXCHANGER

FOOD & HEALTH

Fruit Trees

URBAN TERRACES

A HEALTHY URBAN ENVIRONMENT

AVOIDING WASTE OF SURFACES

INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE

EFFICIENCY

GREENHOUSE

URBAN TERRACES

VERTICAL GARDEN

GREEN TERRACES

URBAN GARDEN

BALANCE WITH OPEN SPACE

AVOIDING WASTE OF SURFACES

ECOLOGICAL FLOWS
OPEN SPACE - RULES

The rules inform even the open environment, working on the creation of a hierarchy of spaces and a differentiation perceived as a value.
PRODUCTIVE FIELDS

ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

COMMUNITY SPACE

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE
REGULATION

OPENS SPACES
COMMUNITY SPACE

PLAYGROUNDS & RECREATION

ART SCAPES

SPORTS FIELDS

MEADOWS AND WOODS

BIODIVERSITY

REMEDICATION & REFORESTATION

ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

URBAN FARM

ENERGY FIELD

HOMESTEADS

PRODUCTIVE FIELDS

RETENTION POND & FILTRATION PARK

SWALES & ROAD SIDE POND

WETLANDS

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

PRODUCTIVE FIELDS

RETENTION POND

FILTERATION BSL

ROADSIDE COLLECTOR

GREENHOUSE

FRUIT TREE

HYDROPHONIC

URBAN GARDENS

BIOGAS

WIND FARMS

HERB HOUSE

ANIMAL SHELTER

DIVERSIFICATION

SPRING WATERSHED

REGENERATION WOOD

REMEDICATION PONDS & BANKS

ARD SCAPES SPORTS FIELDS

PAVILION

OPEN AIR ARENA / FORUM

BASEBALL YARD

BASKETBALL FIELD

TENNIS COURTS
Towards a Midcity
Therefore, a major pressure is needed especially in the West Side to change the story. There’s the possibility to create and actuate a completely different, innovative scenario that could be a real urban revolution, not only for the desperate condition of the West Side, but for Chicago as a whole.

In order to achieve this goal, the triggering element could be once again represented by the Lime Line, but thought in a different perspective, as to realize that urban tension needed to create a real turning point. What could be called indeed a “Airport Express Transit”. And this could be the real first step towards the concretization of a Chicago MidCity.
This MidCity strategy starts with the implementation of a fast transit connection between the city’s two airports, bounding West side in a unique, new corridor. Defining a clear differentiation from its hinterland, the new line will connect and bound the neighborhoods with the rest of the city, while attractors and other urban catalyst will enhance and follow the started redevelopment.
CTA LIME LINE - 21 KM

CONNECTING STATIONS
INTERSECTING STATIONS
SPEED
TIME
MIDWAY AIRPORT - MONTROSE BLUE
21
4 CTA RAIL STATIONS, 5 METRA STATIONS, 20 BUS ROUTES
21 mph
48 minutes

EXISTING PROPOSAL
### NEW PROPOSAL

**Airport Express Transit - 29 km**

- **Connecting Stations & Intersecting Stations**
  - 8
  - 4 CTA Rail Stations, 5 Metra Stations, High-Speed Amtrak

- **Speed & Time**
  - 62 mph
  - 23 minutes

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**Connect the Dots**

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<th>_pic</th>
<th>Airports</th>
<th>Stations &amp; Intersecting</th>
<th>Speed</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<td>Midway - O’Hare Airports</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>62 mph</td>
<td>23 minutes</td>
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WEST SIDE / MIDCITY

Although redeveloping the existing asset of lands occupied by freight railways, to ensure speed efficiency and foster a radical redevelopment of the most problematic area, in Austin a new diagonal will cut through the neighborhood, reshaping the district and providing better condition for high speed infrastructure. Normal, slow speed transit working on the north-south axis will work with the existing set of dismissed rails only.

The corridor is structured in such manner, that with the help of a redefined green necklace, it creates different situations and relations in each area. Providing for the differentiation in programmatic infill.
AN AIRPORT EXPRESS LINE

The new line will then have a strategic role in itself: instead of connecting to remote, lifeless part of the city, hoping for something to happen, the proposed infrastructure links together two extremely dynamic, vital economic district, satisfying the need of mobility between the two airports and the different scales of services that they offer.

Transversally intersecting the existing network across West Side, then, the tension is fostered not only between O'Hare and Midway, but with the loop itself, as a new centrality in the very periphery of Chicago.
Tension with the radial loop network.

From the continental O'Hare airport to the international Midway airport.
Thus is possible to re-imagine the whole West Side according to the consequenced of such a set of interventions.

The area nowadays is made up of independent socio economic and ethnic entities. These entities coexist but have little connections. Shared nationality, culture, place and socio economic status are the binding factors behind these communities.

The hispanic communities in the area are defined by shared nationality and culture. Black residents have a shared cultural background. Members of white communities have their place and socio economic class as a shared denominator.
According to socio-economic and ethnic grouping throughout the area, the previous 17 neighborhoods have been grouped in major districts, in the prevision of the heavy urban impact that such urban strategy will have on the society as on the city tissue.
New concentrated urban realities arise in the form of defined, condensed districts, absorbing the deleterious waste of the present urban sprawl while regenerating with an overabundance of relations a framed existing tissue in the re-established dimension of what is urban and what is not.

In this process, the stage is set for the MidCity Manifesto revolution, a space of utopic actuation and experimentation over the possible consequences of alternative sustainable and efficient economies.
Garfield Park becomes one of the possible core of this future scenario, due to the centrality assumed in the new network of infrastructure and mobility.

At the moment, this neighborhood is full of foreclosure and crime. It does however have good connections on the public transport system of Chicago. Gang life and unemployment rule the neighborhood. West Garfield Park is part of the most struggling neighborhoods in Chicago. For unknown reasons the gentrification of the neighborhood, initiated some years ago, failed.