

Extend City Ground

Zhuyan Shan

Fascination on POPS

When walk through New York city, you will find small opening spaces with trees, benches and other facilities. It always makes some confuses: is it a city park? a community courtyard? or a private garden? Actually they are special forms of public spaces in New York: POPS-Privately owned public spaces.

What is POPS?

POPS is the acronym of Privately owned public spaces. POPS are products of city zoning regulation, which offer opening public spaces and greenery in a dense city. From 1961 the zoning regulation was carried out, private developers will lease a part of ground floor space in exchange for bonus floor area or waivers. On one hand, POPS are the spaces dedicated to public use and enjoyment, on the other hand, they are owned and maintained by private property owners. POPS come in many shapes and sizes, both outdoor and indoor, and offer a variety of amenities. They can be designed as plazas, arcades, galleries, even rooftop terraces. Now, more than 550 POPS provide a myriad of opportunities to sit, relax, people watch, eat, meet others – in other words, to partake and enjoy in urban life in one of the world’s greatest cities.

How POPS appeared?

Today New York shows itself to the whole world as a metropolitan city with skyscrapers and dense blocks. It seems like there is no interspace between buildings to accommodate public activities. However, if we date back to “manor time” in 19 century, when there were only residential houses and few public buildings, it’s apparent to see that a lot of empty land in midtown could be used as public space. What happened during this process was not only about city expansion and urbanism but also the changes of ownership of the land.

In early time, land existed as ownerless objects. There was no specific ownership definition, correspondingly, which belonged to the public was also used by the public. Then during 1870s and 1930s, mainly due to land distribution policy, which aimed to promote land exploitation and agricultural production, these land encountered privatization. The ownership was transformed from public to private one. With capitalism dominating the whole country, the land-owners, no matter persons or organisations, tried to utilized the land as fully as possible for maximum profits. Besides, these owners were real businessmen rather than charitarians who were unwilling to release even one square meters land to the society. As a result, privately-used buildings were constructed everywhere, and the city was fully occupied by these private properties, leaving very limited spaces for public activities.

Now for United States, 58% of the land was private property while the other 32% was owned by federal, only about 10% of the land was possessed by the states¹. Imagine if there is no any POPS that who owned the land are the only group of users, then the land for public use including all infrastructures, social facilities, greeneries and so on, is less than that for private use at a proportion of 42%, which is inadequate for public service. That result obviously shows unbalance between the public group and the private group. With such strict division, a high-density city will be created as the eventual product by capitalism where closed façades become the interfaces between buildings and public transportation spaces. It is indeed a functional and efficient city when there seems no “wasteful” spaces without any capital production.

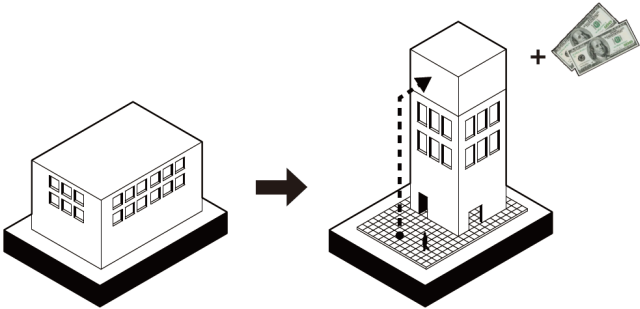
However, it should not be overlooked the importance of public spaces for the daily life in a rapidly developed city, “They perform as an extension of the house, allowing for informal and arranged encounters...Well-designed public spaces can facilitate the enjoyment of neighbourhood life and better support density of activities, uses and users...public spaces can become a highly symbolic element of civic engagement and citizenship, as well as an important anchor of upgrading interventions”². In a modern city, unlike during ancient time, inhabitants pursuit satisfaction far beyond for material demands. Environmental-friendly, comfortable, homogeneous, multi-cultural living environment undoubtedly become new criteria when judge a city.

Considering the city environment is made up by public spaces and private buildings, a certain scale of land should function as public spaces. Even though New York planners tried to insert public spaces as much as possible in the city, the initial problem-lack of enough land, cannot be solved thoroughly and effect the distribution of those public spaces, which result a problem that there is a long distance from one public space to another. Not only that, still isolation exists between private realm and public realm.

