

The Green Neverland

Thesis Topic: Sensuous Public Spaces

Research Question: How to revitalize Street Life and create Sensuous Public Spaces
in New York City on the East River waterfront near UN headquarter?

REFLECTION PAPER

Complex Projects Graduation Studio

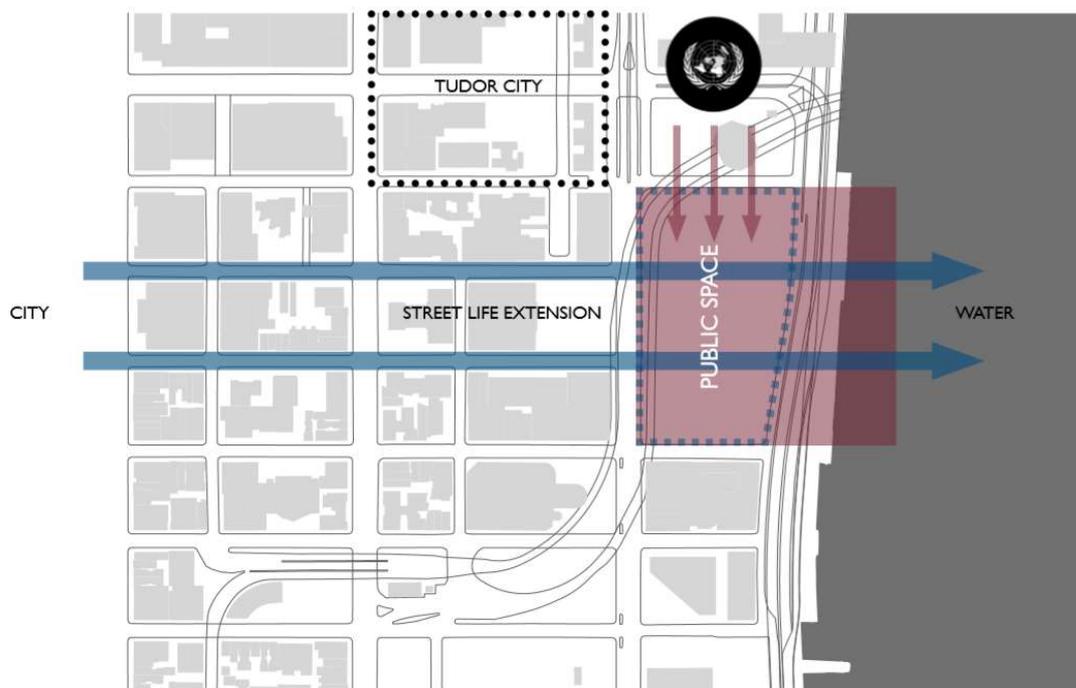
New York Midtown Manhattan

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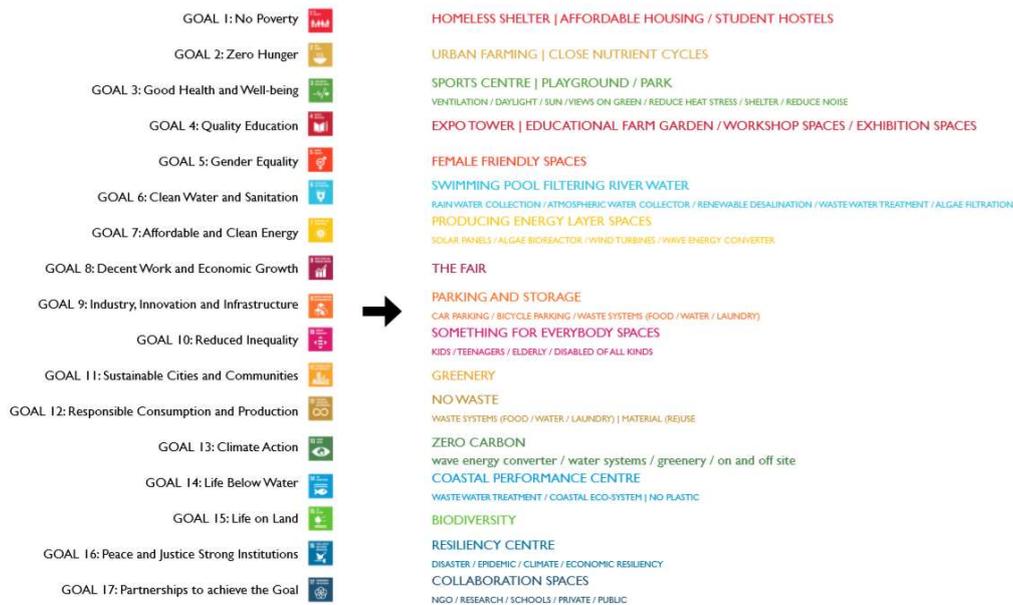
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

