EVOKING EQUITY

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Pratt

Evoking Equity: Designing for Equity in New York City Public Buildings

Observations and Provocations for New York City Department of Design and Construction

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1. Introduction

"Designing for Equity is a paradigm shift that affirmatively promotes design for all. The built environment can powerfully advance everyone's participation in the life of the City" [1]

The creation, operation, and longevity of public architecture are reliant on three key actors: the City, the Architect and the Community. The nature of what can be expected from public architecture, as seen through the lens of social equity, includes the key concepts of cultural relevance, inspiration and accessibility. Through our research, we have learned that designing for equity is a process that cannot be achieved by following prescriptive guidelines but rather, through a principled mission characterized by sensitive and pluralistic actions that benefit the greater public.

This research, a yearlong collaboration between Pratt Institute's School of Architecture and the City's Department of Design and Construction (the Agency) was conceived of and supported through the Town & Gown program.[2] The resulting work is a two-part documentation of research findings and recommendations that demonstrate, through both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Agency's portfolio, how design can impact issues of social, economic and cultural equity in the City.

Our research started with and grew from the Agency's Design & Construction Excellence 2.0 Guiding Principles[3] with the intention to expand beyond principles toward design guidelines. Our two-part portfolio of findings is based on the analysis of three (3) typologies; libraries, police precincts and public plazas, across various neighborhoods. Part One, a policy and planning framework, examined the selected typologies within the Hunts Point and Bushwick neighborhoods. Our focus was

on equity in public architecture as parity in the distribution of resources citywide. Through analysis of the stakeholders served by each typology and their relationship to the facility, we determined equity in public architecture to be realized by the interconnectedness between a community's social and built environments.[4]

Part Two, as per the Agency's request, did not focus on distribution of resources or citywide planning and policy but rather zeroed in on how the Agency, mainly through design, can meet its objective to realize public architecture that is culturally relevant, welcoming and inspiring. With this intent, to understand and articulate designing for equity, we investigated six (6) specific facilities as our case studies. The facilities included two (2) of each typology: plaza, precinct and library, one built and the other currently in design. We identified and documented specific design intentions and manifestations of equity in each project through interviews with the facility designers and site visits. Another layer of interviews, with respective facility staff and the public users, regarding both designed and built projects provided us with stakeholder expectations and facility reception as counter points to each project's design. From this due diligence, we were able to surmise a list of organizers and drivers, architectural and other, through which equity can be achieved.

This report, entitled Evoking Equity, aims to elucidate the publicness of public architecture and illuminate the potential to manifest equity through design. While Evoking Equity focuses mainly on Part Two of our research, key takeaways from our initial scope of work are included—primarily, the unique community analysis tools which offer moments and methods for identifying and engaging the City's diverse communities in the design of public architecture.

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1 NYC DDC's Guiding Principles, p13.
2 The Town & Gown program is a collaborative research initiative between New York City agencies and local academic institutions. The research topics are set by the participating agency and are responded to by the academic partners.
3 http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/ddc/downloads/DDC-Guiding-Principles-2016.pdf

4 The full body of work represented in Part One can be made available upon request

1.1 Evolution of the Research Topic

One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City represents a Mayoral challenge to empower "All New Yorkers" through public projects and investment.   Vision 2 of the Plan proclaims "Our Just and Equitable City [OneNYC] will have an inclusive, equitable economy that offers well-paying jobs and opportunities for all New Yorkers to live with dignity and security." With this concept, among others, City Hall establishes its perspective of equity as including "All New Yorkers." OneNYC lays the foundation for the Agency's Design Excellence 2.0, Guiding Principles for Equity:

Convey a Sense of Welcome to All
Ease Access to Resources
Strengthen Communities
Evolve with Needs and Change

The Guiding Principles invite NYC design consultants to advance design through the lens of equity. The Principles, intended as conversation starters, ask the City's design community to join in and carry forth a dialogue that refines and deepens the collective objective of building a city for "All New Yorkers." The Principles offer no prescriptions, metrics or how to's. They are concepts, which if enacted, have an intention to manifest a perception of equity for the facility user and the public.

The Agency shares OneNYC's stated objective of "designing for all." This idea needs specificity in relationship to the terms equity and equality. The term "all" aims for ultimate inclusivity, without the prioritization of anyone or any one group. Designing for "all" and including "all" does not evoke equity to the extent that it does equality. Not all New Yorkers have equal access to resources. Equity seeks to recognize and root out bias and injustice, pervasive in our city and country, by explicitly identifying and facing the disadvantages experienced by certain populations due to race, class, gender, immigration, or other factors that may render a population vul-

nerable. Equity demands investment in the potential of vulnerable populations and prioritization of their access to resources and opportunity. Plan OneNYC, as well as the Agency's Guiding Principles take a step toward equity by identifying New Yorkers with special needs[1], the poor[2] and children[3]; however, prioritizing investment in vulnerable or disadvantaged populations is not a stated objective of either initiative.

We recognize that the advancement of equity in the City and the role of public facilities is inextricably linked to the advancement of social justice. Given that (i) half of New Yorkers live in poverty[4], (ii) nearly 90% of our jail population is African American or Latino[5], (iii) and 49% of New Yorkers are not native English speakers, we cannot and should not dispassionately design public facilities or not be mindful of the importance of allocation of services. With all public architecture: libraries, plazas, precincts, and others, there is an inherent ability (even a mandate) to reach and empower the most vulnerable populations. Public architecture can and must be a source of support and inspiration. Public architecture may accomplish this by serving as a portal to improved safety, health and knowledge for those in need.

1	NYC DDC's Guiding Principles pg 23
2	OneNYC, Vision 2, Goal 1
3	OneNYC, Vision 2, Goal 2
4	The Center for Economic Opportunity Poverty Measure, 2014
5	VERA Institute of Justice, Incarceration Trends,1990-2014

1.2 Findings in Brief

While seeking definitions of equity, we found many varying perceptions. Equity in public architecture is a three-legged stool that relies on the contributions of three (3) key actors: the City, the Architect and the Community. After completing a literature review and holding many conversations, formal and informal, with a diversity of stakeholders, we came to understand that each stakeholder has their own definition of equity. Rather than choose just one definition, we sought to understand how equity is perceived by these key actors. This understanding became essential to illustrate the reciprocity between a City project/investment, a design intention, and the public's reception of that project and intention.

Being given the Agency's perception of equity (as per their Guiding Principles) we understood the viewpoint of the City. We had to seek those of the Architect and the Community. In order to understand the nature of their perceptions, we engaged a diverse set of citywide stakeholders, including planners, community leaders, advocates, academics, urbanists and designers[1]. These practitioners served as an advisory committee[2] to this research. Through several interviews and conversations and workshops with the committee, we came away with the following findings:

Equity is both personal and place-based.

Equity is perceived at the personal level as well as the community and citywide scale. The concepts articulated in the Agency's Guiding Principles: designing to delight, welcome and inspire, for example, are oriented toward eliciting a highly personal experience. We found that the feeling of equity and, even more acutely, inequity, can be deeply personal, triggered by the color of one's skin, socio-economic status, age, gender or culture. Our discussions of equity at the individual scale revolved around a feeling of welcome and purpose regardless of age, class, race or culture.   Equity and inequity are also place-based. Our advisors often assessed equity and inequity through a comparison of one neighborhood to another, especially when considering public facilities and citywide services. As seen in the following quote from Advisory Committee member, Maria Torres, life long resident of Hunts Point in the South Bronx.

"I think for me, [equity is] parity across the City. Because there is so much disparity in communities in New York, so that someone in Hunts Point has the same amount of access to facilities as someone in the Upper East Side. [Its] Community-wide access that everyone has a part of and a voice in."

- Maria Torres, Executive Director of The Point CDC

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1   For a full account of our Designer/Architect interviews refer to Part One Chapter 5
2   For a full account of our advisory committee content, refer to Part One, Chapter 2
Section 2   and meeting transcripts contained in the appendices of Part One

Equity entails fostering a sense of ownership.

Community engagement is the key to sparking community ownership of a project. However, it is only through meaningful engagement that a community can see itself reflected in a project and thereby experience a sense of ownership. This sense of ownership elicits the perception of equity. Both community organizers and architects understood this connection as conveyed in the quotes below.

"Equity [in community engagement] means listening to many and ensuring that each community member involved sees a result and has ownership in the finished product."

-Iona Jiminez, Community Organizer, Brownsville Community Partnership

"It is hard to show an almost completed design to a community and expect them to embrace it. It almost generates negative energy. [Engagement] In the programming stage before there is a line on the paper would be best. It is more useful and less contentious if you meet the community before design, before anything is drawn."

- Deborah Gans, FAIA, Principal, GansStudio

Equity includes, but is not limited to, design.

Citywide parity in programs and services, hours of operation and facility maintenance were consistent topics of conversation among our advisory committee. These aspects, related more to operations and maintenance than design, were acutely felt and often given more attention than design.

"Design and equity is really about service delivery. Not all communities have the same needs...the extent they get the resources they need empowers and strengthens them."

-David Burney, Coordinator, MSC.Urban Placemaking & Management, Pratt Institute

Equity requires the interconnectedness of social and built environment systems.

Quite simply, empowerment of communities through public architecture involves making strategic and intentional connections between the design, operations and maintenance of the public built environment and existing social systems within a neighborhood. Civic infrastructure, understood herein as civic and community organizations, and public facilities are mutually reliant on each other—they each support the other in their pursuit of public purpose. We refer to this connection between the built and social environments as the publicness in public architecture, a concept recognized by both community advocates and designers.

> *"Designers need to recognize and respect the long-term civic infrastructure that exists within neighborhoods before and after design projects come along."*
>
> – DESIGN for EQUITY: Using A Civil Rights Framework. Hwang, T., Lubenau, A.M., & Torres-Fleming, A. (2015 3–11)

Equity demands amplifying the "publicness" of public architecture.

Within the service area of each typology resides community capital that can be harnessed to amplify the publicness and ultimate success of a public facility. This community or social capital can be a diversity of cultures, organized and invested facility stakeholders, community based and non-profit organizations, and other entities such as educational and religious institutions. Each entity shares the City's objective to support and manifest public purpose. In the following pages we explain our tools and recommendations for amplifying publicness. Through writings on aspects of equity and a comparative analysis of our selected typologies and facility case studies, we reveal drivers and organizers integral to achieving equity.

1.3 Equity and Publicness

Civic infrastructure and public facilities are mutually reliant on each other—they each support the other in their pursuit of public purpose. We refer to this connection between the built and social environments as the publicness in public architecture, a concept recognized by both community advocates and designers.

Equity and publicness are indispensable attributes of a public space. Our research focuses on understanding public facilities as socio-cultural entities that emerge from the interconnected nature of built, social, economic and natural environments. Distinct from a basic quantitative definition of equity, this research builds from a nuanced, qualitative understanding, expressed in the following quote, which suggests that equity in public facilities has implications beyond the distribution of resources and city-wide land use practices and policies.

> *"[Equity is] social, environmental, economic and physical justice, that results in equal and qualitative access to the distribution of products, services and places." (2015)*
> - Ronald Shiffman

Responsible public facilities aspire to achieve the dual objective of (i) facilitating the incumbent services of a particular facility type, such as a library or a police precinct, while (ii) instilling a sense of community pride and identity. Such facilities serve as beacons and social anchors for their respective neighborhoods. Public facilities have potential to be agencies of empowerment, inspiration and refuge, especially in the vulnerable communities, such as those of color and lower incomes. In such contexts, well-designed public facilities become valuable as cultural and social assets, and commemorate our pluralistic society. Designing to the criteria of equity requires an exploration of the metrics by which it may be manifested in public facilities, and the nuanced perception of equity across diverse communities.

Notions of equity and publicness in public facilities were extrapolated from a close examination of contemporary architectural examples of three (3) different typologies, across various neighborhoods. These include two (2) libraries (The Elmhurst Branch Library and Hunters Point Library), two (2) plazas (Plaza de Las Americas and Roberto Clemente Plaza) and two (2) precincts (121st Precinct and 40th Precinct). Three of the projects—The Elmhurst Branch Library, Plaza de Las Americas and 121st Precinct—are built; the other case studies are under various phases of completion. The working method entailed interviewing the respective designers or their representatives to gain an understanding of the design intent of each case study, and their understanding of equity and publicness. When possible, facility staff and served communities were also engaged in informal discussions in order to gauge: (i) their perception of the project, and (ii) whether the guiding principles had been realized (and if yes, how).

Designers, Equity and Publicness

It is difficult to design to the specification of equity. However, it becomes more challenging when a designer receives an inelastic commission in which their freedom is limited by extensive parameters that restrict design. When a public facility project is awarded to an architect or designer, it frequently comes with a set of existing design parameters and expectations, and often lacks clarity of intent. Limited resources, and limited access to tools that may foster engagement with the community and affect an equitable outcome often thwart designers. In the course of our research, designers and architects were asked how they approach a public facility project as compared to a private client or project; the answers were primarily: "little to no difference." Architects and designers see the users of their projects as people irrespective of variations in income, race, color, ethnicity, gender, immigration status and sexual orientation. What supersedes these demographic variables were overarching human factors such as age-specific designs and facilitating access for differently-abled persons.

"I just want to do good design and to me good design does not really know racial or economic or social distinctions. Good design to me is just people making the highest and best use of a space. "

- Jackson Wandres, Plaza de Las Americas

Although accommodating innate human tendencies is central to designing any project in the public realm, all architects emphasized the importance of contextualizing designs within their surrounding socio-cultural, economic and natural environments. The conclusion is that responding to the needs of the community within its context is a premise of equity in design.

The summation of our research directly below explores the nuance of publicness and describes our seven (7) guiding aspects of design for equity. Together these constitute the conclusions drawn from interviews and informal discussions with the designers, staff and community users of the case-study facilities.

Publicness Includes Diversity, Pluralism and Representation

Often described as a city of neighborhoods, New York has five (5) boroughs, fifty-nine (59) community districts and hundreds of neighborhoods. The population is comprised of people with varied ethnic backgrounds, income, race, age, and sexual orientation, who speak more than 200 languages. Representation of this diversity and pluralism is critical to generating publicness in public facilities, and also the keystone for building cohesive, sustainable and resilient communities. Although "designing for people" is a professional ethic for architects and designers, representation of diversity, intergenerational and transgender equity is challenging for designers as conveyed by architect Linda Pollak

"Publicness has to do with embracing the diversity that is there and making the projects in such ways that strengthens it and allow it to be at its most robust. Publicness is always plural in terms of the many different populations."

