

# Graduation Thesis Reflection Paper

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Complex Project Graduation Studio

## Project Description

The project is a multi-program building composed of a residential tower and an indoor food market hall aiming to serve both the local community and the tourists. The market is proposed not only as a solution to the current shortage of grocery retails in Midtown Manhattan, but also as a gesture to challenge and to rethink about our highly consumerism society: it aims to promote an alternative lifestyle against ever-expanding unsustainable consumerism in our society by making grocery shopping an attractive and enjoyable experience that can partially replace recreational shopping.

The main goal of the project is to create a functional, inviting and attractive food market that provide people with daily groceries and also opportunities for social interactions. The project aims to bring back the original function of shopping as an economical tool and a social adhesion agent without the cost of excessive material consumption which is so common in the age of mass production. The project aims to recreate the true beauty of an "authentic New York shopping experience".

## Relationship between research and design

The studio started from a thorough research on Midtown Manhattan with the aim of identifying issues and opportunities for an architectural proposal. In the second phase, researches are done to dive deep into the research question I came up with: how to make consumerism socially, economically and ecologically sustainable? As I came up with the answer of an indoor market integrated with public spaces and apartments, typological research on specific programs were conducted to understand spatial and practical requirements.

This is my first experience of designing architectural project of this scale and with multiple programs. Researching into the references of similar projects for me is a very important process of learning how to do the design. In the technical aspects, researching into the implementation of lattice column like structure and steel waffle floor slab also in turn gives me some inspirations for elaborating my architectural ideas.

## Relationship between graduation topic and the studio topic

My lack of experience on designing big-scale multi-use projects made me choose Complex Project as graduation studio at the first place. I wanted to train myself to be able to learn from the research process and to apply the knowledge to different context and scenarios. I wanted

to challenge myself to deal with complex programs and to propose an integrated design solution that responds to multiple issues. My topic about consumerism is relevant to multiple disciplines including marketing and social science. Although the final project is only composed of two main programs, the market and the residential apartment, it responds to different aspects of the site condition and the overarching topic of consumerism. As the chair Kees Kaan mentioned at the beginning of the semester, the goal of this studio is not to design a complicated building, but to give a simple answer to complicated problems. This is what my project tries to achieve.

### **Research methods in relation to the graduation studio**

The first phase of the research is conducted in the form of exploratory and comprehensive context-led research on Midtown Northeast Manhattan, with the aim of targeting issues and problems specific to the site. Worked as a group, we investigate the site through collecting, analyzing and presenting information under specific topics. In this phase we adopt a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, while quantitative method is more dominant. Research findings are mainly in the form of hard data: population, density, land price etc. The two main analytical tools we adopted are mapping and modeling. Mapping presents the spatialization of data, which also gives a sense of scale and illustrates the border conditions. Modeling is useful as a realistic representation. By making a 1:1000 site model, we are able to observe the volumetric compositions of the built environment of our site from various point of view.

Before the architectural designing started we went to New York for a field trip, which I found was very crucial for the design development in the later phases. The scale of buildings in Midtown Manhattan was tremendous, and the experience of actually walking in that city was fundamental for me to understand the site conditions and what is needed for people live there. The field trip also help to shape a rather subjective perception of the site context, the atmosphere of the environment, the feeling it gives to the pedestrians. This later became a source of inspiration for the architectural design and to help me envision a market that could be welcomed and beneficial to that specific urban area.

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

The critic to consumerism has been a hot topic for many years, mainly in the field of sociological studies. It seems to be an inevitable byproduct of capitalism society. As consumerism is an attitude towards daily consumption, it is highly relevant to our everyday life, which is after all accommodated by physical environment, and more specifically, by urban space. What can architecture do to this consumerism society? Can architecture be a solution that makes consumerism more beneficial in social, economical and environment aspects? This is where my project is derived from. My answer is that a functional and attractive market hall can already bring people the joy of shopping, which may attract them away from excessive consumption of repetitive and unnecessary commodities.

The development of the project is also relevant to in the current situation where the corona

virus epidemic hit the society in such a substantial way. New York city, our site, for a while was the most seriously infected city in the world. Streets are emptied and social distancing become the new social norm. It is imaginable that the pandemic can happen in a periodical way, which has a huge impact on the use of public space. My previous program scheme includes 40% of hotel, which was based on the fact that New York's economy was highly relied on tourism. The pandemic makes me rethink about the program and in the end replace the hotels with apartments. The project was updated as we are now facing a new reality in our daily life.

### **Ethnical issues and dilemmas**

As the pandemic hit and social distancing becomes the new norm, I started questioning my idea and ambition to create places for physical social interaction in this unusual situation. In the end I find the most needed quality for architecture is flexibility – flexibility to adapt to different functions and programs, new technologies, and even to new social norms. The epidemic reminds me that how a sudden change can happen to our society that reshape our everyday life in a drastic way, and forces me to reflect how architecture, something built to last throughout a long lifespan, should be designed to adapt to the ever-changing society and occasional unexpected scenarios. In that sense, a market hall with semi-temporary food stalls is also by nature flexible. The final proposal of the market is characterized with more small and casual type of stalls, which can be easily adapted to rules of social distancing when it is needed.

Another challenge I face is about how to implement my concept of promoting a sustainable consumerism by means of architecture. It is easy to formulate the concept into a strong verbal statement, but once I try to express it in architectural language sometimes I start to lose it. Moreover, researches on precedents help me to learn what are the common ways of designing a market, but in the other hand it somewhat restrains me from going beyond the common practices. To overcome this, it is important to always be very clear with the concept, and to be very determined with my position as an architect, especially when dealing with such complex project.