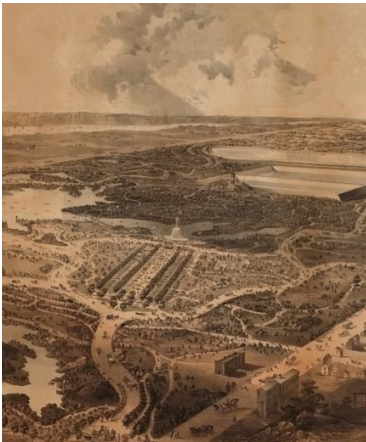
If we turn to the analysis of relationship between ownership and operation of spaces again, except for publicly owned and operated spaces and privately owned and operated spaces, a special type will be created when these two types twist, that is POPS-privately owned but publicly operated spaces. The appearance of POPS not only complements the public space system, but also provides intermediate spatial typology between public spaces and private buildings, eliminating isolation in urban environment to some extent.

1 <https://council.nyc.gov/land-use/>

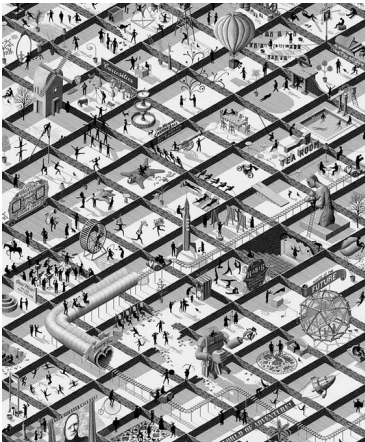
2 United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) Global Public Space Toolkit From Global Principles to Local Policies and Practice



Resource:Vincent Ringoir, P2 Presentation



Central Park, 1864



Super Studio Collage

What POPS bring?

POPS involves three groups in the society, one is developer, who own the property, while the public is the user and government ensures the running of the system as controller. During the operation of this space-capital system, these three groups are affected dramatically.

For the developers, POPS are profitable investment projects. According to data, with every 1 square foot of POPS on the ground, developers get 4.6 square feet of above air spaces on average. Compare to construction and maintenance cost on POPS, the bonus floors brought fairly considerable renting money annually to the developers which is about 35.8 times more than they spend.

Meanwhile, for government, POPS are indispensable complement of public space system in the city. Since POPS appeared in 1960s, the total area of POPS equals nearly 10% of central park³.

For the public, who are direct beneficiaries, due to the regulation of POPS, ground level spaces are released partially, which are compensation of occupied resource by the private party. Besides, through evaluation of POPS in Central Midtown Manhattan, it shows that most POPS receive appreciation by the users and positive for the society.

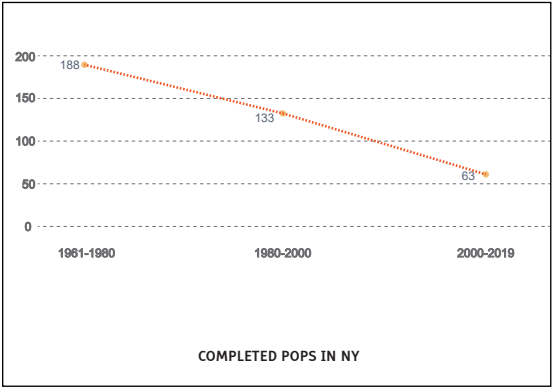
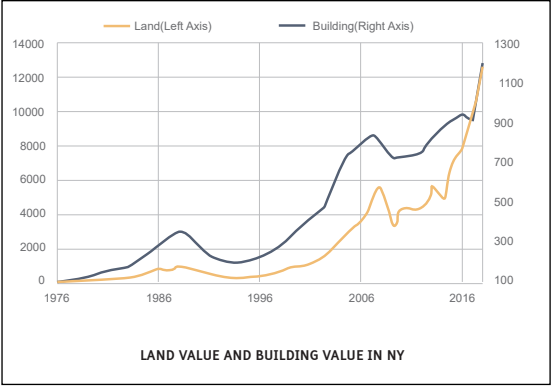
Problem Statement

During the operation of POPS in reality, there are contracts between the private and the public, which means possible conflicts may exist in this special realm. By observation and investigation, POPS do create disconnection of building and the city, by visible boundaries such as entrance, enclosure, and invisible boundaries including security, transportation, greening, etc. Therefore, POPS create isolation not only of city and building, but also public and private.

