



Reflection paper

## **Co-care Oasis** **Mutual Benefit of Intergenerational Engagement**

TU Delft  
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## **Project Description**

The Hell's Kitchen area should keep its residential character and provide more public function so as to be a stable and active community connecting the waterfront and Midtown CBD in the next decades. However, dull street interface, uneven distribution of vitality, expensive living burden, isolation at home intensified the contradiction between the traditional building and block typology and people's urgent needs for diverse life. When facing the aging and diverse population, the project try to answer how to do open-renovation transformation of enclosed residential area according to the scale of intergenerational social interaction needs. Based on this research question, 'Co-care Oasis' is a mix-living project which aims to build such an active intergenerational community by providing staged collective place for people. The project allows joint-use of recreation space and greenery with the public on the street level, which would bring changes to the original enclosed street interface and refresh walking experience during the connection path between the Midtown and waterfront area. It also helps promote spontaneous interaction and intergenerational communication between the public and inhabitants, building a community hub space.

The first and second stage of collective space are organized basing on the cross-block atrium plaza, where small businesses, green space, children's facilities and other diversified functions actively serve both inhabitants and the public of all generations. For the second stage space, it is mainly served for self-organizing activities of all residents. The third stage interaction space is another important collective place in this community. The atrium in each residential building and the double-high shared area distributed on each floor strengthen the accessibility between the neighbors and increase the opportunities for communication among inhabitants. While carrying out daily activities, residents can also engage in dialogues and exchanges with others. Highly inclusive community collective spaces have created opportunities for intergenerational exchanges, neighborhood interactions have formed close social networks, and community-based mutual assistance behaviors based on this are randomly generated in daily life, and residents trust each other, forming a common community value of 'friendly neighborhood'.

To be simple, among staged spontaneous interactions, informal and small-scale exchanges are more conducive to generating intergenerational connections, while large-scale activities are more representative of community and public values. The project also create and support affordable housing opportunities and shared spaces to promote social cohesion, it encourages mutual benefit and co-care among different living groups, especially for elderly people. With collective space, green area and living units melting together, the building finally provides a transition to different scales of interaction space both inside and outside.

## **Relationship between research and design**

Design and research is a closed-loop process. My design topic is firstly derived from my research about the context of the area, at the beginning research might not target sharply at some aspect, but personal ambition will become clear through research process. In research phase, it also helps to define the scale and future vision of the proposed project when we make our own design brief. Then during the design process, research never ends, the key point in the design phase was to solve successive problems through continuous research, in order to choose appropriate options and alternatives in the next step. Sometimes the logic behind design products from some research is wrong, I need to change the way to research. But anyway, design that is not supported by research is like acting blindly by divorcing yourself from reality. The design process will not always be smooth, research and design get feedback from each other and promote comprehensive thinking of the project.

## **Relationship between graduation project, studio theme and MSc. Architecture program**

The 2019 Fall graduation studio of the Complex Studio focused on the Midtown Manhattan, where ambitions and intentions of the graduation lab is always seeking for a change in not only urban context but also a collaboration with political, economic and environmental change<sup>1</sup>. My project target at the traditional enclosed residential district which is facing the challenge of modern times. The project tried to intervene from a comprehensive perspective, like social, culture, economic and architectural space. It not only aims to improve the physical environment of the traditional block, trying to find a renewal method which could be common applied in the future community renovation, but also focuses on paying attention to vulnerable social groups, revitalizing social culture, and pursuing comprehensive community functions and vitality regeneration.

## **Research method and approach in relation to the studio methodical line of inquiry**

The Complex Project Studio is a research-based design studio, which provides a clear guideline but flexible frame, where students could choose our own fascinated thesis point through lecture series and discussion and group research. From the studio group research period, we were firstly given a series of literature for reading to get a basic understanding of the history and context of Manhattan. Basic understanding of our site is done by group work. Making hard data visualized by mapping, learning government report and zoning, and get information from soft data like movie, interview. The research method in group research period could also help individual research in the next period. But for my personal research question, I had not defined clearly before the field trip. The field trip finally converted all previous rational data into more subjective feelings, which helped me relate my research topic with public space in traditional blocks.