Linda Pollak designed the Elmhurst Branch Library, which accommodates its plural and diverse public users through various features. For example, the library has spatial accommodation for specific programs that serve a diverse public, such as the children's room, teen's room, media room and the adult learning center. The facility is also distinctive because of the library programming, selection of books, and the languages spoken by the staff.

A Public Space can be a Contested Space

Diverse and pluralistic communities, often comprised of dissenting stakeholders, are associated with conflicts and contestations that often play out in public space or facilities. The conflicts can be experiential, existential, functional or temporal depending on the type and the context of the facility. Realizing equitable public space is an opportunity to mitigate social, spatial and environmental injustice in the urban environment, especially in neighborhoods of color and low income. While conflicts can be seen in varying degrees in facilities that include libraries and precincts, they are more common in public plazas—spaces that are, in theory, democratic common spaces.

Sites and facilities emerge from unique socio-cultural, economic and environmental contexts; identifying a formulaic strategy to resolve these conflicts is difficult. For example, there is an existing conflict between informal sectors and commercial storefronts at the Plaza de Las Americas. Here, sidewalk merchants are perceived either as parasites or entrepreneurs. In either case, the sidewalk merchants compete with the business of the traditional storefronts. Similar contestations exist in Roberto Clemente Plaza, which qualifies as a contested space because it is cross-programmed as a transit hub and a public gathering plaza.

Designing for equity entails recognition of conflict and contestation as an inherent aspect of public space, and facilitating spatial and other organizational strategies and mechanisms to foster a flexible, inclusive and adaptable environment that supports individual rights to the public realm while discouraging monopoly by specific groups or activities. The first step towards mitigating conflict is acknowledging existing and potential conflicts, as early as the design stage.

"An equitable space could be said to be one where everyone feels comfortable. And that is often a concern in urban context where you do not want to encourage a kind of group behavior. Courtyards in housing come to mind (as an equitable space). They are very carefully constructed, designed so that a certain group does not take ownership, whatever that group is."

- James Garrison, Roberto Clemente Plaza

Publicness has Multiple Scales

The definition of scale of a public space is not limited to measuring square footage but embodies socio-cultural and economic values from individual, to neighborhood, to region. The range and depth of the services rendered determines the effective publicness of the space rather than the physical scale of a facility. This is best expressed by James Garrison's description of Roberto Clemente Plaza as a 'condensed Times Square' with similar exuberance and vitality despite its small size. The second scalar criteria is the scale of the public or the community that the facility serves. The perceived community may not be contiguous with the traditional planning and administrative boundaries of a facility and could include a populace within 0.5-1 mile radius, or cater to a much larger area owing to accessibility via public transport. The scale of public significance also warrants consideration and is embodied by monumental significance and universal values. The scales of publicness achieved by the two public libraries in the purview of our research: Hunters Point library and the Elmhurst Branch library, demonstrate how significance can be achieved at various scales and through various built manifestations. Hunters Point library is sited across from the United Nations Headquarters Building, along the East River and envisioned as a landmark in the skyline of Queens owing to its architectural expression and strategic location. Immensely significant to the local community, the Elmhurst Branch Library is a social landmark which celebrates their local history and cultural identity. Another interpretation of scale in public facilities is offered by architect Linda Pollak.

> *"as a means of thinking of (the) difference that an architect/designer can make a project operative and effective depending on the attention (given) to those scales as you are designing. And this has to do with equity".*

-Linda Pollak, Architect

Amplifying Publicness Requires Dialogue, Communication and Participation

One common imperative that emerged from our conversations with the architects, staff and the public is acknowledgment of the necessity of dialogue and cooperation, between the parties that constitute the City-Designer-Community triangle, as an invaluable impetus for the manifestation of equity. Equally as important as the facilitation of communication is the timing of these conversations during the life-cycle of the public facility. Timely facilitation of this dialogue lies at the foundation of community empowerment, ownership and can affect creative solutions to the tug-of-design phenomenon, such as between green space and public space. Very aptly expressed by Jackson Wandres, 'More is More' in dialogue with the community.

1.4 Aspects of Equity in Design

Our research identifies seven recurring aspects of Equity in public facilities that are underpinned by (i) the findings of our research in Part One, (ii) the Agency's objectives and Guiding Principles, (iii) our evolving understanding of equity and publicness and subsequent discussions with the Agency, (iv) interviews with the architects (or their colleagues where applicable) and (v) informal engagement with the public in various capacities such as staff meetings, public interviews and public council meetings. These aspects include:

- **Welcome to All**
- **Accessibility**
- **Inspiration**
- **Empowerment**
- **Cultural Relevance**
- **Flexibility**
- **Innovation**

Each of these aspects is further described in the sections that follow. Based on the findings of the six case studies, our research explores and defines the connotations of the above seven (7) aspects within the public realm and with respect to design. These aspects may be fostered by disparate design elements and programming, and are effective to varying degrees depending on the facility type and the original design intent.

For example, with the given nature of libraries as social condensers, a context-sensitive architect has a greater opportunity to explore the relationship between the facility and the community whereas the same relationship—between facility and community—will be more difficult for a designer to negotiate in a police precinct due to its purpose and means and methods as a law enforcement agency.

A notable attribute of these aspects of equity is their interconnectedness to form an intangible web fostering design for equity. The aspects are not mutually exclusive focusing on one specific element of design such as 'welcome to all' or 'inspiration'. Rather, they function together to shape, balance and reinforce each other. For example, a public facility incorporating the cultural ethos of the community it serves—in terms of either architectural design vocabulary and/or programming—is both welcoming and empowering by way of facilitation of equitable access to resources. The interconnectedness between the various principles underscores the multiple ways in which equity and publicness can be fostered in a public facility.

Welcome to All

The intent of a public facility is not merely to create a space facilitating services to the public but to 'make a place welcoming to all' that imparts a sense of belonging within the community. Our understanding of a public space has evolved based on our changing perception of what entails publicness. This is best illustrated by James Garrison during his interview at which he discussed what makes a public space welcoming to all. According to Garrison, walls of the public buildings built during the 1960s were designed as fortresses—opaque and meant for exclusion, which the user was somehow expected to penetrate. Likewise, the public buildings during the 1970s had routes in places where people could be placed and controlled.

"Today, we have a much more open and a much more accessible culture. Our job [as designers] is to find ways to make these buildings and spaces that allow that to happen."

-James Garrison

With the given nuanced understanding of the term welcome to all, it would be difficult to devise a set of prescriptive design guidelines common to all facility types. But what can be extrapolated are a few desirable underlying drivers that could foster a public facility that welcomes all. While describing the Elmhurst Branch Library as "super welcoming," architect Linda Pollak elaborates

"Through design there is a way to make it [the library] super welcoming. It has to do with the relationship between the inside and the outside; and how much of the inside is perceivable from the outside."

In the Elmhurst Branch Library, Linda Pollak has accomplished welcome to all spatially through the use of transparent layering of welcoming portals *"that draw you in and then draw the street into the building with this concrete spine and publicly scaled elements."*

Depending on the scale of the community that the facility serves, welcome to all can be accomplished by a universal architectural expression of free-flowing spaces and natural lighting as illustrated in the design intent of Hunters Point Library or by reflection of local culture in the design vocabulary evident at Plaza de Las Americas.

Accessibility

A public facility that is not accessible to a disabled person is in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A public facility accessible to all not only facilitates access to persons with disabilities, but also differently-abled and/or vulnerable populations such as people of color, ethnic minorities and those with low incomes. A public facility that is accessible to all transcends physical, social, cultural and temporal barriers.

Physical accessibility includes ease of accessibility both to the location of the facility and mobility between various spaces/programs within. Since the site is determined before it reaches the designer, the current scope of research is focused on the later spatial manifestation of accessible to all, which includes design elements beyond accessibility via public transport and provision of ramps and elevators.

Accessibility encompasses many of the attributes of welcome to all discussed in the previous section, such as welcoming entrances, portals and transparency. What is of essence in this category is to make the public facilities accessible to differently-abled persons who may be either linguistically isolated and/or culturally burdened with social injustices, such as an African-American teen at a police precinct seeking general information. According to Bjarke Ingels Group, this forms the premise of socio-cultural accessibility which can be accomplished by multi-lingual signage, cultural representations and universal symbols enabling way-finding within and outside the facility. Another aspect of accessibility is temporal and pertains to usage and access of the facility beyond working hours, weekends and holidays. Accessible to all can also be interpreted as equitable access to the various facilities or resources provided by the facility type, such as access to drinking water, electricity, restrooms, 24X7 wi-fi, helplines and parking. Lastly, accessibility is also reinforced by a diverse and friendly staff such as may be found in libraries and precincts that includes representation of the unique demographic of the community it serves.

Inspiration

A public facility is potentially a gift to the community fostering inspiration and empowerment. In our previous research, James Garrison understands gift as an artistic act which cannot be compensated or regulated.

A well-designed public facility can instill community pride and identity cementing cohesive communities. For example, the cubes in the Elmhurst Branch Library serve as neighborhood luminous beacons after dark on historic Broadway. Inspiration in design for equity therefore does not necessarily lie in grand architectural expressions but in subtle design sensitivities responding to the specific needs of the community.

> *"I don't think the style of the project matters. I think the inspiration and excitement matters. A design should deliver a tangible sense of accomplishment….. excitement. When we deliver something to the public, we are infusing a certain spirit into that endeavor…and that spirit should be tangible…you should feel it!"*
> - James Garrison

Equating architects with cooks, James Garrison underscores creativity and inspiration in design by saying *"We [architects] are great cooks. Give us a chance to be great cooks. People are inspired in what they do. And it takes it to another level. It is not a formula. We need to do everything we can to keep that sense of freshness and inspiration in the process."*

Empowerment

Empowerment of communities through public architecture involves making strategic and intentional connections between the design, operations and maintenance of the public built environment and existing social systems within a neighborhood. A well-designed public facility can foster empowerment by facilitating multiple publics to assemble and interact which creates a platform to share their knowledge, experiences and opportunities. Equitable access to resources and amenities offered by the facility also fosters socio-economic empowerment of the community. For example, a library welcoming to all is empowering when a diverse community can access resources such as adult learning centers, immigration information and computers while plazas can foster economic empowerment and well-being. A pertinent example is Plaza de Las Americas which facilitates the existing informal market to sustain by providing access to resources such as space, water, restrooms and electricity.

"The idea was not to deprive anybody of their ability to sell but to give them a place where they can do it and not be in conflict with the merchants on 181st Street."

- Jackson Wandres

Active engagement with the public through programming can also foster equity in facilities such as the 121st Police Precinct where the officers conduct educational programs in schools.

"It [imparts] a positive role in the community, especially for younger people who can make better decisions later."

- Community member, Community Council meeting,121st Precinct

Cultural Relevance

We have come to understand the spatial expression of architecture is primarily a culmination of various socio-cultural and environmental processes. Since a public facility aspires to be a neighborhood beacon and an agency of empowerment, interpretation and reinforcement of these intangible ties between socio-cultural and environmental processes is pivotal in designing a well-serving facility. Cultural relevance can not only activate the sense of community but also cultivates collective memory and ownership, cementing a cohesive community. Since publicness entails multiple publics and each public may be wrapped with a unique culture, a great design challenge lies in how to embody the pluralistic cultural ethos of the place without being a testament to any specific cultural group, practice or time period. This underscores value-based community analysis, community participation and collaborative design as effective tools to inform design decisions pertaining to cultural relevance and community ownership.

Cultural relevance in the Elmhurst Branch Library is reinforced by establishing a nuanced relationship between the library and its surroundings, respecting the history of Broadway and by commemorating the cultural history of the community in the 'memory wall' made of bricks salvaged from the original Carnegie building.
 Beyond physical manifestation, cultural relevance can also be fostered by a wealth of intangible design elements such as displaying works of local artists, local art or in the narrative of the project commemorating local history or cultural icons. Roberto Clemente Plaza is an example. It serves as a connection to the surrounding Puerto Rican community by honoring the Puerto Rican baseball icon Roberto Clemente .

Flexibility

Sir Alexander John Gordon defined 'good architecture' in 1972 as buildings that exhibit 3 "L"'s: long life, loose fit and low energy[1]. While low energy pertains to environmental sustainability, loose fit and long life are central in designing a flexible public facility catering to the diverse needs of the community. Without being overly prescriptive, loose fit facilitates organic adaptations to the contestations or conflicts emerging from multiple publics sharing the same space. Both plazas under the purview of our research are pertinent examples of a 'loose-fit'. Roberto Clemente Plaza functions both as a place of transit and a place of repose. Plaza de Las Americas accommodates a multitude of functions by decentralizing the fountain to allow greater flexibility of the space.

"I am always trying to design a space that is as enjoyable and delightful as it can possibly be without being -a. overly prescriptive or b. super idiosyncratic in terms of its appearance because I don't want it to look silly or dated in ten years"

- Jackson Wandres

The role of public facilities is ever changing. A well-designed public facility seeks long life or longevity that is built to last. This engulfs both physical and cultural durability of the facility over a period of time ensuring transgenerational equity which can be accomplished by employing the fundamental principles of good design.

"A good space ...good proportions....natural light...and natural ventilation is a great space for every kind of function"

- Steven Holl

1   Measuring Good Architecture: Long life, loose fit and low energy by Craig Langston

Innovation

According to architect Steven Holl, *"Energy is one of the most important places for innovation today"*. With the City striving towards 80X50, the thrust of innovation in architecture is on combating greenhouse gas emissions and achieving sustainability. While sustainability is essential for fostering transgenerational equity, innovation in design for equity pertains to all phases of the project and to all aspects of design. The premise of innovation is neither invention nor intervention but lies in rethinking new solutions to common problems. Innovation is therefore not an isolated design strategy but an underlying guiding principle to accomplish all other aspects of design for equity including welcome to all, accessibility, inspiration, empowerment, cultural relevance and flexibility. Innovation in a public facility could pertain to either aesthetics, function, technology or a combination of all.

Innovation is evident in Hunters Point Library by Steven Holl which is manifested in the architectural expression of the building that frames views of Manhattan and embraces sustainability by the use of bamboo for insulation and an acoustical barrier in the interior. Although very different in approach, innovation is also evident in the rethinking of operations, as seen in the creation of a direct access community room in the 40th Precinct.

"The community was wanting their own sense of place [while] breaking down the sense of hierarchy [in the precinct]"

- Bjarke Ingels Group

2 Case Studies

2.1 Typologies Reviewed

Urban Plaza

Plaza de Las Americas
Roberto Clemente Plaza

Police Precinct

121st Police Precinct
40th Police Precinct

Public Library

The Elmhurst Branch Library
Hunters Point Library

Using a case study approach we aimed to bring a better understanding to how equity is achieved in design. We investigated six (6) specific facilities using a comparative analytic method. The facilities included two (2) contemporary examples of three (3) different typologies: plaza, precinct and library. In each pairing, one project is built and the other is in design or under construction.