New York was born in the pursuit of profit. Anglo-Dutch War, Independence War, Civil War, World War I and World War II, New York stands at the forefront of every major political change until it becomes the capital of the post-war world. New York opened its arms and embraced the groups that were excluded and expelled from other continents. It also attracted speculators full of speculation, creating a unique immigration city in the world, where global cultures collided and sparked. Capital and population accumulate here, creating a spectacle of congestion in this metropolitan laboratory. However, what will the New York City change in the future? How the public realm would evolve in the urban context? Although the globalization might lead to a homogeneous future, the sensuous space and emotive architecture are still what we cannot lose. It's always meaningful to really touch, smell, hear something. So, it's always worthwhile to discuss the position of public spaces in the future.

The proposed site locates where the city meets the water, the old meets the new, the past meets the future. It will be the future public gateway leading people to the waterfront. And it will be the new commercial hotspot connecting the north and east-side existing commercial area. Based on the site observations of non-built area and vacant land conditions in Empire Village, most vacant lands will build for commercial use and there is no public project proposed. The proposed site was a piece of largest vacant land locating near the east river waterfront and next to the UN headquarter, where contains lots of possibilities and potentials to create outdoor public spaces. The future transport nodes would locate nearby. It's going to be a new iconic building representing the Zeitgeist and functioning as a future architecture, bridging the past, present and future. Besides, the proposed site, together with the Bryant Park and Madison Square Park, somehow created a Green Triangle towards a resilient city. Finally, the nearby open public spaces and some parks at the other side of East River can form a green network in a larger scale.



The site used to be the Con Edison Power Plant and it was demolished around 2000. The East River Master Plan designed by Richard Meier in 2005 was cut down due to financial crisis in 2008. Only one residential building nearby has been built in 2019, but the land was still vacant. So, the first request of the proposed project in this global economic context is to make profit. The residents of Tudor City are mainly high-educated young people around 20-30 years old. They are mostly one-person family. Thus, the second request is to revitalize the street life and improve the quality of public spaces for young people. The most influential context might be the UN headquarter. As a result, the position of the site will be the UN culture extension as it's close to the UN headquarter and under high impact from UN. So, the last request is to match and promote the sustainable development goals (SDG) and educate people how to live green. Therefore, it will be the future public space experimental site. The large area ensured the space to test the possibilities for future public space, like vertical streets. Some competition has shown the assumptions of future public spaces in New York. There are two key features, one is modular design, one is smart city and big data. Modular design makes the public space more flexible and efficient. By using the big data, the public space can be more intelligent and smarter. If some spaces are not popular anymore, it can be changed immediately. All in all, to merge the needs of economy, environment and culture, the project is going to be an Expo Campus. It would be a SDGs educational and promotional site.



The project was named as *The Green Neverland*, which implied it's going to be a playground-like space for young adults having fun. The challenge is always about how to make the Neverland ever land.

Aspect 1: The Relationship between Research and Design

In the project development process, architectural research is always needed as the preliminary study before proceeding to the design. During the thesis project building up phases, one whole semester has been taken to form the research question and draw up the design brief. The importance of research has been well emphasized.