Except of POPS itself, because of the development of New York, increasing number of buildings gradually occupied the whole city. Land value and building value go up annually. As a result, decreasing number of POPS were built as the city develops. So the situation is that less land in New York can be preserved for public used, however more public activities ask for spaces at the same time.

With the problem of POPS presented and the tendency that the city is growing more densified, the research question is how and where can public spaces be integrated in the future city, considering the highly densified urban environment such as New York?

3 Kayden, J. (2000). Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience.



Research Process

Public Space

The Research start form public space. First it is important to rethink a question: How to define public space? In recent New York, there were already interventions concerning this concept. They inserted different scales of public spaces in the city, including Lincoln Centre (citizen’s public spaces), Teardrop Park (neighbour’s public space) and WTC Memorial (visitor’s public space). So clearly, there exists classification of public space realm, from city-wide square, to neighbourhood park, courtyard of a cluster of buildings, a hall of a building and to a sharing room. It’s important to classify the scale of public space since it can serve as a collective object between the city-wide public space and the individual private space. And from the classification, the conclusion can be drawn that decomposition and reorganisation hierarchically of PS could connect city to individual territory.

In New York’s history, there were always attempts exploring how to organise public space in the city. In early stage, influenced by city planning, public space was designed in grid network, for example, the Washington Square Park and the central Park. Later, due to the zoning regulation since 1961, public space began to appear along with building, as we all know, the POPS. The prime example is Seagram Building Square, which is a leader of this movement. In past several decades since 80s, new attempts were implemented in the city. On basis of demands for more public space, there was a large movement of public spaces in New York⁴, including redesign abandoned spaces in the city, among which High Line Park is a successful project. At the same time, a lot of transportation spaces were transformed into public space for recreation, which improve the city environment. Recently, there is a tendency that public space is designed as a part of plot planning, not only serving for the building, but also integrated to the city environment. So, here arises a hypothesis that in the future, public space of a building can also be added to the definition of “City Infrastructure”.

POPS

POPS, exists as a medium between Public Use and Private Property, have possibility for above hypothesis. As a special staff derived from NY, How POPS in Manhattan developed? The data shows in midtown, 46% of land is occupied by building, only 6% is opening space, in which 50% is owned by private⁵. The location of POPS have a high relationship with land value and skyscraper. However, they are isolated with each other and also have no connection with city public space system. Therefore, POPS need an overall strategy instead of one-offs in the future city planning.

During the development history, the forms of POPS changed a lot, early POPS was only designed as an opening plaza, later as a pocket park with facilities, recently as a central zone of a

plot. The relationship of POPS and building changed too, from isolated to partially connected, and now attraction node of surrounding buildings. Which bring a large amount of people flow for developers. For better used by the Public, the regulation of POPS also experienced evolution since 1961. With the changes in regulation, the POPS were equipped and design from quantity to quality. People use it from just passing by to working.

During development of POPS, one of relevant three groups, government, can extend POPS into infrastructure, while the developers, see POPS as from renting bonus to selling points and the public, can use POPS as short term sharing workplace for individuals. Therefore, in future POPS design, sharing should be considered as a planning principle.

Densified City

How PS was implemented in NY’s building considering the densified condition? If we look back on history, we can find that due to densification, the building morphology in the New York changed over last century, extending along from horizontal dimension to vertical dimension. Observation deck as public space on top floors has a long history in NY skyscraper such as Rockefeller Centre. Since 1960s, POPS appeared, which released the bottom floors as public spaces. In latest scenario, public space on different floors provided new potentiality in buildings⁶- can we create and connect “neighbourhoods” by public space in a building?

