Midwest Peripheral Collaboration Complex

Providing opportunities in an area inhibited by mono-centricity.

P 4 & 5 REFLECTION

Tutors: Darrel Roland (design mentor), Hubert van der Meel (building technology)

Jorge Martín Fernández de Córdova - 4313917
Relationship between theme of the studio and my project

The Complex Projects graduation studio area of investigation is the Western part of Chicago. The studio has been divided into three groups that study the following three areas, Garfield Park, the Lime Line, and Midway Airport. I have worked on the last one; it is an area that represents a local problem which mirrors similar problems occurring in other major US cities. An area in which its main features are a contemporary parallel existence of suburban housing and industry is faced with the problem of poor urban quality and services. Criminality and education standards among non-central neighborhoods are high, and the broad differences in quality of life between Chicago’s cultural, economic, centre in the loop seems to be expanding with the years.

My project establishes a relationship in a dual approach. On one hand, many of the essential problems the area is experiencing in general are given solutions via a Masterplan located beside Midway airport which was designed in collaboration with two other students from the studio. On the other, the collaborative complex I’ve designed within this Masterplan gives solutions to the urgent need of making available working space and temporary accommodation within the immediate vicinity of the airport. A hotel and two
office buildings have been designed with the purpose of enhancing collaboration within the periphery of Chicago and take advantage of the incredible but not utilized potential of the airport.

The project establishes itself within the peripheral area of Midway Airport and creates not only a new centre for Chicago but a new business centre for the Midwest region. This is possible due to the fact of the high infrastructural connectivity sought for the masterplan. The collaborative hotel and offices provide opportunities for entrepreneurs, start-ups, and established firms to collaborate in a peripheral environment to the centre of Chicago and therefore not only benefit from their mutual cooperation but to benefit the surrounding area by providing jobs and through architectural design enhance the spatial experience of the area.

This multi-scalar design approach aiming to tackle a broad range of social and economic issues existing within the surrounding area of Midway Airport relates very closely to the themes explored by the Complex Projects studio each year.
Relationship between research and design

The relationship between research and design is intrinsically linked. During the first semester, the studio researched into many aspects which then nourished the design process during the second semester. The transition from research into design came in a natural way specially after the various discussions with the tutors as well as with the other students of the studio.

During the site visit in Chicago, it became clear that the area was lacking architectural qualities. The airport did not connect in any way to the surroundings. The design proposed aims to provide this connection by creating services which would be of use for the airport. Office space and accommodation are services which the airport heavily requires and these not only benefit the airport itself but the surrounding neighborhoods.

Creating a hotel which enhances collaboration between it’s guests and providing office space in the immediate vicinity of the hotel within a Masterplan containing many other services required by the airport came as a design response to the currently unattended potential the airport provides. The Collaborative Hotel and offices not only form part of the Midway Airport Business hub but they also form part of a larger scheme in which the area surrounding Midway Airport becomes a Midwestern Peripheral Business centre due to its high degree of connectivity provided by public transport, rail, and air transport. The building program and design solutions could not have been formulated in the way they have been without the primordial research carried throughout the first semester.

Relationship between methodical line of approach of the studio and my personal methodological approach

The Complex Projects Studio is essentially divided into two parts, a research part and a design part. I felt comfortable working under this bi-partite process as during the first semester one is mainly asking oneself what the area one is working on requires. My personal methodological approach can be described as a constant back and forth between the studio’s research and precise design decisions. In the initial stages of the studio I examined my research question and thought of the various design solutions that would provide an answer to the problems the area is suffering from. During the second semester, I started to transform the knowledge I had gained from the research into a building. This was done by examining similar building typologies, generating a program for my buildings to later on develop the buildings which merge, circulation, climate design, structural design, spatial experience into a surrounding context.
Relationship between the project and the wider social context

The project’s main relevance within a wider social context lies in the fact that the problem being experienced by the area surrounding Midway Airport is common to many cities. A problematic urban fabric in which large areas of suburban housing sprawl into the peripheries due to a vast number of issues that are mostly tied to a problem of monocentrality within cities. The mono centrism occurring in many cities acts as an economical, educational, and cultural centre and, therefore, leaves little chance for gentrification to occur with peripheral parts of this monocentric system. In other words, the project provides a solution to a problem in which a central business district, due to its monocentricity, becomes an inhibitor of opportunities searched by entrepreneurs and startups.