The Material Politics of Future Airport Cities

* Re-thinking design, power, and materiality in light of airport design

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This paper aims to conceptualize the relationship between materiality, design and the politics of airports. The paper is conceptual and theoretical but will use as its empirical backcloth the ‘*Airport City Futures’* (AirCiF) research projects. AirCiF is funded by the Danish Innovation Fund with 10 mill. DKR for the period of 2017-2021. The project aims to explore the future of airport planning, design and policy-making through a ‘360 degree’ investigation of Copenhagen Airport (CPH), Denmark. With a special emphasis on frequent flying business travellers the project aim to create new knowledge about airport design and experiences as well as airport management and connections to landside infrastructure. In this paper point of departure will be taken in the work-package titled ‘*Becoming a Passenger*’. This work-package explore the relationship between the physical layout and material design of CPH and the passenger experiences. The work-package establishes a theoretical and conceptual framework for theorizing ‘the process of becoming a passenger’ and this paper will take this as its pivotal axis.

Theorizing the processing of passengers needs to bridge both architectural and design-oriented conceptualizations as well as it needs to connect to theories within the so-called ‘mobilities turn’ (Adey et al 2014; Cresswell 2006; Urry 2007). In particular the framework will address the level of mobile situations framed elsewhere as a ‘staging of mobilities’ (Jensen 2013). Moreover, empirical work carried out on the borderland between Mobilities and Urban Design will be drawn into the framework (Jensen & Lanng 2017). Work already done on how to understand the complex relationship between airport systems, human bodies, and the processing of these (e.g. Fuller 2009; Fuller & Harley 2004) leads to the insight that a deeper understanding of the processing of airport passengers must include a plethora of disciplines. In relation to this there is a need to explore even further into the newer ‘material turn’ literature (Jensen 2016). In particular the connection between actor networks (Latour 2005), vibrant materialities (Bennett 2010), material sensitivities (Anderson & Wylie 2009), and design as a way of enacting the social (Yaneva 2009) will be incorporated into this emerging framework.

The paper thus aims at establishing a theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding the material politics of airport design. Moreover, the paper contributes to a broader discussion of the relationship between power, design, materialities, and mobile subjects within large infrastructural systems.

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