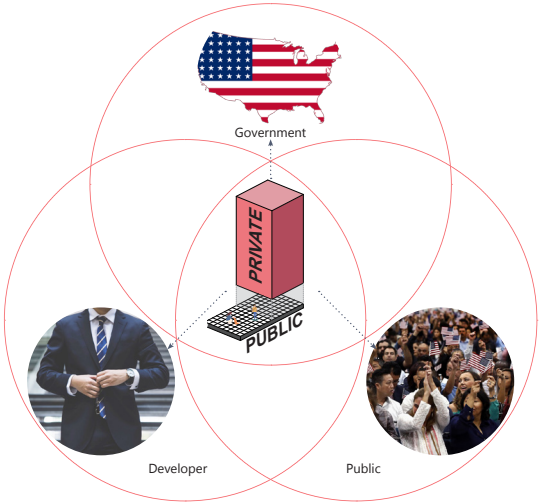
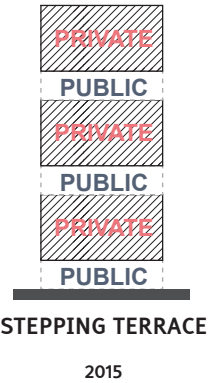
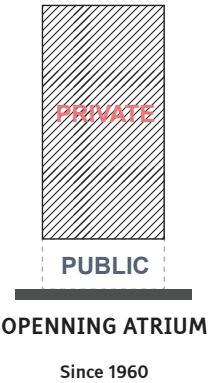
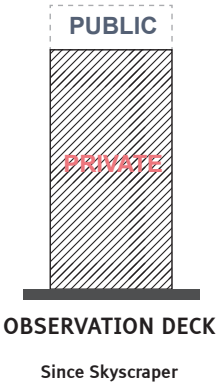
Reconnect

Also, Public Space should solute the isolation between people. More than provide recreation function, public space should possess communication function and be used as multi-function spaces which can change according to requirements. So it’s important to explore flexibility of public space to attract and reconnect people by connecting and integrating spaces in the city.

4 Amy Hau, WXY architecture + urban design. Sharing The City: Learning from the New York City Public Space Movement 1990–2015

5 <https://capitalplanning.nyc.gov/>

6 Bjarke Ingels. WTC project



Design Brief

Site

The group site is located in the southwest of Midtown, occupying one quarter of area. The most remarkable event in this area is the construction of Hudson Yards, which affect the whole area in many aspects. Meanwhile, except for the new development chances Hudson Yards bring, it should take into consideration that other plots also need reactivation. To achieve this goal, the project will be implemented in the west wing of the post office building, which is located next to Penn Station. The most important public buildings including convention centre, Hudson Yards, Manhattan West, Penn Station...in the site are mainly concentrated in the middle of the site, forming a linear sequence. With existing POPS and public parks, the linear relationship of these public spaces is much more noticeable. The post office, as one indispensable building in this sequence, connects Penn Station in the east and Hudson Yards in the west, then a city space system which consists of outdoor spaces and indoor spaces will be created.

The existing building, Farley Post Office, is precious heritage for New York with nearly one hundred years history. The east wing of the building was built in 1914, and then the west wing was built after 20 years. Since digital email replaced the traditional letter correspondence, the building has to face renovation to accommodate new activities. The east wing is now under construction and will be transferred into Moynihan Station, as an extension of Penn Station. The west wing was used as office area, which will be renovated for the project. To preserve the old building, the most façade will be kept. The length of the west part is 106 meters while the width is 115 meters. The site area is totally 12,190 square meters. The FAR of the site is 10, so maximum gross building area can be 121,900 square meters. If the building occupy each floor, then the maximum envelope can reach to 50 meters high.

The strategy of the building renovation is clear as well. The first step is to keep the original character-that is to say, keep the entire façade. Then in order to open the building to the city, the ground floor will be released to the public as opening spaces. The building will be divided into parts, the public program on lower floors and the private program on top floors, through public space system inserted between different programs, these individual parts can be integrated as a connective neighbourhood. This is also the core concept of the topic-extend city ground into a building.