The present research examines contemporary public facilities, which is in contrast to the older examples in our first study. Although not central to this study, the comparison of old and contemporary facilities reveals the process of designing and creating public architecture as evolving in response to cultural and technical changes.

Our analytic approach took the form of interviews with each facility's architect (built or in-process), the onsite staff and the public users wherever applicable. To maintain a level of consistency we developed three sets of questionnaires to guide these interviews and conversations with all. Standardization allowed us to maintain a level of consistency in all our conversations. The following aspects of equity, described earlier, were central to the questionnaires and related conversations:

- Welcome to All
- Accessibility
- Inspiration
- Empowerment
- Cultural Relevance
- Flexibility
- Innovation

Public Plaza as Equalizer

During interviews with designers, facility staff, community members and our advisory committee, 'the street' was frequently cited as a space that evokes equity. Specifically, the street was recognized for offering open access to all, regardless of their cultural or socio-economic status. Jonathan Kirschenfeld[1], Architect and Founder of the Institute for Public Architecture explains:

"the space that comes to mind when thinking of equity is the street, [where] there are no doorkeepers."

Whether planned or resulting organically from the City's colliding urban grids, plazas offer many opportunities. Regardless of their scale, plazas are powerful tools to promote public life, activate place, and cultivate local identity, collective memory and ownership within the dense urban environment. Plazas relieve congestion, ease tension on the City's grid, facilitate storm water management, and foster interaction between the built environment and the community to positively affect social cohesion. They can potentially enhance the overall wellness of their respective neighborhoods.

The public plaza is a place for gathering where the citizens can advocate for themselves and uphold the unspoken traditions of the City's inherent culture. Plazas are unique since there is no staff or service provider on the premise and City services are delivered indirectly. Local organizations, such as neighborhood economic development corporations, assume the roles of maintenance and programming. Oftentimes, the same local organizations also serve as the moderators between

1   For a full digest of Jonathan's interview visit Part One, Chapter 5

the City and Community throughout the life of a plaza and generate stewardship, thereby enabling plazas to better respond to their cultural, as well as physical, context. Cultural context is identified and amplified through design in both urban plaza case studies.

Plaza de Las Americas (completed 2015)
651-699 W 175th Street in Washington Heights
Designed by Jackson Wandres, Director of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning at NV5

Roberto Clemente Plaza (in progress)
Third Avenue between 148th and 149th Streets
Designed by James Garrison of Garrison Architects

Context

Within the urban context, Roberto Clemente Plaza is the result of colliding urban geometries while Plaza de Las Americas is a wider-than-normal street that has been closed off to vehicular traffic and transformed into a pedestrian plaza.

Existing local conditions were key aspects in designing these public plazas. Roberto Clemente Plaza will transform a busy intersection, one of the City's largest bus and subway transfer stations, carving a public space in which commuters can slow down and find respite; whereas the site of Plaza de Las Americas is distinctive by its long-standing service as a public market and has become the town center in its neighborhood.

Flexibility

All amenities in Plaza de Las Americas (a public toilet, kiosk, benches and fountain) are located at either side of the plaza in order to provide flexibility for the market activity as well as for cultural performances and access for emergency vehicles. At Roberto Clemente Plaza nothing is arbitrary. The distinctive feature is a curvilinear zone that is carefully designed and landscaped to provide visual permeability delineating interior and exterior spaces for both rest and movement.

Art

The fountain, designed by Ester Partegàs, is consciously not placed in the center of the plaza; instead it is moved closer to the United Palace Theater leaving a large area unobstructed for events to unfold. The element of water is well received by all age groups, including the children. However, according to our interview with WHIDC Director Dennis Reeder, the design of the fountain is somewhat contested by the local, mostly Dominican community. Decorative elements of the fountain are inspired by textile design from other regions of Latin America and have no direct affinity to the Dominican Republic. Decorative design elements aside, the fountain, in front of the United Palace Theater's supersized facade, appears to be undersized.

For Roberto Clemente Plaza, art, in the form of Melissa Calderón's 'Para Roberto', is utilized to imbue cultural relevance. Approved by the NYC Public Design Commission, the public artwork, a product of the City's Percent for Art Program, is integral to the plaza's design, as evident in our conversation with Bronx Community Board 1 District Manager, Cedric Loftin.

Precincts as Contested Space

"Designing the 40th Precinct we learned that doing a public building does not necessarily mean that it is open to everyone ....it is also highly restricted. ...The 40th Precinct is the first one where NYPD has joined the steps to open up the building to general public use apart from the police work."

-Sören Grünert, BIG-

The degree of publicness is a relevant question in reviewing the role of the police precinct as a typology fostering equity. It elicits an almost automatic compare and contrast between the precincts, presently still a contested space and the all-inclusive plazas. Although NYPD has developed programs that foster community relations, these take place in large part outside of the precinct. The practice and culture within the precinct is essentially closed off from the public.

Over the course of this yearlong study, we have reviewed four (4) police precincts[2]. Three are built; one is in design. Excluding the un-built project, we concluded that approximately 8% of floor area of a precinct is accessible to the public (basement not included). All entryways have layers of security, including improvised barricades. The public cannot freely enter these facilities to approach the information desk and communicate to the law-enforcement agents. With the exception of the 40th Precinct by Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), which is still in progress, the entrances of the precincts included in this study are not welcoming.

NYPD is the responsible agency for the safety and security of our neighborhoods, yet the relation to the communities they are serving is tender. Police-Community collaborations might be on the rise but lack complete trust especially within the confines of the precincts. This is reflected in the spatial organization of many precincts even in the most recently completed 121st Precinct in Staten Island.

Accessibility

Accessibility is not just limited in the entryways. The information desk in the central hallway, where people from the community as well as detainees communicate with the police force represents a risky and contested space.

The location of the precincts themselves also raises issues of physical accessibility. In most neighborhoods, the precinct boundaries coincide with the Community Board boundaries (with the exception of Manhattan) and the exact location of the police precinct is either not critical or not considered in the siting of the facility. Precincts can be situated anywhere within their geographical boundary, in the middle or periphery, unlike the library and public plaza typologies which are considered to be central in their respective neighborhoods with a service area radiating out to a ten minute walk.

Accessibility is not only measured by distance. Cultural, racial and language barriers, as well as immigration laws, burden Police-Community relations and therefore precinct accessibility. Expecting that the architecture alone will change the perception or the behavior on both sides is not likely. However, during our study we came across ideas and initiatives which, if pursued, may help foster a mutually beneficial outcome through shared activities bringing down psychological barriers. Ideas include appropriating some of the precinct's spaces for shared ownership between the NYPD and community. As proposed by Studio Gang Architects:

"Building on simple steps like reclaiming underutilized parking for shared play, the Polis Station proposal envisions new opportunities within the community for police and local residents to spend time together eating, working, learning, playing, and building trust"
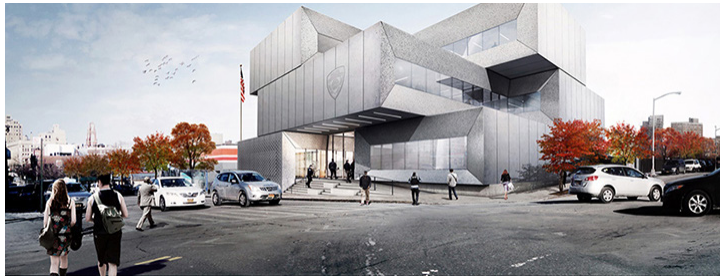
Polis Station, Studio Gang Architects

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2   For a complete analysis of our precincts visit Part One, Chapter 3

121st Precinct (in operation since 2015)
970 Richmond Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10314
Designed by Rafael Viñoly Architects, PC

40th Precinct (in progress)
E148th Street and St. Ann's Ave.
By: BIG/ Bjarke Ingels Group

Shared space already exists to a certain extent in the muster room. Within the built projects we investigated, the muster room was utilized to varying degrees based on availability and direct public access. The muster room presents an opportunity to foster community relations through curated events. By in large, in communities where NYPD invested in community relationships (as seen in both precincts analyzed in Part One), both would use their muster rooms more frequently if the rooms were easily/directly accessible from the outside.

Entryways

Although both entrances are elevated from the street, each precinct engages the City street and sidewalk differently. 121st Precinct sets back from the street, especially at the main entry level, leaving enough room for a roundabout. A 90 foot cantilever at the second level further accentuates the entrance to the precinct. A ramp that starts at the sidewalk meanders its way towards the entrance as well. The 40th Precinct, a result of a three-dimensional composition of 'bricks', creates a covered opening by pulling one apart, another forward and pushing yet another back. The entryway makes the most of the street corner. In fact, the sidewalk blends into the ramp that rises diagonally across the steps making the size and scale of the entryway approachable.

Spatial Organization

The 121st Precinct is based on a linear organization that spans the building on an east-west axis giving way to the traditional, yet light filled central hallway from both sides, while the 40th Precinct has a cluster formation with a central atrium that provides visual connectivity throughout.

Empowerment, Accessibility and Inspiration

The muster room of the 121st Precinct, although annexed into a separate smaller building mass, is hardly visible nor directly accessible from Richmond Avenue. Just like in older more traditional police precincts, the room is only accessible from the central hallway. The 40th Precinct is made of 12 volumes, each hosting a specific program. One big volume, which sits directly on the street and is accessible from the outside holds the community room, exclusively dedicated for community use. The community room has its autonomous volume but it is not separate from the rest of the building, allowing it to be an integral part of the system that makes up the whole precinct.

In contrast to the 121st, plans of the 40th Precinct provide ample space for community activities to unfold. The 121st Precinct, however, hosts many innovative off-site programs which the officers have cultivated for the area school children.

Library as a Social Condenser

Libraries deliver foundational City services to communities and have the potential to become inclusive, empowering and equitable spaces.

> *"People are very dependent on the library for different needs and its resources. They are very inquisitive about its services.""It has become a place to come and sit, and you do not have to buy coffee. It has become the local pub without the alcohol, the home away from home."*
>
> From the interview with the Elmhurst Branch Library Staff

The changing role of public libraries is evident and the emerging typology is inspiring. Libraries have gained significance and transformed from being a quiet reading room into a community center, a cultural hub, an educational portal and a refuge from urban heat. The public library can potentially bring diverse groups of people together, facilitating their interaction and thereby encouraging social cohesion.

Social Cohesion and Connectivity

Both Steven Holl and Marpillero Pollak, the architects of the libraries under consideration, have used the term social condenser to describe their inspiration for design. The term 'Social Condenser' was first used by Moisei Ginzburg referring to a spatial concept that architecture can transform and influence social behavior.[3] According to Ginzburg, the concept of social condenser would influence the design of public spaces and break down perceived social hierarchies toward creating socially equitable spaces. These ideas manifested themselves in built form by intentionally overlapping programs and creating shared circulation nodes thereby allowing unexpected connectivity among diverse communities.

In the contemporary urban context, the concept is appropriate for libraries, museums and other public gathering places including parks.

Rem Koolhaas later appropriated the term social condenser in his publication, Content: "the programmatic layering upon vacant terrain to encourage dynamic coexistence of activities and to generate through their interference unprecedented events".[4] This interpretation takes it one step further and refers to how program can become the driver for spatial organization and the built-form. Such ideas inspired the design of the Seattle Library. In this case the movement of the patrons throughout the building was choreographed, de-compartmentalizing and dispersing certain library functions throughout resulting in a stimulating continuous landscape.

In total we have visited nearly 10 public libraries many of them historic examples from the Carnegie era. Comparing new and old was a great opportunity to understand the evolution of this typology. The evolution of the library from book repository to cultural hub is recognizable in the two library case studies discussed.

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3   NARKOMFIN building for collective living 1928-30, Moscow

4   McGetrick, Brendan; Koolhaas, Rem, Ed., Content, Taschen, 2004

The Elmhurst Branch Library (opened February 2017)
8508 51st Avenue, Queens, NY 11373
By: Marpillero Pollak Architects
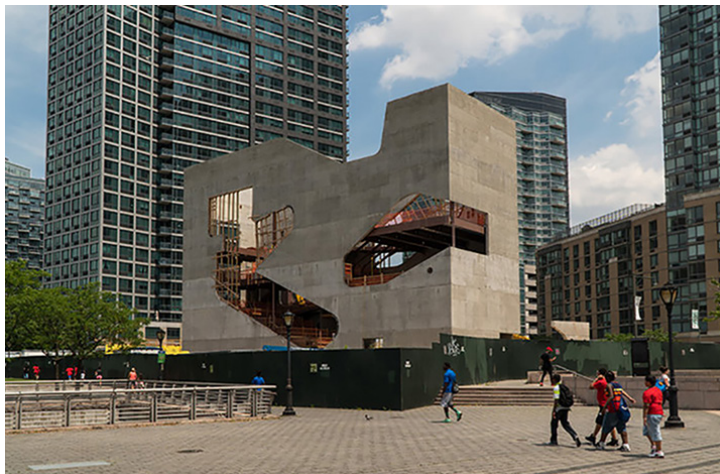
Hunters Point Library (in progress)
47 Center Blvd, Queens, NY
By: Steven Holl Architects

Focusing on the design intentions, spatial manifestations and the libraries' public perception, we interviewed both the architects, arranged a visit to the Elmhurst Branch Library, met with the library staff and spoke with a number of library patrons. Since Hunters Point Library is still under construction, onsite observations were not possible. These two cases share the location of Queens but are different in other important aspects.

Context/Cultural Relevance

Located on the corner of Broadway and 51st Avenue, the Elmhurst Branch Library is surrounded by a temple, historic townhomes and high-density residential buildings. Recalling the small scale of the historic urban fabric of the neighborhood, the library is composed of volumes, varying in shape, size, height and material, each referencing an adjacent cultural landmark. The building is in conversation with its neighborhood. The Hunters Point Library, located adjacent to the Gantry Plaza State Park, steps away from the waterfront, is surrounded by recently completed (high-end) residential towers which make the immediate neighborhood rather homogenous.

Accessibility and Scale

The Elmhurst Branch Library takes advantage of the curve of Broadway and assures visibility from the busy commercial intersection with Queens Blvd. The library responds to the residential context on the North and East, by making room for open space where mature trees were preserved and gardens grown. Aside from the availability of a multi-nodal public transportation network, the building's relationship between the inside and outside enhances its visual as well as physical accessibility.

