REFLECTION PAPER | NEW YORK FOODSCAPES

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SITOPIA | MARKET AND HOUSING IN HELL'S KITCHEN

Hell's Kitchen West is currently transforming from former manufacturing to residential district however at the moment the quality of the living environment is far from being sufficient. The transition is done in a very hasty way and rezoning has a fragmentary character, some blocks have been already rezoned into residential and new high-rise housing developments are rising surrounded by warehouses, car retail shops, parking, car wash and warehouses which don't reflect the changing character of the urban environment. Moreover, the NYC planning department considers this zone a 'food desert' which means that the area between 10th and 12th avenues lacks public amenities which can provide fresh food. Doubled with the high level of environmental pollution from the Westside highway, lack of green public spaces and issues of reachability by public transport it leads to a discussion of how to create a qualitative urban environment for residents. Thus the research question is: How can food infrastructure be integrated into the residential urban environment of Hell's Kitchen and soften the transition from the industrial past? How can local food manufacturing and distribution create new values for the community as well as provide green public spaces?

The project is a combination of housing and Food Hub. Project is implemented in the group strategy of densification the strip of blocks along the Hudson River and creating new links with the waterfront and piers and thus establishing a new relationship between Midtown and the Hudson River. Food hub components are market and restaurants, urban farm/park-supermarket, e-commerce fresh food distribution centre, space for educational programs. Food and waste flows are a closed cycle between food hub ingredients and housing and shape a harmonious and sustainable food system.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND DESIGN

The project is a critique of a modern invisible industrialized and monopolized Foodscapes. Food is the main objective of research and design. The aim is to show how food is produced and distributed in the city and to reinterpret market building as a public space and a 'food palace'. Housing is included in the project as a part of the group strategy of the redevelopment of Clinton Piers area as well as to emphasize the transition from industrial past of Hell's Kitchen to residential building. Design is focusing more on the market public space and Food hub facilities rather than housing itself. However one of the design assignments was to combine these controversial parts of the program into one building.

The aesthetics of outer and inner elevations of the market are closely related to the Hell's Kitchen history research. Piers, cargo ships and NYC industrial buildings are an inspiration for the market space design and reinterpreted setback skyscrapers are the base for apartment blocks shape. Reinterpretation of historical assets of Hell's Kitchen helps to link its industrial past within the process of redevelopment and attempts to maintain the sense of place.

Another aspect of the design was to emphasize food topic and to create public and production space entirely dedicated to food and to create the idea of Sitopia ('sito' food, 'topos' place). The program ranges from conventional food places like restaurants, cafes, market, supermarket and health store to cultural and educational spaces like NYCHA nutrition education centre and NYC food policy office as well as production and distribution spaces like aquaponic farm, market logistics and e-commerce groceries delivery centre.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR GRADUATION

TOPIC AND YOUR STUDIO TOPIC

The ambition of Complex Projects Studio is to investigate different urban conditions, this year in Midtown, and how it is affected by social, economic, environmental and political changes. The studio is making assumptions on how Midtown will develop and accommodate future ambitions and demands whether it transforms the working environment, adaptation to climate change, alternative modes of transport, attitude towards food supply or a new lifestyle.

The project involves several themes that are not strictly architectural, such as food supply technologies, sociology, political geography and economy of food. I have studied and included in my research process several philosophical and theoretical academic sources. The project is located in Midtown Manhattan, as suggested by Complex Projects studio and has to consider intricate urban conditions and how they are affected by the social, economic and political shifts. To render a bigger picture of fragmented and multifaceted realities of modern cities architects might need to try on different roles such as a 'planner, organizer, politician, economist, philosopher, strategist, humanitarian' as suggested by the Complex project's chair. The project is touching upon most of these professional and academic fields.

RESEARCH METHOD AND APPROACH CHOSEN BY THE STUDENT

IN RELATION TO THE GRADUATION STUDIO

The research first phase can be defined as Quantitative research carried out as a collection and analysis of a large amount of 'hard' data. This research exercise is group work. The data is visualized as the series of unified and highly precise maps which help to draw verbal conclusions based on the facts and figures. The second phase of research is an individual work and methodology has a completely different character. It is rather Qualitative research where it is 'legitimate' to use 'soft' data and to make interpretations. This part of the research has to be lead by personal motivation and interest however based on the conclusions of previous findings and 'hard' data. Methodologies used in Complex Projects aim for relatively realistic topics and analysis of the current situation in Midtown Manhattan.

My research can be described as an investigation of NYC food systems, everyday practices such as grocery shopping in New York and the hidden notion of food and its supply routes in the city which to a certain extent shapes the urban environment and plays an almost political role in the city. The sources used for this research stage are not necessarily a scholar for instance to understand the current social and

economic situation in Manhattan the use of hard data might not be enough to render a big picture. Interviews of local community organized on-site, articles in newspapers such as the New York Times, city council resolutions and documents, NYC food metrics or even reports by real estate agencies help to depict the context in full colour. The methodology can be described as studying Social Sciences within Architectural research or Cross-disciplinary research which is multidimensional and includes such fields of knowledge as politics, economy, sociology, and history. The use of Social Sciences in Architectural research as a cross-disciplinary approach is perhaps the most suitable methodology applied to the investigation of the city's Complexity. Furthermore, Hell's Kitchen West is transforming, meaning that a predictive analysis of its future morphology and use will be conducted as a part of the group strategy.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GRADUATION PROJECT AND THE WIDER SOCIAL, PROFESSIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE.

