

MADE IN MANHATTAN

Revitalizing community through the creative engine · Hell's Kitchen ·

P4 Reflection

Complex Projects

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26/05/2020

INTRODUCTION

Project description.

The Hell's Kitchen community has been fighting gentrification over the last 50 years. The Special Clinton Preservation area (with unique low-rise residential buildings, located within Hell's Kitchen) seemed to protect old tenement buildings but not their residents. The increasing real estate prices results in a decrease and almost destruction of the permanent local community, accelerating also the displacement of many long-time tenants and small business (including artistic activities of huge relevance for the cultural life of the area and daily life uses). Important values of the area are now under threat. The community belonging feeling, industrial past and artistic background have shaped the character of the neighborhood and formed the identity that nowadays Hell's Kitchen and Clinton Piers have and express to the rest of the city and the world. The questions that arise then are how to create a stable community so as to regenerate the belonging feeling that seems to be diminished.

The Made in Manhattan cluster is based on the strengths found in the area and looks for its potentiation through architecture. The focus is put on the redevelopment of historical manufacturing areas in order to encourage the development of productive and dynamic activities. Manufacturing activities in New York have been crucial for the development of the city. It is striking that manufacturing was everywhere, it was not relegated to a few districts, it was not hidden, but it was integrated into urban life, New York was a factory city.¹ This industrial legacy is still quite present in the area of Clinton Piers in comparison to other areas of Manhattan. Furthermore, while transforming two blocks in the stripe between 11th and 12th Avenue, the connection between the Hudson River and the city are revised. The relevance is given to the human capital and the creation of a unique identity (small scale), in connection to the Hudson River, through a new engine of opportunity looking for the benefits of the community. Key elements of the proposed district are the manufacturing spaces (small-medium manufacture, smaller artisan workshops and experimental studios) in combination with public spaces for the community and city inhabitants (events, meeting spaces...) as well as housing. This merge of uses is a result of the need for affordability, common spaces in the neighborhood and the attraction of a wider scope of people. The focus of the design will be the main manufacture building as a production space that also articulate the connection with the city, and the central building, created as meeting space for all users.

While offering experiences, this mixture of users makes economically and socially feasible this concept of district. The multifunctionality increases economic diversity and therefore, the range of time and intensity of activity. The experience economy, where the colocation is really relevant, gives feasibility to the proposal by integrating both individuals and collectives in interaction with the space and processes. After the consideration of these concepts, in the design it is fundamental the idea of a generic system that brings flexibility enough to hold current needs for the transitory uses but also adaptability for future options of use.

¹ Rappaport, Nina. 2015. Vertical Urban Factory. New York: Actar, pp. 308-323.

ASPECT 1

Relationship between research and design.

Research and design are fundamentally connected as two interdependent practices.² The continuous relationship that exists between design and research differs in the discipline of Architecture when it is compared to other fields. Although design and research are understood as independent, both reveals many associations. “Design and research constitute neither polar opposites nor equivalent domains of activity. Rather, the relationship between the two is far more nuanced, complementary, and robust”, as stated by Groat and Wang.³

The relationship between research and design are essential for a coherent and proper development of projects in the architecture field. Research allows architects to find out evidences and understand situations that are not familiar at first sight. There is the need for a critical way of researching in order to generate a sensible position towards an issue proposed.

ASPECT 2

Relationship between graduation topic and studio topic.

The graduation topic proposed the area of Midtown Manhattan. This specific site is home to some of the most iconic buildings of New York city and worldwide. Still today remains the largest business district in the world as well as one of the most expensive sites for real estate. Recently, the role of the CBD (Central Business District) is experiencing a shift due to new developments such as Hudson Yard and this will translate into a reorganization of the area functions together with the integration of new urban challenges.⁴

Complex Projects investigates settlements around the world and within areas that are ambiguous in their development and embedded in the process of change.⁵ The studio search to focus also on the political, economic and environmental changes that the area will necessarily experience. The complexity of New York, historical relevance in the field of architecture and its worldwide impact makes it fascinating in order to challenge obsolete ways of designing. Such a dense and consolidated urban settlement has evolved and current tendencies show the intention of generating new ways of developing the city deriving in a real challenge for architects. Within this context and through a critical examination of New York’s Midtown, the studio search to eliminate the traditional and perhaps linear processes of planning, urban design, and architecture.