Hunters Point is a freestanding structure sited at the water's edge and surrounded by high-density, high-rise residential buildings. It is expected to have more patrons from areas within walking distance than it can serve. The interior of the library is contained within the boundaries of a perforated envelope; the perforations frame views across the river and obscure the immediate surrounding context.

Welcome to All

A common element in both libraries is an adjacent open space accessible to the public. The open space acts to buffer the interior from urban activity while creating a serene environment for the patrons and the public. In the Hunters Point Library, functions are distributed vertically so that the footprint is kept compact, allocating the remaining lot size towards an open space surrounding the library between the entrance and the street.
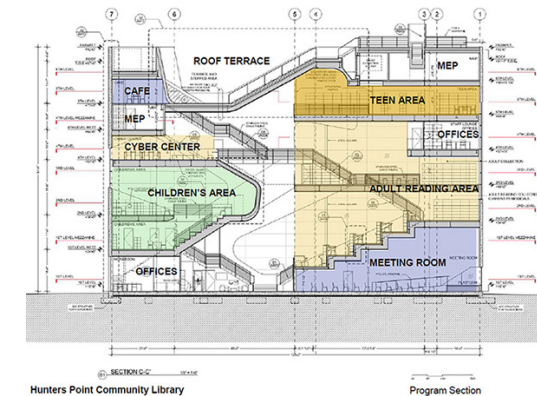
The intimate scale of the Elmhurst Branch Library renders it extremely welcoming. Providing cozy, comfortable, well-lit, defined areas for every age and interest group.

Spatial Organization and the Interstitial Space

Both architects use the term social condenser as their design inspiration. According to Ginzburg, and later Koolhaas, the term social condenser is understood as the interstitial or in-between space that does not belong to one or the other programmed area; it is where diverse activities unfold. In these case studies, interstitial space is explored in different realms -one in plan and the other in section.
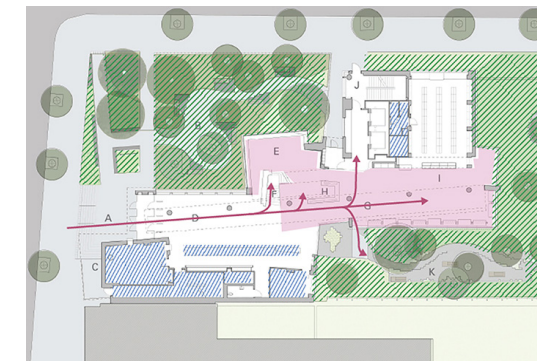
The Elmhurst Branch Library in Plan

Hunters Point Library in Section

Behind the glass entrance doors at the corner of Broadway and 51st Ave. a street-like spine spans the entire length of the Elmhurst Branch Library. It passes by the information desk and the Park reading room, giving way to the highly visible stairs leading to the second level. Similarly, on the second level, the linear circulation traverses different activity zones. The adult computer area and the Broadway reading room, located at both ends are transparent which allows a user's site line to continue beyond the physical boundary of the building, to the neighborhood. Wayfinding is greatly emphasized through design, this decentralized circulatory system is a challenge for the staff, who expressed concerns about the lack of visual connectivity and control.

On the contrary, Hunters Point appears to be one big open space. The interior is a vertical continuum, whereby compartmentalized areas, such as the area for the children and the multipurpose community room, are pushed north or south to either end of the facility, allowing the circulation system to alternate between ramps. Hallways and stairs overlook and wrap around the guts of the library and serve as the adult reading areas.

Inspiration

Both cases are inspiring for different reasons. The publicness of each library is communicated through design. The Elmhurst Branch Library celebrates intimacy through spatial sequencing and relationships to the surrounding context and users, while Hunters Point distills the experience of openness, an attribute of urban life.

The Elmhurst Branch Library achieves publicness through its intimate relationship between the inside and outside. Park and Broadway reading rooms, which take their names from the views they frame, are two stories high and contained in a structural glass facade; the acquired transparency dissolves the boundaries, fostering the perception that these reading rooms reside both in the public realm and in the interior. The alternating sensation, from day to night; outside, looking in; or inside, looking out, introduces permeability to the building.

The Hunters Point Library is not yet open but has already become an icon on the East River waterfront. The shape, a supersized box with varied openings, does not look like a typical library. The scale of the building is further obscured by its materiality; the exterior of the structure is on-site concrete that has received a painted finish which creates a monolithic condition by erasing any indication of the modulation of the exterior cladding. Both, the scale of the void and the formlessness of the openings suggest that the apparent scale is not in relation to one person but for a number of people, a community, an assembly.

2.2 Six Facilities

FACILITIES	ARCHITECTS	LOCATIONS		INTERVIEWS		
				ARCHITECT	STAFF	PUBLIC
1	**THE ELMHURST BRANCH LIBRARY**	**MARPILLERO POLLAK ARCHITECTS**	**86-07 BROADWAY ELMHURST, QUEENS**	**BUILT**	✓	✓	✓
2	HUNTERS POINT LIBRARY	STEVEN HOLL ARCHITECTS	4740 CENTER BLVD. LONG ISLAND CITY, QUEENS	IN-PROCESS	✓	X	–
3	**121ST PRECINCT**	**RAFAEL VIÑOLY ARCHITECTS**	**970 RICHMOND AVE, STATEN ISLAND**	**BUILT**	✓	✓	✓
4	40TH PRECINCT	BJARKE INGELS GROUP	567 E 149TH STREET, SOUTH BRONX	IN-PROCESS	✓	X	–
5	**PLAZA DE LAS AMERICAS**	**JACKSON WANDRES (RBA/NV5)**	**651-699 W 175TH STREET, MANHATTAN**	**BUILT**	✓	✓	–
6	ROBERTO CLEMENTE PLAZA	GARRISON ARCHITECTS	148-149TH STREET, THIRD AVENUE, SOUTH BRONX	IN-PROCESS	✓	✓	–

Facilities Location Map

Plaza de Las Americas

651-699 W 175th Street, Manhattan
By: Jackson Wandres

"We wouldn't have called it a project of regional significance. This was a 'neighborhood space'. This is really a space that...clearly to us ..was serving the neighborhood."
-Jackson Wandres, of NV5

Context

Plaza de Las Americas is located in the Washington Heights and Inwood neighborhoods which are home to populations predominantly from Latin American cultures.

NV5, then RBA Group, was hired to design the 14,000 (10,000 sq. ft. in other sources) sq. ft. pedestrian plaza on 175th Street flanked by a historic theater 'The United Palace' (to the North) and a supermarket (to the South).

Plaza de Las Americas is one of the City's first urban plaza projects. The Washington Heights and Inwood Development Corporation (WHIDC) responded to the RFP and received funding in 2008.

In addition to other compelling reasons, such as the need for a town center in the neighborhood, and securing a space for area vendors, the most convincing argument for closing off this section of 175th Street to traffic was the lack of visibility at the intersection of 175th Street and Broadway.

Design

The design of the Plaza de Las Americas has permanently transformed an ordinary street into a (much needed) town center.

Primarily to make room for the market activity and cultural performances, the space is kept open to possibilities by the unobstructed and flexible plan. It accommodates the plaza's current use and future programs.

The plaza's amenities, including a kiosk, (housing all the power and water lines), a state of the art water closet and the fountain are managed by WHIDC. These amenities as 'objects' are not integral parts of the design, instead they are generic elements that populate the plaza along with the City benches.

According to Jackson Wandres, the chief designer of the plaza, the wavy lines of the paving pattern, is in reference to a project 'Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro by Roberto Burle Marx, and is dynamic in appearance.

Reminiscent of Portuguese plaza designs, the repeat of the wavy pattern sets a rhythm when crossing the plaza. In the Plaza de Las Americas the pattern, rather than being a space/time notation, marks areas for movement and areas for the market activity.

"Here is an example of what I wish we had done and we didn't- whenever we design a public open space, one of the first questions I ask myself is - is this a space for passing through or is this a space for being...or is it both. In this case it is both, right? It is a City street so people are passing through all the time. But it is also a plaza. And it is a gathering space. So as a gathering space, it has to be comfortable and easy to use...easy to spend time and... So, seating becomes really important...and how you accommodate seating becomes really important. I wish that we were able to supply more seating...formal seating... And I wish we had been able to supply more types of seating. We ended up only using New York City DOT's standard benches..."
- Jackson Wandres, of NV5

Program

WHIDC played a pivotal role in the plaza's transformation recognizing the need for a town center and the desire to legitimize street-vending activity while supporting small business owners. Since the plaza's opening some of the street vendors have become storefront owners.

Also, the vendors appreciate the advantages that come with a vending permit and organization. The plaza provides power and other services for everyone to enjoy, including the homeless. The community also benefits from the access to power as it makes cultural activities, musical concerts and other performances possible. Unfortunately, the fountain is not winterized, therefore the running water is only available during the warmer seasons.

Art

The fountain, that was designed by Ester Partegàs, is placed close to the United Palace Theater, leaving the center unobstructed for events to unfold in addition to allowing for FDNY accessibility.

The element of water is well received by all age groups, especially the children.

The design of the fountain is somewhat contested by the local, mostly Dominican community. Decorative elements of the fountain are inspired by textile design from other regions of Latin America. Decorative design elements aside, the fountain, in front of the United Palace Theater's supersized facade, appears to be undersized.

Empowerment

Dennis Reeder, Managing Director of WHIDC, is well aware that there are two communities whose needs have to be met; the vendors and the locals.

"Is the facility meeting the need? We do not have nearly enough events as we want because of bureaucracy. We would like to have more cultural activities when the vendors are not there. We have no creative rights."

The plaza by its program aims to contribute to the economic development in the community it serves; it is a vital business hub for the neighborhood.
On all accounts, it is said that the plaza is well received and well used by everyone. During our visit the Green Market was in full action despite the heavy rain. The awning of the United Palace Theater was a protection from the elements for the seniors who were enjoying a chat with their neighborhood friends.

History, Longevity and Cultural Relevance

In this respect, the most important asset of the Plaza de Las Americas is WHIDC and its Managing Director Dennis Reeder, who has held his position for decades. His depth of knowledge regarding the community has been and will continue to be pivotal to the success of the plaza.

Roberto Clemente Plaza

148-149th Street and Third Avenue, South Bronx
By: Garrison Architects

Context

The area in the South Bronx where Roberto Clemente Plaza is to be completed is a local, multi-modal transportation hub. The design transforms a traffic island where 3rd Ave. and Willis Ave. merge near 149th Street. By merging the traffic island with the sidewalk on the east side of Willis Ave., it was possible for the City to define this sizable, contiguous space as an urban plaza.

Design

According to the architect's drawings, the triangulated site is designed to create a center and a periphery by the highly articulated, landscaped curvilinear zone that turns onto itself.

"The plazas are essential parts of the City which break up the traffic and the density within a community. Even if a park is located within a few blocks, a plaza still provides community members and families a much needed place for respite and reflection."

- Cedric Loftin, District Manager of Bronx CB1

This design element delineates or carves a quiet area from the surrounding busy sidewalk that gives space to several bus stops.

There are areas planned for movement and areas for rest. The highly articulated and landscaped curvilinear zone, that turns onto itself, is wide enough to separate the quiet area from the surrounding busy sidewalk, creating inside and outside zones.

The design utilizes green infrastructure for stormwater management on the site, while also featuring and celebrating the element of water.

In his own words, Garrison continued describing his design as something for everyone *"The scale does not matter either! Roberto was not big! But that piece has everything in it."*

He continued referring to permeability and visibility created by the curvilinear zone. All in all, the plaza is inclusive while also providing enclosure.

When asked about the definition of equity, Garrison responded:

"I suppose William Whyte's standards are useful here. Can you sit yourself on it, can you see other people? Have you dealt with the sensory environment in a way that gives you a respite from the City or if appropriate, forces you into it? But I think, we first started with how the individual experiences our space... how we accommodate their minds and their bodies... Because, that is for everybody! Then you get to representational issues... so it is named after Roberto Clemente, the great baseball player."

"We are looking to serve the culture in the most complete way we possibly can in every project... And, if it means in a private project convincing the developer to respond to the public need, to be more responsible on the face of the overall cultural need, we are going to do that. We see that as our job. If it means going into a situation like Roberto where (City) planning may have a kind of pre-ordained approach to a project which we think does not completely serve the population in the South Bronx... that very active hub... And there was a conflict there, a conflict between the City's desire to make a green... everything green let's say...and this kind of miniature Times Square that is extraordinary and vibrant...We had to find a way to navigate between those..."

- James Garrison, Architect
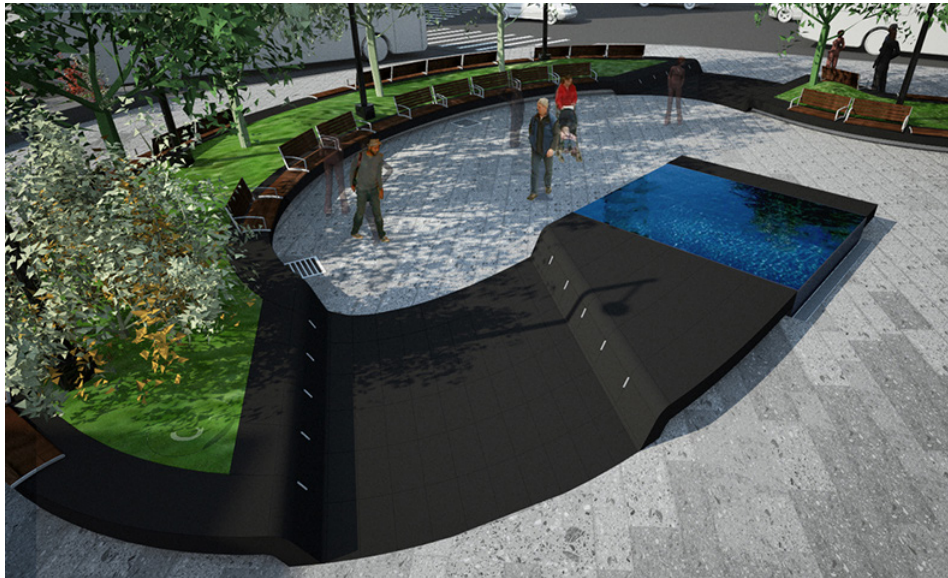
Program

According to the architect, the design of the Roberto Clemente Plaza project requirements/description did not address the need for a larger, protected waiting area at this heavily used transportation hub. In other words, the program was seen by the City as green infrastructure with a rest area and not a transportation hub.

"The plaza is situated within one of the busiest and largest bus and subway cross stations." Cedric Loftin

Accessibility

When pressed about the importance of accessibility for the public Cedric expressed concern about the use of the plaza by the homeless. He said

"Making the plaza completely accessible was essential even if a repercussion is the homeless folks sleeping there."