The project proposes an alternative framework for the NYC food system. As a new model of the decentralized food hub. The current system is highly centralized, unsustainable and vulnerable in case of natural disasters and the rise of sea level due to climate change. Although food infrastructure shapes cities to a high extent because food is so vital it stays invisible. Most of the food is coming from Hunts Point distribution centre in the Bronx where the tracks are lost (2,3 billion lbs of food each year). High real estate prices and weakening control from the municipality resulted in the disappearing of traditional markets and supermarkets creating food deserts. [1]

Making food more visible and integrated element of the built environment makes urban dwellers more aware of it, gives them more control because food can play an almost political role in society. Furthermore, on the local scale of Hell's' Kitchen food manufacturing and distribution, the creation of new lifestyle and modern ways of grocery shopping produces values for the community and improves the quality of the residential urban environment.

The research objective was to analyze foodscapes and food infrastructure and its influence on city structure. The topic of food systems In New York has been overlooked by the city planners over the last hundred years, according to professor Nevin Cohen, Professor of Health Policy and Management, CUNY School of Public Health.[2] As Carolyn Steel coins in her book Hungry City: 'Food shapes cities in ways that we largely take for granted. Paradoxically, because it is so pervasive and essential to human societies, food is almost invisible. The place of food in society is also immensely political, both figuratively and geographically.'[3]

Modern foodscapes are mostly invisible and highly monopolized. Large corporations produce food in the industrial methods and control the whole hierarchy from production to distribution instead of thousand individuals that supplied cities before. Food is mostly distributed from the massive food hubs located outside cities which keep all the food supply routes invisible. Most of the urban population stays unaware of how food arrives at the supermarket: 'The food industry is a highly secretive operation. One of the reasons it can be hard to appreciate the effort it takes to feed a modern city is the sheer invisibility of

[1] Cohen S., *Understanding New York Food Supplies*, Columbia University, New York, 2010

[2] Nevin Koen, *Urban Food Policy*, New York

[3] Steel C., *Hungry city. How food shapes our lives*, Chatto & Windus, London, 2008, p. 78

the process.'[4] These modern tendencies of monopolization of food industries make it's hardly possible to trace food in the city and decisively brakes the connection between country and city however there are some forms of social resistance and alternative ways of producing and consuming such as community gardens, urban farms and farmer's markets which make foodscapes visible.

Although historical analysis shows that the food infrastructure of the early nineteenth century Manhattan was highly efficient. It was to a great extent managed by city authorities and every urban dweller could reach the market within a ten minutes walk. Food infrastructure was fairly distributed across the city and was the only possible model to succeed considering that houses didn't have refrigerators and New Yorkers had to do grocery shopping from two to six times a week. Besides supplying the city this system was reflecting the democratic process of open negotiations between authorities and citizens. The process of managing public markets was based on a participatory approach 'All participants — residents, vendors, city officials — had to continuously (re)negotiate the location, size, layout, building material, basic rules and the daily practice of the public markets.'[5] Besides, the decentralized character of the infrastructure played a vital role in its success. The food system crises started in the mid-ninetieth century when municipal control weakened and the rise of capitalism leads to a chaotic expansion of infrastructure.

The Second aspect of professional relevance is the emphasis on circularity and sustainability concepts within the building. Clustering helps to reduce transportation costs and thus food costs and environmental pollution. Aquaponic farm on-site can reuse heat from other buildings, saves 90% of the water in comparison to other production methods. The building has a large roof surface for rainwater harvesting and reuses it for food grown on the aquaponic farm. Heat exchangers and geothermal pumps help to reuse heat from the market fridges and greenhouses. Finally, food and waste flows are a circular system between elements of the food hub and housing.

ETHICAL ISSUES AND DILEMMAS YOU MAY HAVE

ENCOUNTERED DURING GRADUATION

One of the main ethical issues during the research part of this thesis was the topic of Gentrification in Midtown. Hell's Kitchen is rapidly losing stable community, rent control apartments and becoming more expensive and unaffordable for some social groups. In my opinion, it poses the question if the group strategy redevelopment of industrial blocks along Hudson River will trigger even faster gentrification of Hell's Kitchen or would it be a critique to Hudson Yards and Highline area? Can gentrification issue be solved by architecture and master planning or is it a much more complicated and controversial social process? It seems that attitude towards social issues, affordability and gentrification in NYC real-life conditions contradicts with academic European environment ideas. That contradiction was the biggest dilemma for my research.

The second dilemma I faced during the field trip which was aiming to verify research assumptions. In general, it is hard to find architectural problem statements in Midtown. Hell's Kitchen gentrification is an almost invisible process. Although my field trip analyses showed the change in local commerce, loss of small

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[4] Steel C., *Hungry city. How food shapes our lives*, Chatto & Windus, London, 2008, p. 75

[5] Baics G., Feeding Gotham: The Political Economy and Geography of Food in New York, 1790-1860, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2016

scale businesses and residential amenities interviews with residents gave controversial results and impressions. On one hand, Hell's Kitchen is staying a diverse and lively neighbourhood on the other part of the local community has to be relocated. The impression of Clinton Piers, Westside highway and industrial blocks along the Hudson is high contrast to Hell's Kitchen and a problematic urban area which gives a piece of evidence for project development.