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<sup>1</sup> Complex Project Graduation Studio, SYLLABUS 2019 Fall Semester

Also, theory study played an important role in the stage. Rob Krier once defined streets and squares as the two most basic elements of urban public space<sup>2</sup>, it's simple and reasonable. And inside blocks, public space also exist similarly with the form of path, plaza, atrium, courtyard, arcade and so on. How district was developed and how the urban space changed is clear through typology study, which is really significant in research phase. Typology study is also helpful during the design phase, how the project is joint-used with the community and public, and how they are connected with each other were explored as the main body of the research and design for the whole assignment. Typology can be simply defined as a concept describing objects with the same structural features. Its most fundamental basis is the possibility of combining objects through internal structural similarities.<sup>3</sup> Although each site context makes each project specific have own characters, but they have a principle that could be applied another place. It can even be said that the typology study is the act of combined thinking.

### **Relationship between the project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework**

'OneNYC 2050' is a strategy to secure New York's future against today and tomorrow's challenge, including comprehensive aspects. New York City will foster communities that have safe and affordable housing and are well-served by parks, cultural resources, and shared spaces.<sup>4</sup> This also matches the theme and goal of the 9th World Urban Forum. enabling future cities and human settlements to achieve environmental sustainability, more prosperous economy, and more inclusive community and society. ensure that all residents of the present and future generations, without any discrimination, can live and build a fair, safe, accessible, convenient, and affordable, resilient and sustainable community and human settlements to promote prosperity and improve the quality of life for all. My project is in line with the social context, because my topic is mainly about how to build such a community where residents of all generations could enjoy social interaction by architectural language.

The New Urbanism theory which advocates open urban settlements have the potential for collaboration with this 'Intergenerational reciprocity' idea, which advocates increased participation of the elderly and stimulates intergenerational interactions. At the macro level, they both pay attention to the issues related to residence and urban development, that is, the urban interaction layer. At the meso level, it should focus on the integration of multi-dimensional design concepts such as ageing, elasticity of demand, and comprehensive design, to shape the intergenerational mutual benefit system, which is the community-sharing layer. At the micro level, both of them propose specific implementation strategies from different levels such as society and architecture, namely the neighborhood living layer.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Krier, *Urban Space* (London: Academy Editions, 1991), 15-17.

<sup>3</sup> Moneo José Rafael, Guereñu Laura Martínez de, and Michael Moran, *Remarks on 21 Works* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 15.

<sup>4</sup> OneNYC 2050, Retrieved from <http://onenyc.cityofnewyork.us/strategies/thriving-neighborhoods/>

### **Ethical issues and dilemmas**

It is all acknowledged that New York is such a high capitalized city with much high value of land, and Mumford once pointed out, there is no limit to the congestion of urban living; there is no limit to the increase in land rents. There is no absolute standard for urban construction, zoning planning, and the distribution of buildings. There is only one control method that continues to operate: profit.<sup>5</sup> The pursuit of maximizing profit value never ends. Midtown Manhattan becomes more and more expensive, dense and higher. However in our groups research area, the Special Clinton Preservation area, part of Hell's Kitchen, is the very few remaining low-rise residential area in Midtown Manhattan. What will it be in the future especially with the densification and development of the western waterfront area? Will it be protected as a historic area or succumbed to the pressure of capital? How much the historic area could be touched? How to make balance between old and new? These are all questions needed to be answered.

Building belongs to urban context but finally serves people, and architectural design should not only fit physical environment, but also be humanistic orientation. Sometimes we can't solve some objective social problems, but as an architect, we can improve the building space and guide people to pursue a better and suitable life. Our role is not compulsory correction, but implicitly affecting the people in buildings. At the same time, The opening and closing of urban settlements is a relative concept, and the degree and method of opening also need to be designed for specific situations, and the privacy of individuals or groups living in residences does not contradict the opening of public spaces or facilities to urban spaces. In the process of design, it is necessary to fully consider the behavioral needs of multiple generations and make a reasonable design. At the same time, the transformation of urban settlements is not a one-time process, but a comprehensive process that needs to be layered, graded, and phased to integrate the advantages of various professional technologies.

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, ( Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press, 2009), 180-181.