Art & Cultural Relevance

Cedric Loftin mentioned that the NYC Public Design Commission just approved the placement of a sculpture commemorating Roberto Clemente (perhaps in the center of the curvilinear zone) He felt that this made the plaza unique.

"The artwork serves as the connection to the Puerto Rican community, allowing for cultural and historic recognition of Clemente's accomplishments. This is an inspiration, especially for children and ultimately community empowerment."

When asked about welcome to all, he concluded

"The plaza has a very strong cultural relevance and is in a great location, bound to be well used, commuters have no option but to traverse it and utilize it."

121st Police Precinct

970 Richmond Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10314
By: Rafael Viñoly Architects, PC

"Mindful of the local context, the design of this sustainable building is marked by a distinctive cantilevered second floor, which extends out to the avenue as a symbolic gesture of engagement between the NYPD and the community it serves. The building will not only serve as a model for sustainable design, but also expand law enforcement presence in Staten Island by cutting response times and relieving the workload of the existing precincts."

-Rafael Viñoly, Principal, Rafael Viñoly Architects

Context

The 121st Precinct is situated at the border of the Graniteville and Mariners Harbor neighborhoods of Staten Island on Richmond Avenue, flanked by a cemetery on one side and a commercial strip on the other. On a former Department of Transportation parking lot, the 121st carves its service area from the 120th and the 122nd Precincts.

Design

Intended to be a beacon for the community, the building has a significant presence and is visibly different from everything around it. The 90 foot cantilever is indeed an impressive gesture. When speaking with members of the design team they reflected on the functional role of the covered entrance as well as its symbolic gesture:
"The fact that the building extends out into the public realm, tends to want to bring, in reverse, the public realm back into the building."

-David Rolland of Rafael Viñoly Architects

Welcome to All

The well intended 90 foot cantilever over the entryway is meant to symbolize a welcoming gesture to the community but can also be perceived as a symbol of power. The winding ramp to one side and steps to the other, as wide as the building, lead one up to the glass entrance doors. Upon entering the building, the welcoming gesture is interrupted. One stumbles upon standard metal barricades, blocking any further free access.

However, upon our visit to the June Community Precinct Council meeting, we heard words of praise for the precinct.

"The Precinct is a good neighbor to everyone"

"It is fresh, new, clean and welcoming to all."

"The modern shape [architecture] of the building attracts diverse community."

"We were waiting for this to happen."

Program

No doubt, the entire police force is proud of their new workplace; it is spacious, light-filled, clean and overall an improvement from their older, outdated working environment.

However, similar concerns regarding a lack of understanding of how the men and women in the police force work, led to room allocations that are not being used as planned. For example, Commanding Officer Harrington has moved his office from the second floor suite to downstairs off the central hallway:

"Originally this was just supposed to be a conference room, I have another office upstairs, I never use it because I would rather be down here, this is where everything goes on."

Conversely, when in communication with the Detective Squad, which operates almost independently often times requiring more cover than uniformed officers, they asked why they were not allocated space on the second floor.

Despite the state of the art mechanical equipment and air-conditioning, the air quality, especially during Fall and Spring, when demand on the system is low, is less than desirable in the confined office rooms.

The Commanding Officer, his accompanying officers and the detectives, all expressed frustration with the non operable windows. Even the building manager commented on how he does not understand how a building receives 'LEED certification' without natural ventilation.

Accessibility

Although we question the building's relationship with its community, the police force of the 121st Precinct has developed admirable programs, especially for children and teenagers.

On the premises, the Community Precinct Council Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month.

Lastly it is worth mentioning that the building layout kept us all wondering why the second building mass, which is very different in size, shape and materials from the main elongated structure and houses the muster room was not made more like an annex making the muster room directly accessible from the outside. Perhaps, this way scheduling community affairs would have been less challenging for the staff.

"I enjoy working with the men and women here."

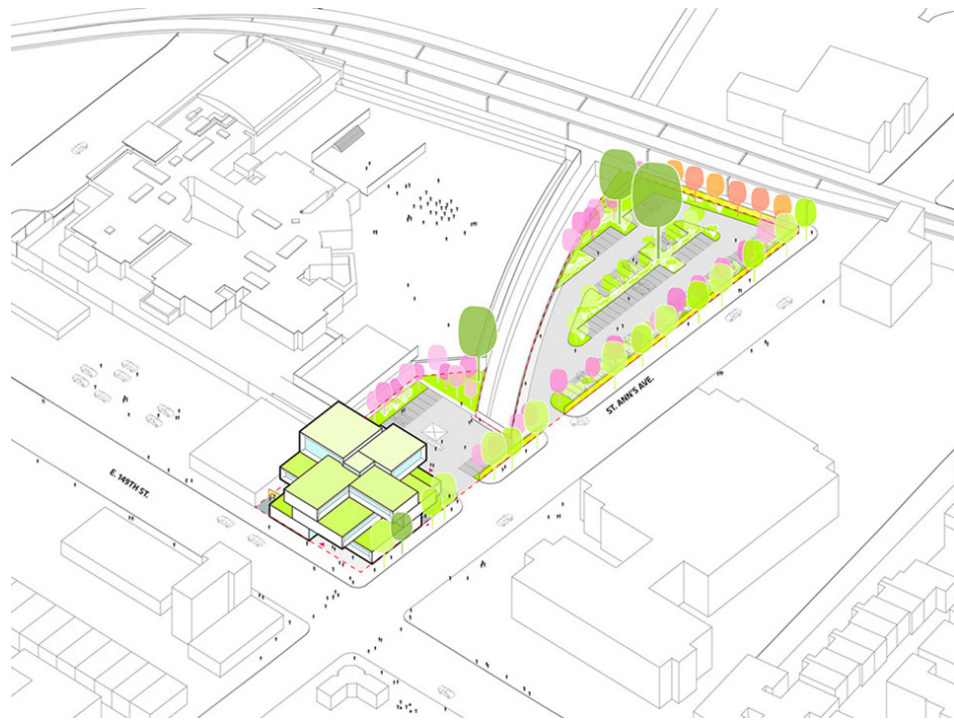*"The best precinct ever to work with and I have been around for a long time".*

"It [imparts] a positive role in the community, especially for younger people who can make better decisions later."

-Community Council Vice-President
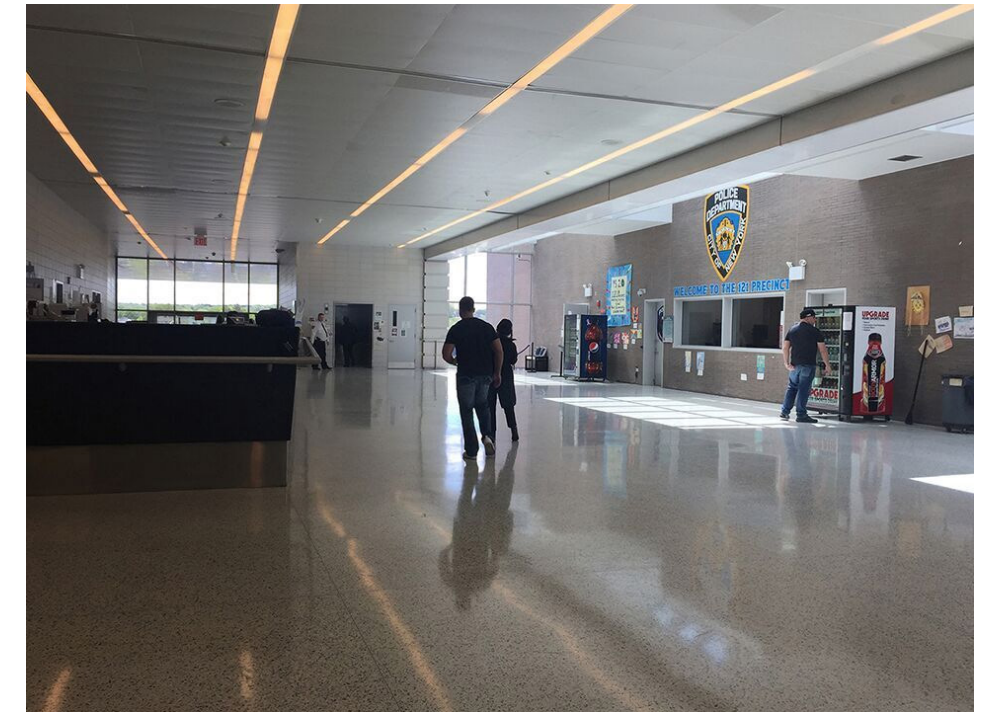
40th Police Precinct

567 E 149th Street, South Bronx
By: Bjarke Ingels Group

Context

The new 40th Precinct is for the neighborhoods of Port Smith, Mott Haven and Melrose in the South Bronx and will replace an older facility at 257 Alexander Avenue.

It is challenging to write about a building or a concept that does not exist yet and has not passed the test of time, however one can see the potential it offers and anticipate the change it might provoke. The proposed 40th Precinct seems to be doing many things right including re-enforcing the district's commitment to community policing.

Design

A cluster of 12 volumes, bricks, as they are referred to by the architect, defines the building which covers 45,000 sq. ft. in total. Each brick, has a dedicated program and together they coalesce around the central atrium, while each maintaining visual relationship throughout the building. The sculptural

"So what we have done in terms of design ...is to make this as open and approachable as we were allowed to. And at the same time its obviously a public building that has kind of a civic appearance."

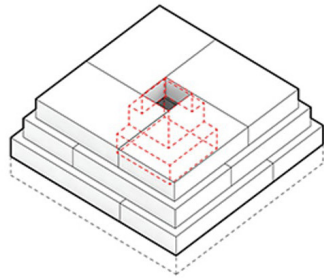Sören Grünert of Bjarke Ingels Group

composition of bricks dominates the first encounter of the building stirring visitors to the entryway.

The community room independent but not autonomous is one of the 12 bricks. It has a street-front presence and is directly accessible. The decision to move the community room out of the building's interior is an innovative approach to program that influences formal and spatial aspects of this project, making it the greatest contribution of this design.
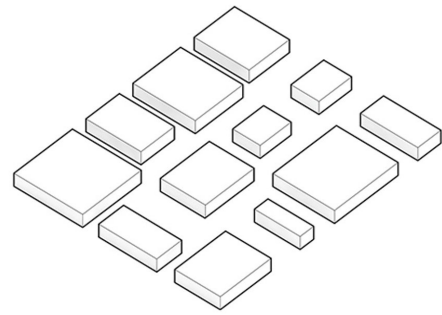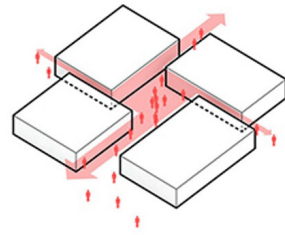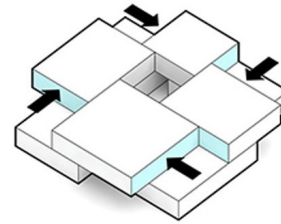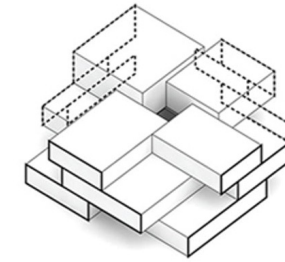
Program Requirements
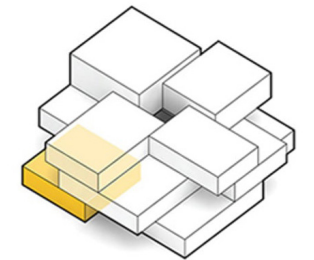

Massing & Program Organization

Precincts within a Precinct

Setbacks & Windows

Bricks

Community

"For the community room we had these concrete panels and we are casting 12" wide glass block into them ....so there is a pattern across that portion of the facade where on the interior there is light in an interesting way ...while on the exterior you will see the movement and color and you will know that something is going on in there. So it more porous literally. When I thought of publicness as it relates to this project... how you evoke that sensitively, I thought of how we would do the facade treatment at the community room."

Elizabeth McDonald of Bjarke Ingels Group

Program and Spatial Organization

The timing of this project couldn't have come at a more critical moment, when relations between law enforcement and communities of color are tender not only in the City but nationwide. It is a noble quest to look for remedies by creating equitable space where both parties, community and law enforcement, can come together.

The design team explained their intent behind the bricks, and said that each serves a different unit of law enforcement with differing program requirements. This way each has their own brick in close proximity to the others and are visually connected.

Unlike other police precincts which ask the muster room to be multi-purpose, here the community room is separate and directly accessible from the street; leaving the room open to scheduling events, community meetings or classroom activities.
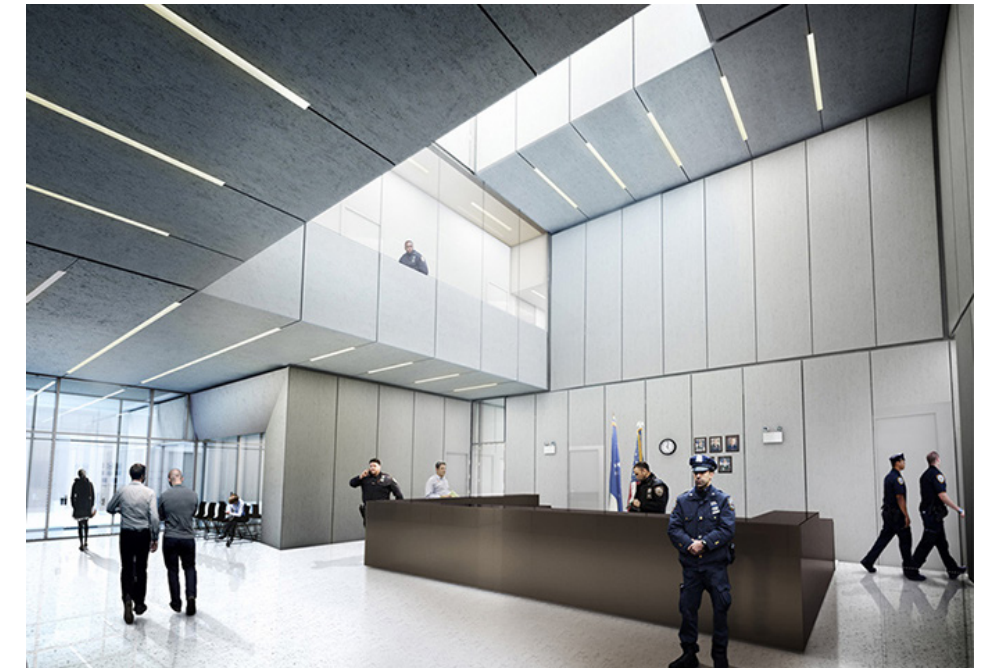
Accessibility and Welcome

Setting back a brick at the corner of St. Ann's Ave. 149th Street, carves ample space to create the entryway to the Police Precinct as well as the community room. An ADA ramp and seating blocks are integrated into the landscape steps, which blend into the topography ot the sidewalk's changing level. It is casually inviting.
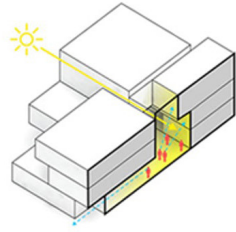
"When we included the community room, we were asked to treat the façade at that location in a unique way. We weren't told what that should be but we were told it was important that the building expressed that piece of program so that the people in the neighborhood would know that there is something different going on there. For us that meant opening it up. Creating visibility into that space."