Through the deep research, the narrative and ambition of the design became much clearer. The design does benefit from the concrete research process and be guided by the comprehensive research results. And all the problems and challenges faced during the research and design would provide precious experience for the architectural learning.

However, there might be still some problems and challenges when the research and design divided equally. As a graduation project, it's a bit rush to finish the design process within three months. The research and design could be more integrated. Actually, during the design phases, research will still continue. The outcome of the design could also somehow lead and guide the research. To accomplish a completer and more concrete project, the design process could be started earlier.

Aspect 2: The Relationship between Your Graduation Topic and Studio Topic

The complex studio aims to observe the city from different scales, study the cultural backgrounds in different cities, and build narratives to operate with diverse urban contexts. To seize the Zeitgeist, and response to it. Architects' role is to solve problems, create places and improve the living environment.

The graduation topic I chose is public space, which is an essential part in urban life. The goal is to create more outdoor public spaces for people gathering and sharing. The project aims to activate the vacant land and revitalize the street life, while promoting the sustainable and green lifestyle.

The studio topic started with the discussion of the changes in the nearly future and focused on the local context in Midtown Manhattan. The challenge for my project is to think about how the city would be reacted through changes in terms of public spaces and how to apply values on the public spaces. It took a long time to narrow down the topic, phrase the research question and make the narrative strong and clear. As a result, a specific theme of United Nation SDG has been chosen. Various public life scenarios would be designed and discussed as a whole green campus.

Aspect 3: Research Method and Approach Chosen by The Student in Relation to The Graduation Studio

The awareness of research methods is literally important in architectural practices. In addition to find the "what", the "how and why" also matters. A proper research method can not only provide the systematic and theoretical guidance but also trigger the efficiency to the possible solutions. Without a clear plan on research methods, it somehow might lead to a detour on the whole research process. The research methodology and architectural practices could influence and benefit to each other.

The research methods I chose were phenomenology and praxeology, which are subjective and objective approaches respectively. To build up sensuous and emotive public spaces, phenomenology was chosen as the main approach. The praxeology was worked as a complementary method to balance the overall strategy. Thus, these two methodology together created a comprehensive way of understanding the whole project.



There are also some limitations both on phenomenology and praxeology. It's clear that both methods pay attention to the human scale study and discuss about human beings. On the one hand, these methods would cause too personal results. During the phenomenological research, the results would be varied on different views of observers, different kinds of people, and participants in different mood. These factors are uncontrollable and won't be neutral. As for the praxeology, the behaviors of people are unpredictable. It's hard to have accurate results even to enlarge the database. On the other hand, it might cause the observations fragmented. Various and diverse research scales should be applied.

The CP studio always adopted a more rational approach, which based on the collected hard data and research conclusions. However, the initial approach I chose, and the personal interest were started with senses. It's an intangible and affective way to do research. It seems have conflicts with the studio approach. During the research phase, it did created problems on the overall progress. So, the site visit and case study analysis were added as additional methods. Especially during the design process, the project should back to be tangible and objective.

Aspect 4: Relationship between The Graduation Project and The Wider Social, Professional and Scientific Relevance

Essentially, the city is dynamic and will reshape itself in the constant change process. But in the last decade, the development process of American cities seems to have undergone some changes. Compared to the rapidly changing economy and technology, the development of American cities seems to stop growing. This situation seems counterintuitive. From the introduction of new technologies and start-ups, to the prosperity of construction, the intensification of the middle-class elite, and the rising cost of renting houses, these factors should have greatly accelerated urban

development. Such a result confirms a conclusion that the development of the city is not active, but reactive. Since 2010, this passive development mode of American cities has become more and more obvious. Most cities tried to recover from the economic downturn and the collapse of the real estate market and strive to get rid of the crisis by creating capacity and strong capital. In this process, we can occasionally see a brave attitude to change, but most city managers have not made drastic reforms.