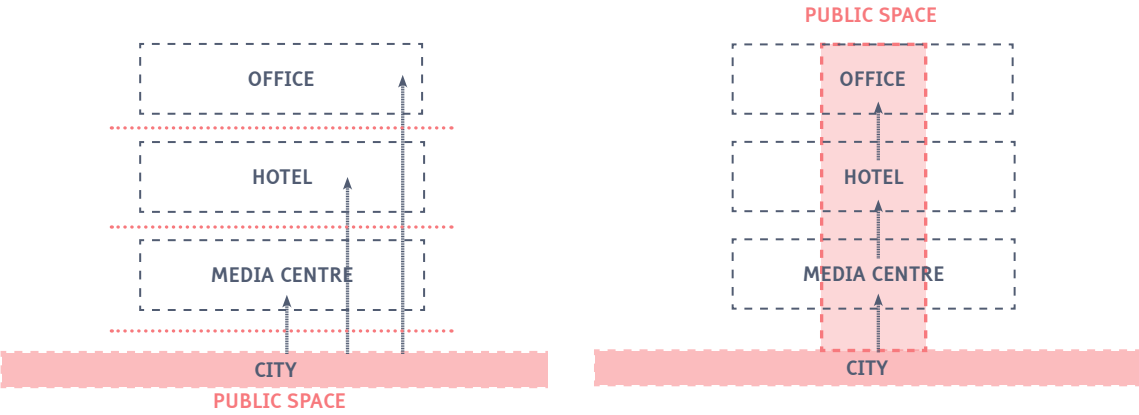
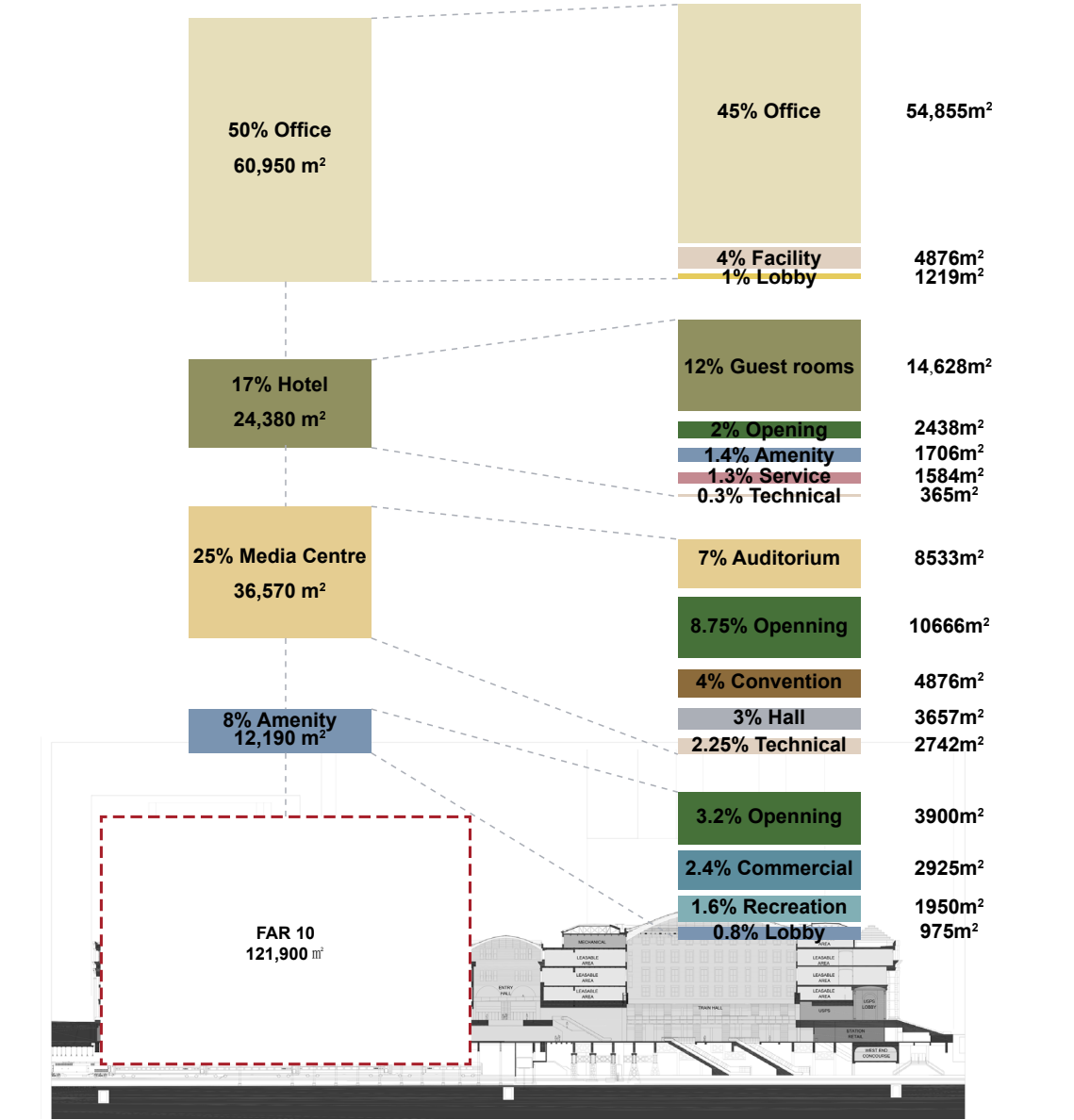
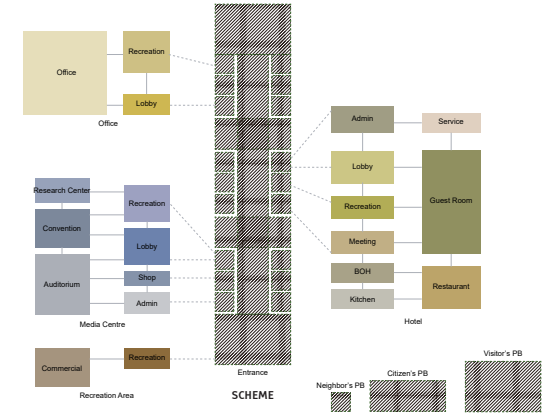
Program