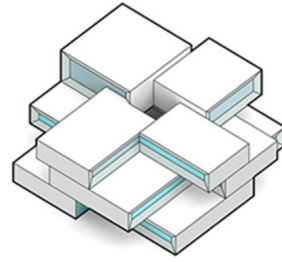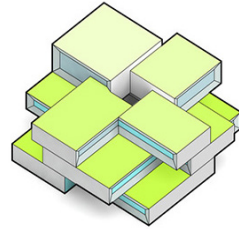Elizabeth McDonald of Bjarke Ingels Group

Atrium
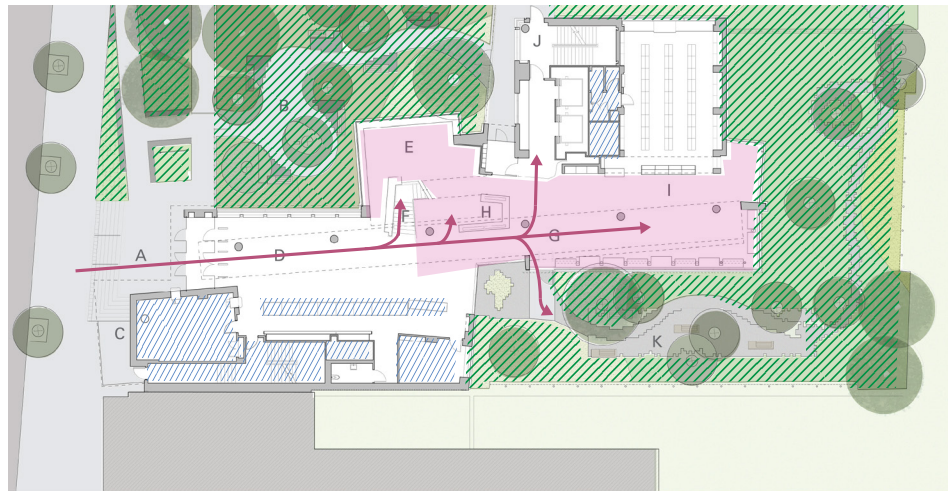

Perimeter & Facades + Setback Facades

Green Roof

Lastly, it is acknowledged that the building is conceived according to sustainable design practices.

The Elmhurst Branch Library

86-07 Broadway, Queens, NY 11373
By: Marpillero Pollak Architects

First Level Plan

Green Space
Staff
● Adults
● Tweens/Teens
● Children
● Stacks
— Library User

A Entry Plaza
B Community Park
C Carnegie Brick Wall
D Lobby
E Park Reading Room
F Monumental Stairway
G Main Circulation Spine
H Newsstand Kiosk
I Carnegie Room
J Main Stair
K Learning Garden

Context

The new Elmhurst Branch Library was designed to replace a Carnegie Library dating back to 1906 at the same location. Like many other Carnegie libraries, this was originally a single-story library with one big open space in a symmetrical layout situated on a large corner lot and was told to be a popular destination for generations with its gardens and resources. Over time, the Carnegie Library had several additions (1920, 1926, 1949 and 1965) which transformed and fragmented the original single space into smaller ones, in order to respond to rising population density of the neighborhood.

"The public loves it! We get a lot of compliments."

-The Elmhurst Branch Library Staff
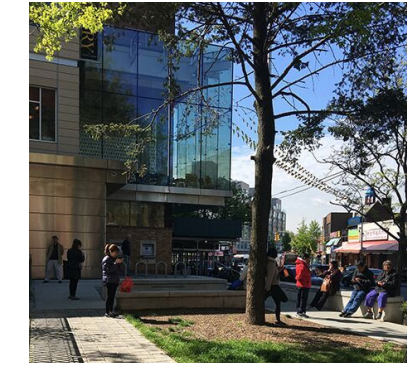
Design

The new library with its 30,000 sq. ft. has doubled the size of the former branch, which was the second busiest circulating library within the Queens Library system. The library is designed to meet expectations of this extremely diverse residential community, which is home to immigrants from 80 countries.

In the context of the small scale, historic (urban) fabric of the neighborhood, the library building is composed of volumes, each referencing one or the other cultural heritage in the immediate surround.

"When you are in these reading cubes, the idea is to feel that you are in the building...that you are in the neighborhood....and you are in the City and the environment all at the same time."

-Linda Pollak, Architect

The double height, structural glass cubes break the norm, adding to the library's visibility, beacon alike, from afar, especially from curving Broadway. The resulting transparency of these volumes blur the line between inside and outside making these reading rooms belong to the public realm, each taking their names from the respective context; the park on one side and the bustling urban life of Broadway on the other.

"The welcoming portal entries that happen outside draw you in and then draw the street into the building with this concrete spine and publicly scaled elements. So the transparency from the side walks to the outdoor programs spaces to the interior program spaces welcome people but also to make it possible to make many things happen at the same time."

-Linda Pollak, Architect
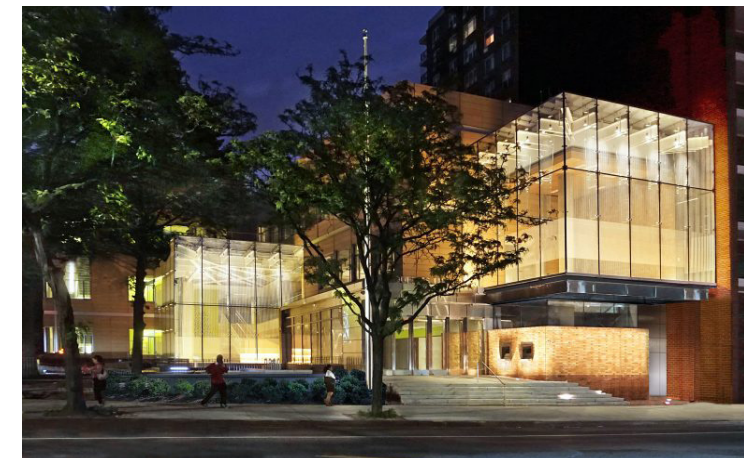
"Nobody knows better than us, we live here every day."

Spatial Organization

The library is rather decentralized and relies on an interior 'street', a (complex) linear interstitial space, that gives way to various, age and interest specific zones of the library on four levels. Wayfinding throughout the library, enhanced by vibrant, colored portals, accent walls and color-coded furniture makes it easy to navigate the space.

An open staircase takes advantage of the double-height Park reading room and gives way to the second level central spine; this is where the vertical (visual) continuity ends. Both, vertical circulation, the main staircase as well as the elevator core bring the library patron to a central location on the second floor where the Broadway reading room celebrates one end and the teenage workroom with the adjacent adult computer area marks the other end.

Program

The Elmhurst Branch Library is one of six libraries in the Queens Library system with continuing education programs (including citizenship exam preps) and classrooms on the premises. Here, the classrooms are located in the basement, along with the staff lounge and mechanical rooms, all accessed through two elevators and the fire stair. In short, there is no visual continuity or connectivity to the levels of the library. As a result, the staff is challenged to service the patrons.

"In the old library you did not want to sit and stay."
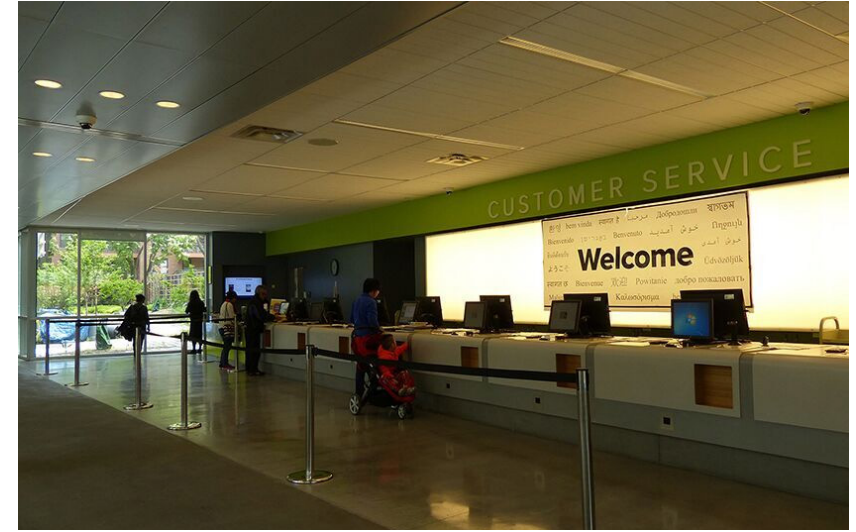Member of Community

"it makes me want to study more."
Member of Community

"The drawback to sufficient area … is the need for extra staff."

Staff

"looks plentiful and spacious with lots of light."
Member of Community

The Children's and the Community rooms share the third level. The popularity of the children's programs congests the circulation (in front of the elevators) with baby carriages. The healthy numbers of attendees for the adult programs and events in addition to the young families with kids challenge the staff. According to the staff interviews, both of these areas should have been on the ground level. This quality of giving everyone something or better yet some place presents a challenge for the staff who brought up the lack of visibility and visual control throughout the facility.

"People are very dependent on the library for different needs and its resources. They are very inquisitive about its services."

It is obvious that this is not the 'one big room library' that it has replaced. The new facility provides cozy, comfortable, well defined areas for every age group. The downside of differentiated space allocation is the lack of spatial economy due to enhanced circulation throughout the building. Building code requirements for egress force the hand of the designer to widen the hallways, even in distant, less used corners of the building.

History

More than the wall that is reconstructed from the reclaimed bricks from the old library it is the few tall standing trees that are carefully protected and preserved as a living memory of the past times; they will offer welcome shade for future library patrons or the passer by.
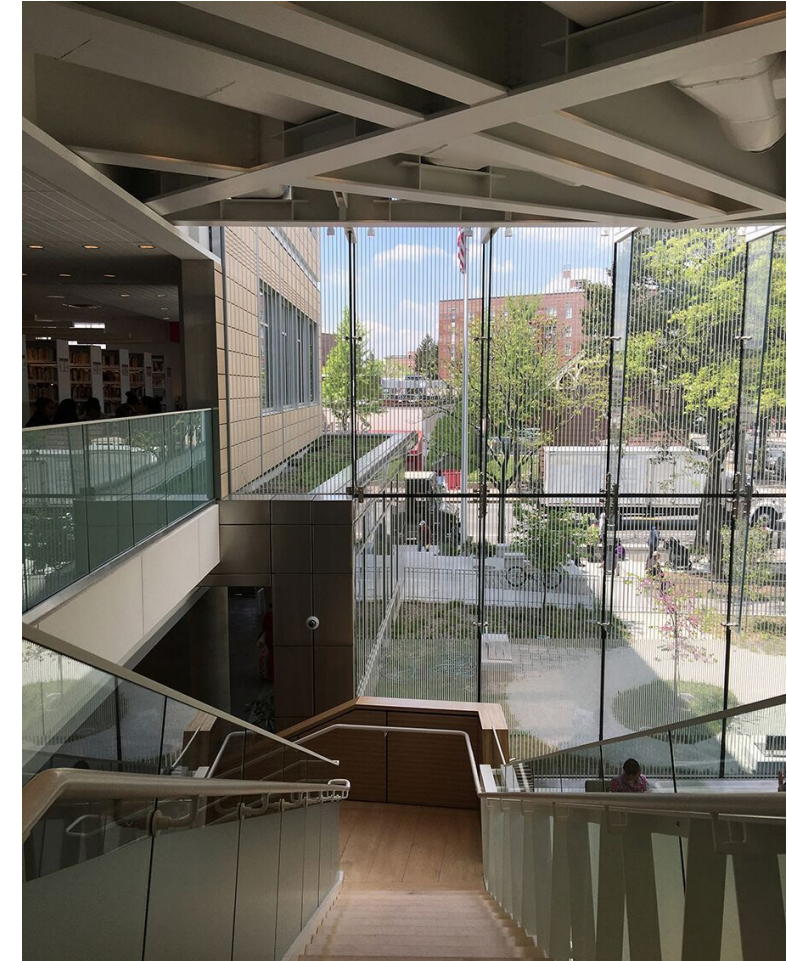
"Here, everything outside is inside. Look at the view. For this reason they should maintain the same cleanliness outside on the grounds as inside."

Member of Community

Hunters Point Library

4740 Center Blvd. Long Island City, Queens
By: Steven Holl Architect

Context

The 22,000 sq. ft. Hunters Point Library broke ground in May 2015 and is currently nearing completion. Yet it has already become an icon on the East River waterfront as seen from Manhattan. The library defines the edge of a neighborhood and will serve a recently developed, somewhat homogenous, high-rise residential community. These residential towers in the backdrop, emphasize even more how different this library is from the conventional, surrounding buildings.

"It is a tiny building. It is very architectonic....that is the structure you are looking at...it has silver paint on it... so that is the structure but it is also the form and also the geometry of the interior things...the way they look out....but it is sitting in the middle of all these developer towers that have nothing to give back to us. So therefore it has a kind of iconic necessity...[stating]..this is a public building."

Steven Holl, Architect

Accessibility

The building is setback obliquely from the street, creating a public space and extending the threshold. The main entrance to the library is through a revolving door from the reading garden which is a public space created between the library and the street. Rather than utilizing the building itself and modeling the entrance, Holl exploits the reading garden, a public plaza, as the welcoming gesture. Upon entry, the multi-story open space becomes the first impression. The design breaks the mold which we anticipate from accessibility and transparency and a feeling of welcome when approaching a public library. Holl shows us that accessibility and welcome is not only achieved through transparency. The rooftop terrace is an added feature to celebrate another public space.

"We had thirty schemes. But [with] one level two things - you couldn't see Manhattan...and after everybody said on the committee - 'Oh the great views of Manhattan!'......we were like...okay.......lets [do the café and roof terrace] which is going to be open to the public ...and everyone can go and get these incredible views."