Compared with the past ten years of this century, the 2020s will also full of uncertainty, and even more variable. Many existing social problems are still to be resolved, but it is uncertain whether the time for resolution has passed. Anyway, the government will need to take more efficient actions to meet these challenges, especially serious problems such as traffic congestion, climate change, and global warming. So, as the SDG promoted and the society required, my project would always focus on the following issues that American cities will be forced to face in the next decade.

Car-free City

How to deal with the increasing number of motor vehicles and the environmental problems they bring? This is undoubtedly the core problem that many city managers will face in the next ten years. In the decade of facing the climate crisis, traffic congestion, and increasing air pollution, should city managers increase their investment in automobiles and car-centric development to meet urban demand? Or should they directly find a balance between urban environment and transportation, and more consider pedestrian safety? Some people think that the popularity of autonomous driving and clean energy electric vehicles will find us a compromise way. However, this compromise attitude both delayed the timing of important decisions and ignored the success of the emerging “car-free city policy”. Over the last few years, many international metropolises have made successful attempts on this issue, including emission-free zones, congestion pricing, BRT and bicycle sharing. Facts have proved that walkable urban areas are more commercially valuable, especially today when traffic emissions have become the largest source of carbon emissions in our cities. Leaders need to make drastic reforms to the transportation system, stop widening highways, and consider using more sustainable planning and zoning to achieve such a big leap.

The proposed expo campus is going to be car-free zone and bicycle lanes would be arranged to promote healthy lifestyle. Pedestrian footbridges would be designed to create multiple layers of public life.

Urban Energy Crisis

At present, most American cities are overly dependent on unsustainable energy sources, which causing a lot of pollution problems. Over the last decade, we have seen more and more policies shift to focus on energy efficiency, such as New York’s green building standards. It is worth noting that the real estate industry is one of the industries with the highest energy consumption. In general, urban energy saving can change the status of energy consumption in two ways, reducing the amount of electricity used within the city, and increasing the city’s autonomous power generation. This strategy is still at the stage of combining demand and technology. Solar power is becoming cheaper, urban solar installations are becoming more common, and pilot projects to create urban energy microgrids are underway.

The goal of the whole project is to achieve energy neutral. A closed loop of energy system has been applied. Some clean energy like wind, wave, solar, alga has been introduced.

High-Density Living Environment

One of the biggest challenges which cities facing in the future will be the increasing population. Indigenous people in cities will maintain a boycott attitude towards the construction of large-scale commercial housing. One of the most controversial issues that leaders will face is zoning planning, and how to use building regulations to encourage vertical urban development while allowing different types of residents and living environments to coexist. Living environment issues are closely related to other core indicators of urban development, including economic mobility, carbon emissions, and transportation systems. Many large cities in the United States have put forward clear development goals for urban zoning, released relevant legislation to protect the interests of different residents, and allowed cities to develop vertically.

The Expo campus also tried to find a balance between the living density and the communal space.

Natural Disaster

Over the past ten years, nature has issued warnings about the current human development mode, such as natural disasters such as California wildfires, severe hurricanes, and floods in the Midwest. Climate change has become an urgent issue that needs to be resolved. In the next ten years, low-lying coastal cities like New York and New Orleans will be important for survival or destruction. Some cities will focus on investment in infrastructure construction, seawalls, pumps and other equipment to prevent the inflow of seawater, while others consider planned evacuation from the waterfront. Natural disasters will also bring huge economic losses and personnel losses. It is estimated that by 2045, the flooding problem caused by increased climate change will cause \$135 billion in property damage across the United States and force 280,000 Americans to adapt or relocate. Faced with the many challenges brought about by environmental problems, city managers need to prepare for landmark building protection, the "climate gentrification" wave and climate refugees. At the same time, the federal government must promptly reflect on the flood insurance system and the priority and distribution of community reconstruction funds to respond to the emergency climate crisis.

As the proposed site located at the waterfront, the flood risk is an important issue to take into account.