The project will be designed as a mixed-used building consisting of three programs-a media centre, a hotel and an office area. The media centre and the hotel will be inserting into existing building as main design area and the office will only be considered as a tower to meet FAR. New program benchmarks of hotel, media

centre will be distributed through analysis of different projects all around the world. The media centre will be 36,570 square meters, the hotel will be 24,380 square meters and the office will be 60,950 square meters. The rest of area will be used as amenity for the whole building with nearly 12,000 square meters.

Considering the main concept, it is necessary to rethink the location and distribution of public space in the whole building. To achieve the goal, the first step is the decomposition of public spaces in these programs before the reorganisation stage. These public spaces will be integrated into a system in three types: neighbourhood's public space, citizen's public space and visitor's public space. Different programs then will be connected through this system so that they can be designed as collective spaces for the city instead of isolated, individual ones.

Since the public space system will be the core of the building, while the programs will be attachment unites, it is essential to consider how to organise the relationship of these two parts, and the relationship could decide the building massing directly. If divide each part into vertical form and horizontal form, then there will be four types of compound mode, and all of them show that the building will be a landmark of the site with a huge massing. For different programs and spaces, scale and facilities need to be distinguished according to corresponding requirements. Especially for the significant public space system, what is the function of the space and how it can connect other function by design, or how it serves users are significant to consider. Besides, the scale of special program, for example, auditorium of media centre, needs unconventional space, which is also another thesis to be focused on. Despite that relationship of various spaces should be redesigned, regular program has its own standards, such as room units of hotel or the core of office tower, providing frames for the later design work.



Ambition

The entire building will become a city hall for Midtown with its opening public space system where all kinds of public activities that can be imagined will take place. It may have a closed enclosure, however it has opening collective spaces inside. Different from other newly constructed public building, with its magnificent façade, it possesses both historical value and modern function, providing a new typology that public space could be implemented on a limited land meanwhile become a “bond” instead of “boundary” between the building and the city, from human aspect, the private and the public. It will no longer exist as an isolated building, but a connective neighbourhood on vertical dimension.