Steven Holl, Architect
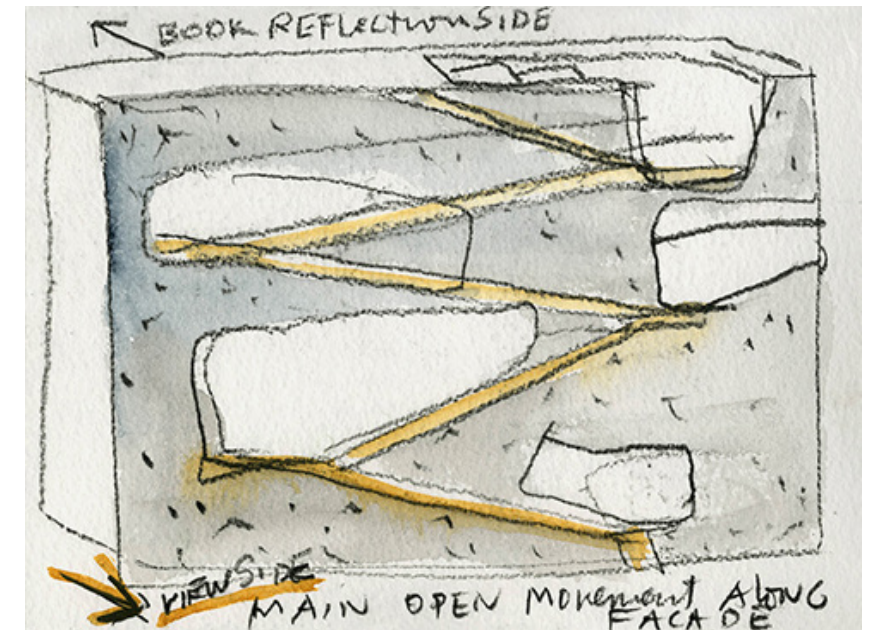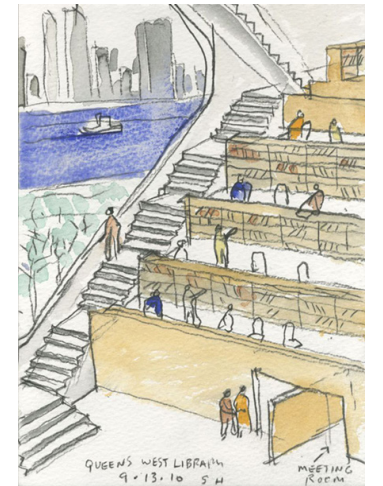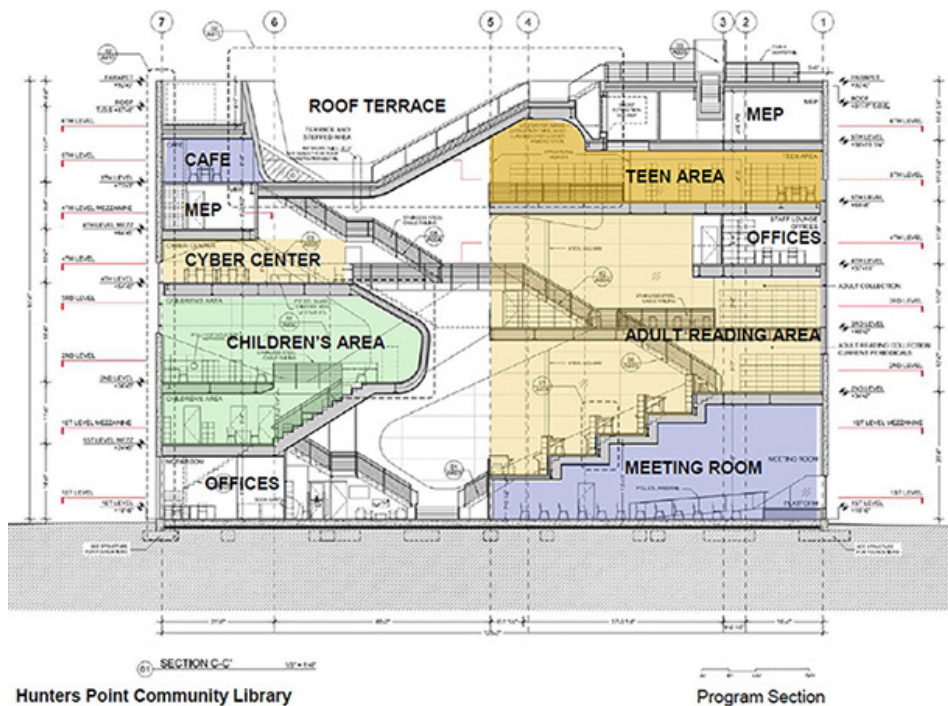
Design

The unconventional shape with intriguing openings defies expectations. The scale of the building is further obscured by its materiality. The exterior of the structure is on-site concrete finished with a smooth paint which hides any indication for unit measure of construction or size of a room. The abstract composition of the building is further invitation to explore.

The enchanting box is very compact and accomplishes, by default, several virtues. It promises to be energy efficient as it has, relative to the volume, small exterior skin area to insulate and the space will be easier to air-condition. It distributes the entire allowable floor area vertically, thereby reducing its footprint on the ground and allocating much of the lot size towards outdoor space and lawn to be used as a public space.

"It is very important to me that public space and the organization of urban space and public space are priority here. Actually we have 13 active projects all of which are about public space. I am very proud of that because to me that brings a mission to each project....to makes the building offer something for the future."

Steven Holl, Architect

Sections and plans of the building describe the central void as an impressive space which is huge in scale with arbitrarily shaped openings that are not calibrated with floor plates. Instead, the openings relate to the movement through space. The scale of the void and the formlessness of the openings suggest that the apparent scale is not in relation or related to one person, body scale but for a number of people, either community or assembly. There is no doubt that this is an expression of publicness in the building.

Each person is integrated into a larger group or left to enjoy what the library has to offer without being forced into participation.

Spatial Organization

Both ends of the oblong, rectangular building are reserved for programmed spaces. The interior of the building is seemingly a vertical continuum whereby the community room at the ground level and the children's area at second and third levels are the only programs contained. All other programs such as the teen space, cyberspace and the cafe overlook the major adult reading area that forms the central gut of the library. All levels, terraces alike, are connected through a series of ramps and hallways that frame the central space and run parallel to the façade. The entry to the community room at the main level is through double-doors under the reading terraces. According to the architect's plan, the community room is also directly accessible from the outdoors.

"I believe that architecture is breathing in and breathing out. It is like analysis ...(inhales)...of all the different things about site and circumstance ....and then... (exhales)... synthesis. So the breathing in part is like the most important part...And going to the site of course you can do that...you can read the program...whatever the client tells you....But if you can meet with the people in the community and listen to what they think...what they want...then breathe out."

Steven Holl, Architect

ROOF TERRACE

CAFE
MEP
CYBER CENTER
CHILDREN'S AREA
OFFICES

TEEN AREA
MEP
OFFICES
ADULT READING AREA
MEETING ROOM

SECTION C-C'

Hunters Point Community Library

Program Section

Actors, Drivers, Organizers, and Spatial Manifestations of Equity

DRIVERS & ORGANIZERS

ASPECTS of EQUITY

CONTEXTUAL DESIGN
SITE DESIGN
SCALE
ART
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
CULTURAL IDENTITY
MEMORY AND HISTORY
OWNERSHIP
PROGRAM
SPATIAL ORGANIZATION
INTERSTITIAL SPACE
ENTRYWAY
WAYFINDING
SLIGHT-LINES
MATERIAL
TRANSPARENCY
DAYLIGHT / LIGHTING
OPERATION
SERVICES
STAFF
MAINTENANCE
LIFE CYCLE COST
FUNDING

WELCOME TO ALL
ACCESSIBILITY
INSPIRATION
EMPOWERMENT
CULTURAL RELEVANCE
FLEXIBILITY
INNOVATION

Our research concludes that evoking equity in public architecture relies on fostering connections within and between social and built environments. The facility case study analysis and stakeholder interviews demonstrate how the experience and realization of equity requires early and frequent communication among the identified key actors: the Architect, the City and the Community. Strategic communication is the means by which clear objectives may be established and used to define a process that can reveal the facility-specific organizers, drivers and spatial manifestations. Thus, communication is at the root of instigating equity and collaboration from which all parties can benefit.

Herein we describe the essential actors, drivers, organizers and spatial manifestations that can evoke equity. As shown in the accompanying graphic, it is the organizers and drivers that influence the experience of the seven (7) aspects of equity in design: welcome to all, accessibility, inspiration, empowerment, cultural relevance, flexibility and innovation.

Process… Product…Process

The life of a public facility entails (i) a process of making which leads to (ii) the manifestation of the building (product) and continues with a lasting process of operations and services. If we accept that product is the realization and manifestation of all aspects evoking equity in the built environment, the process as referred to herein, is all the steps required and parties involved in achieving and maintaining aspects of equity. The process is not only in relation to the public facility's service delivery (operations) but also its making. Since we have found that community needs vary by neighborhood and that the culture of service delivery in a library is very different

from that in a police precinct, collaboration among all parties involved is essential.

Key Actors

In order to understand the dynamics of the process we identified the actors who participate in the pursuit of an equitable built environment. Collaboration between the City, the Community and the Architect is central to shaping the public realm and reaffirming the public purpose of plazas, libraries and precincts. These three entities share responsibility in varying degrees towards accomplishing equity.

- The City
- The Community
- The Architect

The City as Curator

The City represents all layers of the regulatory bodies and operating agencies within the five boroughs. Together these agencies (Queens Public Library, NYPD, DDC etc.) allocate funding, select facility locations and develop program. The Agency's leadership in this process is vital in orchestrating communications among all parties involved.

The Community as the Character of the City, the Stakeholder and the End-user

In the context of our study, the community references New York City's culturally diverse population. The City has historically been and remains a destination for newcomers from around the world. Here, the richness of cultures constitutes the

character of the City and contributes to our quality of life. However, such diversity demands civic services which both accept individuality and encourage integration toward one NYC.

In our mixed society some differences, like cultural diversity, could be cherished while others could lead toward disparities. As such, we can agree that when defining public space or designing public facilities, communities are the end-users and therefore, it is essential that engagement of our diversity, our many publics, is viewed as an opportunity. Their engagement during the process and production of public architecture enables the City and designers to align their objectives with community needs, thereby empowering communities regardless of their background.

The Architect as Catalyst and Interpreter

The Architect is the interpreter between the City's charge and the Community's insight. He or she plays a crucial role in synthesizing expectations toward a public facility that inspires and since public perception is a decisive factor in the longevity and cultural relevance of a public facility, it is the Architect's responsibility to engage the public through design.

Throughout our research we have asked design professionals how they consider equity in designing a project for the public. After naming accessibility in all of its literal and phenomenal manifestations, the creative act of the architect resulting in a community asset was mentioned most. It was repeatedly said that responding not only to community needs but also to its character required a creative approach which could not be accomplished through prescriptive guidelines. As we concluded in our earlier work, exemplary architecture which is tailored for its context, can emerge from critically questioning conventions and re-thinking programmatic and

spatial relationships with innovative interpretations.

Drivers, Organizers and Spatial Manifestations of Equity

We have learned that designing for equity is a process best evoked through a principled mission to benefit the greater public through sensitive and pluralistic actions. This act is driven and organized by several concepts both tangible and intangible which result in spatial formations which we have found to evoke the seven aspects of equity.

Drivers

Drivers reside in the inherent qualities of the locale and influence the overarching concept for the facility type and program. Site analysis could begin with demographic maps used as a driver to render the cultural context. Similarly, civic infrastructure and stakeholder analyses within the service area of the facility render the relationship between activities, goals and all groups involved.

These tools amplify the publicness of the facility by revealing the community which the facility will serve.

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS
Bushwick, Brooklyn
Communities of Color (2005-2009)

100%   80-60%   20-.5%
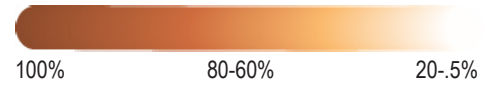
1 Mile & 1/2 Radius:

○ Main Library Branch
○ Alternative Library Branch
○ Knickerbocker Plaza
● Schools
    (Public, Private, & Religous)

Demographic Analysis

A demographic analysis of public facility service areas in Bushwick, Brooklyn as performed during the previous phase of this research. We have developed the maps with an assumption that accessibility of public facilities should be measured by distance and time. The circles represent half mile or mile radii, the equivalents of 8 or 16 minute walks. Age, race and English as a second language were some of the aspects that could be studied to further understand the opportunities and challenges that reside in the respective community.

CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE MAP
Bushwick, Brooklyn

83rd Precinct

1-33. Block Associations
34. Monthly Community Meetings
35. Community Board #4
36. Maria Hernandez Park
37. NYCHA Palmetto Gardens Senior Center
38. NYCHA Bushwick II (Groups A&C)
39. NYCHA Bushwick II (Group B&D)
40. NYCHA CDA Bushwick II (Group E)
41. Council District #37 Rafael Espinal
153. Wyckoff Heights Medical Center

**Brooklyn Public Library
- Washington Branch**

42-62. Public Schools
63-92. Universal Pre-Kindergartens
93-99. Head Start Program
100. Boricua College, Graham Center
101-121. After School Program
122-129. DOE/OACE
130-132. Percent For Art
133. Art Gallery
134-152. Day Care Centers
154. Summer Youth Employment Program
        Literacy Program

Knickerbocker Plaza

155. Myrtle Avenue BID (Precinct #104)

Subway Stations

The Civic Infrastructure Map

This map is a tool for identifying the latent (or very active) community capital within the service area of the facility. This capital can be a diversity of people, organized and invested facility stakeholders, community based and nonprofit organizations or other entities whose mission it is to support and manifest public purpose. Meant to be done collaboratively, this act of mapping the civic and community based organizations within the facility's service area allows the client agency, DDC and the designer to identify the community organizations which share in the mutual support of the facility's public purpose. The public facility itself is a piece of this civic infrastructure, ideally, its physical manifestation reflects the surrounding social capital and by doing so serves as a beacon.