Global Warming

In addition to short-lived, severe natural disasters, climate warming will affect the development of cities in the United States in the near future in many other ways. The hot weather in most cities is increasing, and even in northern Europe and other regions with high latitudes, there are rare heat wave weather. As time goes on, the global average temperature continues to rise will bring more diseases related to high temperature, and even affect daily activities and working hours. For instance, as the summer gets hotter, people's daytime activities begin to shift to early morning and night, which also means that city services and operations will change accordingly. The rise in temperature also means an increase in social "unfair" problems. Poor residential areas often do not have parks or shaded public facilities, and their residents are also

more susceptible to health problems related to overheating. Reducing carbon emissions is the most important measure against climate warming. But city managers and designers should also consider some short-term effective strategies, such as strengthening greening, to help individuals cope with climate warming.

A flexible operation and work mode would be applied to the whole campus in terms of both construction and daily running. Public spaces would be designed for everyone.

Income Inequality and Unemployment

People nowadays face extreme income inequality. But what worries more is that economic inequality also leads to spatial inequality. At the same time, many experts believe that in the future, artificial intelligence (AI) may cause more people to lose their jobs, leading to more job inequality. Although the economic progress and trends in the 2010s are conducive to concentration in urban innovation zones and are not conducive to manufacturing in rural areas, the era of artificial intelligence will once again change the pattern of urban development. Artificial intelligence will affect different types of occupations, not just manufacturing, but also the employees of ordinary millennials and service industries. The rise of artificial intelligence means that the fate of cities will be more clearly linked to technological development and social equity.

The project aims to provide equal work opportunities for all kinds of people, regardless of gender, occupation, age, race, etc.

Personal Privacy in the Data Age

In the era of rapid urban and technological development, facial recognition, machine learning, cameras all over the streets and high-tech surveillance will threaten the personal privacy of people. Tech giants such as Google and Amazon have a large amount of personal information about the public. How to protect the security of personal information and control related information will become one of the problems that we have to face in urban development.

As the campus would be built based on smart city mode, the security of personal data still needs further concern.

Aspect 5: Ethical Issues and Dilemmas You May Have Encountered during Graduation

As the proposed expo campus aims to be a smart city, the question I always keep in mind is how to make it possible in reality? Will it be the right solution of this largest vacant land in Midtown? Again, will *The Green Neverland* ever land?

Recently, Sidewalk Labs announced that Sidewalk Toronto project will no longer continue. If all the assumptions in this smart city project could be finally realized, we may see a micro city with, unmanned public transportation, fewer private cars, more public space; Smart urban infrastructure, safer roads, and more user-friendly design; Modular housing construction system, faster installation and reconstruction, and lower housing prices; Sustainable construction materials, greener buildings, lower carbon emissions, etc. Since the announcement of the project, Sidewalk Toronto has been the most concerned project in the smart city field. The sudden abortion of the project astonished many people. Why is the Sidewalk Toronto smart city suddenly aborted? Is the Sidewalk project terminated because of the affordability, or is it because of data

privacy issues? The most essential reason for the failure of the Sidewalk Toronto project might be that the new model that Google as an urban innovator wants to explore is inconsistent with the demands of the Toronto government and local interest groups. This flexible way of government-enterprise cooperation allows compensation for land prices and policy support by creating more public interest, which is the new model that Google really wants to explore. It is a pity that these appeals, which sound very reasonable, are really difficult to implement, and involve policy modification and multi-party game. The Toronto government, which was very supportive of Google, did not give Google the support it needed in the new model that Google expected.

The failure of the highly ambitious Quayside project may mean that the upsurge of smart cities has come to an end. The transformation of cities may not only depend on technological changes, but also requires the joint efforts of society, institutions, and even culture issues. We can assume that, in the future, the smart city should not rely on collecting data and realize the commercial value of the data but should pay more serious attention to the essence and purpose of urban innovation, which is better connect people and help people live easier and more affordable in the city. Thus, the project I worked on still need more complex concerns and further discussions.