² Charles Jencks, *Architecture 2000 and Beyond: Success in the art of prediction* (Chichester: Wiley Academy, 2000).

³ Wang, David, Groat, and Linda N. Groat. 2013. *Architectural Research Methods*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

⁴ SYLLABUS 19 FALL SEMESTER, Delft University of Technology, Department of Architecture.

⁵ Ibid.

ASPECT 3

Relationship between research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio.

The Complex Projects studio establishes a strict given structure with a specific area of research but giving students the freedom to choose fascination and topics to develop. In my case, and due to my concern about social issues and demographic changes occurred in the area, the research is focused in the values of the site. The approach followed in the research was mainly context led. Allowing the context to take the lead in the research process is one way of establishing the primary importance of the physical, social or historical setting in order to understand the complexity of the context and incorporating the scope of the studio, researching from urban scale to the architectural object.

The main aspect tackled during the research was the understanding of the historical background of Hell's Kitchen and Clinton Piers (area under study). Firstly, there is a willingness from the community living in the area that results in the clear need for affordability as a result of the threats generated by the gentrification trends and the increase of living costs due to real state pressures. Furthermore, the specific area around the two blocks chosen for the intervention is a zone in transition. Used in the past for manufacture and highly related to the shipping trade along the Hudson river, nowadays and due to real state pressures is being rapidly developed. However, there is a predominant presence of industrial buildings built in the 1920s, a mix between commercial and residential buildings and empty spaces used for transportation. This situation results into a low dense urban fabric in comparison to other areas of Manhattan with lack of daily life activities.

A second aspect was the high relevance of the Creative Engine in the city of New York, being this the city of most impact in the world, bringing economic benefits and with potential to make the proposal economically feasible within this context.

The design approach chosen tries to deal with the issues exposed (result of continuous process of deterioration) currently present on the specific site and convert them into engines of opportunities for new developments. The district proposed would be a mix of light manufacture (productive spaces) and creatives, where the mixture between the artistic background with the creative engine and its potential relation with the production of goods (small manufacture) could regenerate the area and help in the creation of a stable community with its consequent belonging feeling, nowadays quite lacking in the city of New York.

ASPECT 4

Relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific relevance.

The approach of the graduation project tries to integrate a new way of developing the city in a sustainable manner. The city of New York is a super dense area but in the site under study there is a lack of density and activities. This situation makes the area suitable and perfect to test a new type of development considering all kinds of needs, integrating and working for a wider range of users. This proposal is

developed as a testing example that could be later implemented in other areas of the city with similar characteristics. Within this approach, concepts as adaptability are, therefore, crucial. The idea is to create flexibility enough to hold current needs for the transitory uses but also allow options for the adaptation to future requirements of use, understanding flows of markets and changes in both short and long-term situations. This flexibility, as first priority of the design, is conceived from the systems that generate the structural and organizational scheme of the building. Nowadays, sustainability and resiliency are concepts to include in architecture and the integration of adaptability in the design brings interesting and proper options to answer to these new challenges expressed above.

From a social perspective, the inclusion of production of goods linked with the creative innovation can deal with concepts like creative placemaking. The social benefits that it incorporates are found essential in this context. In order to promote the mixture and diversity in this neighborhood, a key ingredient seems to be the creation of public/private partnerships that help to unlock the entrepreneurial and creative potential of small enterprises, which play an important role in the new economy and in the preservation of the community.⁶

ASPECT 5

Ethical issues and dilemmas.

In the process of research and design, one main and important ethical dilemma appeared. The approach of the project is based on the community and how new engines of opportunity can benefit these social groups. This concern came from the loss of sense of community experienced in the area of Hell's Kitchen after different processes of gentrification from the 1960s. Trying to fight against this loss of affordability in a city such as New York, which has relevant examples as the impact that the High Line had in its surroundings, seems to be quite challenging. Is it possible or feasible to fight or slow down gentrification processes in cities like Manhattan? Our society is experimenting changes of high significance, we all are in a moment of transition where questioning about how to develop in a more sustainable and resilient way have to be crucial starting points. It seems difficult to avoid gentrification if a project of urban regeneration has economic success. This effect gives even more relevance to the consideration, taken in the design process, of integrating a bottom-up development. It is key element the pursue of equal benefits of a wider range of social groups involved, creating a new collectivity in order to provide welfare to each other from the co-location proposed.

⁶ Goethe Institut. 2014. "The role of artists and the arts in creative placemaking".