P2 Reflection

Problem statement:

Chicago is one the largest, not the largest City in the United States when you disregard the two Megacities New York City and Los Angeles. Besides Chicago There numerous large cities that currently deal with similar problems in relation to the built environment. Therefore we could state that the city of Chicago is our model city in this research studio to explore future possibilities and development in the American city.

Chicago as a city shows two faces, the glorifying city centers high-rise and historical imago on the one hand and on the other hand, beautifully seen from the high-rise, are the problems of the extensively wide spread, low rise, urban tissue. The research location is located exactly in the middle of this carpet of low-rise urban tissue, Midway International Airport (MIA).

The problems that occurred during the research reflect exactly the two faces of Chicago. MIA is a well functioning airport with a rising number of passengers, 16% more than 10 years ago. It is seen as a convenient and fast city airport focused domestic flights, with a 95% of the operations by South West Airlines. The opportunities of this airport are to be found in the number of annual aircraft operations that have decreased in this same period with almost 30%, the new AMTRAK high speed train that is projected to be build nearby, but can be rerouted along the MIA terminal, the planned new Lime Line (CTA elevated metro line) that is creates a more direct metro connection from MIA to Chicago’s main International Airport O’Hare in the north, and finally the lack of connection and program to the surrounding neighborhood of MIA.

The question now is why are these opportunities while the airport is already functioning accordingly. These problems are to be found and reflected in the suburban society of the American cities. There have been numerous developments in the past few decades that have had serious impact on the environment, of which one is the extending built environment for less people. Chicago for instance has grown severely in the past 50 years, but the population has declined with almost 200,000, of which mainly young professionals that were living in the suburbs. The extensive growth has had a large impact on the development of infrastructure. That is infrastructure related to car transport. The development of the public transport network has been left behind which only increased the need for tarmac.

The reason for this has of course multiple aspects and in not only a governmental and societal problem, but has also a business and economical side. Industries in Chicago have thrived for long, because of its diversity, but a large economical booster was the steel industry related to car manufacturing. These car-manufacturing companies sabotaged in a way the development of public transport, by buying all the train tracks and stopped the use of these tracks in order to sell more cars.

This has left Chicago with a large grid network of tarmac, but also a small radial network of public transport. This radial network can be compared to a growing hand. Imagine you spread your hand on a table, the palm is full of tissue and therefore public transport that connects and is close enough to get to, but the distance between the fingers is increasing with every step towards the fingernails. This network therefore does not serve the large suburban area, which together with low fuel prices boosts the use of the car.

This when you have a car. In parts of this suburban area mainly the South and a small part of West Chicago have a large unemployed population, which mainly consist of Afro-American and Hispanic people. With this unemployment and rising difference between rich and poor population, problems with gangs, drugs and criminality are evident. The contradicting issue is that there are a large number of jobs; S.T.E.M. related manufacturing jobs, available. Together with the new Obama plan, that invests a large sum of money in the field of digital manufacturing and research, This to boost the revival of homeland manufacturing in the USA and has designated Chicago as one of the main Hubs for these new trend.

Another problem there is that there is a lack of education in these areas, because of these earlier mentioned problems. School dropouts, gang crimes etc. The unemployed population therefore mainly consists of youngsters and young adults between 16 and 35 years old.

This problem is fueled by the policies on educational funding. The tax for education is mainly
paid by the Chicago districts itself. The funds, then being redistributed by the districts governmental organs, so the poorer areas pay less tax for education. This is also a downward spiral, because it shows that the lack funding influences the schools performance and educational level compared to more rich districts.

The Goal of the project:

The underlying problem for this is the goal of this project. The Discrepancy between the rise in vacancies in manufacturing jobs and the rise in unemployment among the blue and green collar workforce is an opportunity to try and solve a part of this problems in relation to the infrastructural opportunities that are nearby at MIA which already consist of partly solving this problem.

Urban Strategy: To create a solid educational backbone for South and West Chicago. Using Midway International Airport’s potential as a new transportation hub, attracting business and investment at a first class Location in direct connection with the Chicago Loop and O’Hare International Airport. Starting at Midway. This educational backbone will follow the infrastructural interventions to connect Chicago districts, creating an urban environment where education, socials space and the revival of manufacturing business will thrive thereby reflecting the posed political/economic problems and opportunities of the ‘American’ society.

Relevance:

Dealing with all the facets of urban re- or degeneration in different scales shows that the complexity is part of the new urban question. How to deal with urban systems that are to complex to fully grasp to deal with in the architectural profession. Therefore there is a need for rethinking urban strategies and planning theory, dealing with 21st century problems. These problems relate mostly to happening events, and reacting on these events with possibilities to adapt to fast changing circumstances.

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