PLAZA

Service Area: 1/2 Mile Radius

GOALS

Safety
Justice
Social Well-being
Community Activation

ACTIVITIES

Rest + Relaxation
Cooling
Recreation
Gathering
Meeting
Commerce
Maintenance

SERVICE + PROGRAMS

Markets/ Small Business
Community Events

VULNERABLE POPULATION

Youth
LGBTQ
Elderly
People of Color
English as a second language
Low Income

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Religious Figures/ Clergy
Teachers
School Principals
Block Association Leaders
Elected Offcials
Community + Civic Organizations
NYCHA Tenants Associations
Police
Community Board

PLAZA STAFF

Maintenance Crew
Business Improvement District Director

PRECINCT

Service Area: Precinct Boundary

STAKEHOLDERS

GOALS

Safety
Justice
Social Well-being
Leadership
Prevention

ACTIVITIES

Permitting
Arresting/ Detaining
Questioning
Gathering
Collecting + Giving Information
Rest + Relaxation
Protection/ Shelter
Work Place

SERVICE + PROGRAMS

Police Athlete League
Community Precinct Council

VULNERABLE POPULATION

Youth
LGBTQ
Elderly
People of Color
English as a second language
Low Income
Perpetrators

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Religious Figures/ Clergy
Teachers
School Principals
Block Association Leaders
Elected Offcials
Community + Civic Organizations
NYCHA Tenants Associations
Businesses
Community Board

PRECINCT STAFF

Officers
Undercover Detectives
Admin Staff
Community Liaisons
Support Staff

LIBRARY

Service Area: 1 Mile Radius

STAKEHOLDERS

GOALS

Safety
Justice
Social Well-being
Education
Community Activation

ACTIVITIES

Research/ Reading
Gathering/ Meeting Space
Work Space
Information Exchange

SERVICE + PROGRAMS

Afterschool Programing
Adult Education
Resume Building
Summer Reading
Internet Access
Heating
Cooling

VULNERABLE POPULATION

Youth
LGBTQ
Elderly
People of Color
English as a second language
Low Income
People with Criminal Records

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Religious Figures/ Clergy
Teachers
School Principals
Block Association Leaders
Elected Offcials
Community + Civic Organizations
NYCHA Tenants Associations
Community Board

LIBRARY STAFF

Librarians
Admin Staff
Support/ Technical Staff

Stakeholder Matrix

For this investigation stakeholder refers to those who work within, are partnered with or seek services from the facility. With the objective of deepening the design and program's reflection of the community it serves, completing the matrix is a simple act of listing the services and programs and goals associated with the facility as well as its stakeholders, both internal (staff) and external (public) and then drawing connections between the two. It is founded on the notion that all facilities have a service area, a defined geographic area, wherein demographic and civic infrastructure analysis can yield the stakeholder lists. It leads with the inherent tenet that equity is achieved through the integration of stakeholder capital with facility activities and services. The matrix is meant to be utilized during the programming and design phases by project staff from the client agency as well as DDC, the facility staff and the architect or designer. Completing the matrix in a collaborative way allows for dialogue regarding the many (sometimes competing) uses the facility must support. Most important for equity, the matrix asks its users to identify vulnerable population stakeholders and generate the services which meet their needs and embrace their capital.

These tools collectively can elicit a specificity in public architecture, allowing for a design which is contextual. Such specificity is herein recognized and described by architect Deborah Gans;

"Equity means addressing the needs of the people who are going to be making use of that building… A library in Spanish Harlem looks vastly different from the ones in the Upper East Side and Queens. That understanding of fundability and differences programmatically is essential. And of course, that kind of specificity makes for a great/ better architecture."
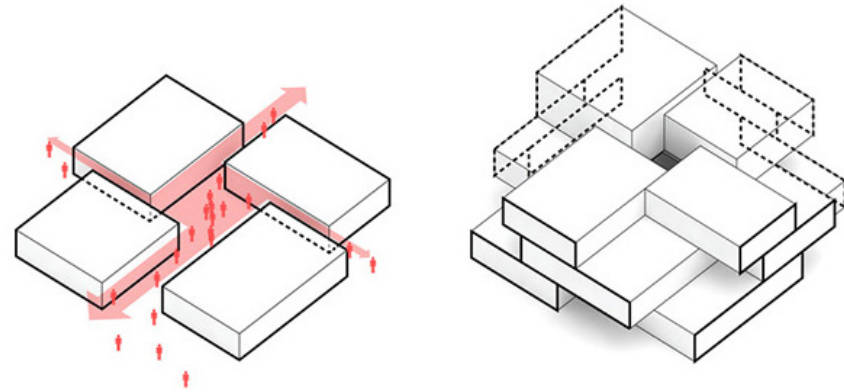
Program

Program is both a driver and an organizer. It can act free of scale or preconceived ideas and is capable of initiating interactions among all actors involved. Aside from the facility operations that include services and events, such as children' s story telling hours or citizenship exam preparations, the program, as we refer to it herein, influences the space requirements and spatial organization of a project. The design of the 40th Precinct utilizes the conventional precinct program in an innovative way. The unique design is based on using program as a driver. Here, the formal composition is expressive of various functions in the building. For example, as a response to its program, the volume for the community room is recognizable from the street and is directly accessible from the public realm.

Organizers

The term organizers is used to imply more concrete, spatial systems and conditions that when applied help shape the building. Herein elements of interstitial spaces, circulation and spatial organization are discussed in a reciprocal relationship generating the design of a facility.
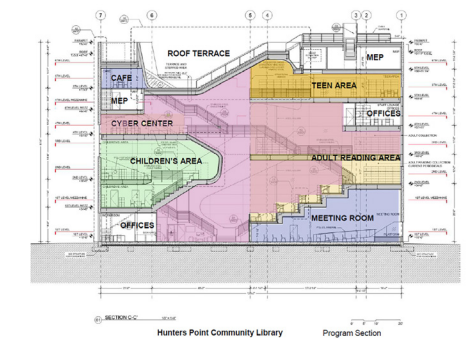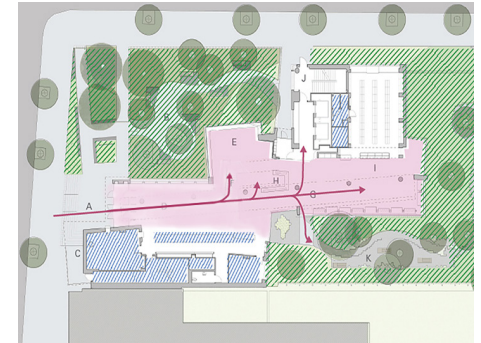
The Interstitial Space

Primarily, the in-between spaces or shared areas which are mainly dedicated to circulation is best explained as a space that is between the public and private not belonging to either. These spaces greatly influence the spatial organization of a facility, dictating whether it is linear, like a corridor or street, or more plaza like with a large central space. Such use of interstitial space is evident in the "spine" that dominates the plan of the Elmhurst Branch Library by Marpillero Pollak.

In the Hunters Point Library, the interstitial space is the vertical collective space that dominates the section. It serves as both circulation space and the adult reading room.

Jonathan Kirschenfeld, one of our interviewees and a lifelong architect of low-income housing, explained the role of interstitial spaces as spatial organizers for social connectivity and interaction:

Hunters Point Community Library   Program Section

"I know that people who have lived on the street are fragile enough to want to stay in their own unit. I have to make that transition for them, to really pull them out of their shell, from their protective, private unit. And that space, the hallway, to become a beautiful space that is safe and where they can interact...Courtyards and gardens, the connective tissue of the urban building, making a city in a building."

Sightlines

At Hunters Point, the interstitial space allows for open sightlines throughout the building, establishing a new kind of connectivity among the users. The project's circulation and spatial organization influences people to people relationships as well as people to place through visual connectivity.

Wayfinding

In the Elmhurst Branch Library wayfinding is practiced with cheerful play through the use of brightly colored accent walls and gates. The children's area is bright yellow, the teen's room orange and the community areas blue. Easily finding one's way in a building enhances a sense of familiarity and eliminates anxiety, positively affecting the patrons' perception.

Entryways

Entryways mark a critical moment wherein the outside, truly public space is delineated from the interior (semi -public) space. Throughout our research we have seen all iterations of entryway, from 90-foot cantilevers to a single revolving door. We conclude that establishing welcome to all and accessibility via the entryway can involve literal transparency, how the building engages with the street and programming of both interior and exterior spaces.

Spatial Manifestations

Manifestations are directly derived from the application of the above mentioned concepts and result in concrete built environments.

Material

Part of the many choices that an architect has in designing a building is the full spectrum of materials available today. Materials used in the buildings are the way we experience it sensually. In a public setting it is a more visual than tactile experience that informs our perception. Certain expectations such as welcome to all, transparency, literal as well as phenomenal, result in the use of glass for its tendency to dematerialize/dissolve the exterior barrier, i.e. the wall at the Elmhurst Branch Library. Contrary to public libraries, the police stations seem to have a different palette that is consistent even in the design of the 40th Precinct; it will also appear solid with openings set back from the street space.

The Wall

As we heard from Elizabeth McDonald of BIG NYC Architects, the wall, as a theme is front and center in the 40th Precinct. Here the exterior wall is an important building component that elicits an emotional response from the people passing by. Not just separating the inside from the outside but carving its own space, contributing to a play of light and shadow, obscuring boundaries and engaging those outside with the interior activities.

FAÇADE SYSTEMS

STACKING OVERHANG COMMUNITY
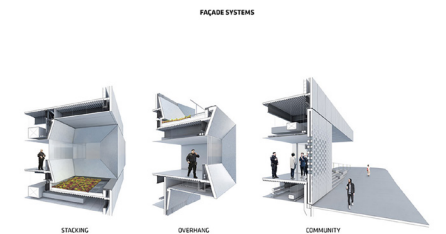
An equally interesting manifestation is the structural glass walls surrounding the Park and Broadway reading rooms at the Elmhurst Branch Library. Here the exterior wall is so transparent that it nearly dissolves and disappears, blurring the boundaries between inside and outside. Thereby situating the reader in the most public realm of the park or the sidewalk. The wall negotiates the relationship between the user and the City.

The Front Desk

If the (exterior) wall can communicate and influence whether we perceive the facility as inviting or accessible so can the front desk. In both police precincts and libraries, the front desk represents a critical moment for a personal encounter between the facility, its services and the user. In the precinct this moment is marked by a high desk which dominates the central hallway while in contrast, the front desk of the library, referred to as the information desk, is low and often to the side as to not obstruct free entry into the library. In the case of the Elmhurst Branch Library there is literally an art installation spelling "welcome" in many different languages above the information desk.

The topic of the front desk was central to another Town and Gown project. One aimed at improving police and community relations led by architects James Garrison and Deborah Gans. They described the contested nature of the central hallway,

explaining how police traditions and culture of service delivery challenge the neutralization of that space. Garrison describes the front desk:

"it is the place where power emanates; you walk up to it and it is oppressive. The front desk is always the center of activities. Now, the precincts have violent criminals, coming in from the other side to the same desk as the community. Incarcerated people are at the same front desk to drop their cell phones. This piece, which used to be for the civil society is now really tough!"

Recognizing the charged central hallway and high desk, Garrison and Gans proposed a ' Community Connectivity Pavilion' , a neutral zone, where the high-overpowering front desk is replaced by a low desk, thereby communicating through furniture and influencing the one on one interaction between the user and the facility.

The Gift, Creativity and Art in Architecture

Nearly all of the designers interviewed spoke of their role as a creative act which if done successfully contributes an asset to the public realm. This gift was seen as a gesture of equity in which the creativity and art contained within architecture is not just reserved for private property. As alluded to by Garrison and Holl the creativity of the architect lies in their interpretation and synthesis of all aspects of the place into their design. Resulting in a community asset which resonates with the public. Sometimes the manifestation is a reminder of familiar spaces and may awaken cultural identity, other times it is completely new and stirs collective inspiration.

Although collected here as exemplary, the listed drivers, organizers and spatial manifestations are not without compromise. Throughout our research we stumbled upon many inconsistencies when looking for manifestations of equity. Conditions intended to evoke one or more aspects of equity often represented challenges to

the overall performance of the building. Perhaps the most notable example lies in the Elmhurst Branch Library's reading rooms. The extreme transparency and welcome achieved through the blending of indoor and outdoor spaces also results in the unwanted outcomes of excessive glare, hot and cold. The facility is so clearly successful in the manifestation of transparency, empowerment and welcome, however, that success is compromised by the diminished indoor environmental quality. Similar conditions were also present in other facilities.

Conclusion

We conclude that achieving publicness in public architecture hinges on creating opportunities for interconnections between social and built environments. These interconnections are vital throughout the life of a public facility beginning with design and carrying though to operations and maintenance. Establishing and maintaining these interconnections requires effective and open communication between all parties particularly the three key actors of the City, the Community and the Architect. We have found that the seven (7) identified aspects of equity; welcome to all, accessibility, inspiration, empowerment, cultural relevance, flexibility and innovation take many different forms and can be achieved in many ways thus reaffirming the findings of Part One. Designing for equity is not prescriptive.

Our investigation has often been punctuated with the potential for public architecture to serve as a beacon. Our earlier discussion of drivers offers the tools of demographic, civic infrastructure and stakeholder analyses as a means to amplify publicness and identify who the facility will serve. However, implementing all drivers and organizers does not by default create a guiding force. This requires an added awareness, a different scale, an excellence in design to captivate the public's attention, to inspire and empower, to guide them. Architect, Sir David Adjaye, believes communities need empowering buildings and that designing public facilities is about the creation of a strong beacon. He continues:

"the primary act of public architecture is to create spaces that are socially edifying and socially liberating-using design excellence as a social force that makes good."

Research Team

Principal Research Investigators

Jaime Stein
Director of M.Sc. Sustainable Environmental Systems and Adjunct Associate Professor at Pratt Institute. Jaime's academic research focuses on systems thinking integrated with community self-determination. Areas of focus include green infrastructure, equity and community based resilience. She is Co-Director of Pratt Institute's Recovery, Adaptation Mitigation & Planning (RAMP) climate change adaptation initiative, is a founding member and Steering Committee Chair of the Stormwater Infrastructure Matters (S.W.I.M.) Coalition as well as the Collective for Community, Culture & the Environment. Ms Stein is also the Mayoral Appointee for the Atlantic Yards Community Development Corporation, Board of Directors.

Zehra Kuz
Adjunct Professor of Architecture at Pratt Institute. Zehra Kuz is a registered Architect in New York and Connecticut and Adjunct Professor with CCE at Pratt Institute, School of Architecture, where she has been teaching since 1993. She is the principal of Oasis Design Lab (registered since 2002), a collaborative office for architecture and engineered design. Prior, she worked for Edward Larrabee Barnes - J.M.Y. Lee Architects and later for SOM in New York where she was an active member of Professional Development Committee. Her approach to design is influenced by reciprocal relationships that exist between buildings, their occupants and the surrounding environment. Similar ideas inspired the exhibition "Autochthonous Architecture in Tyrol" accompanied by a catalog and the three-part symposium 'The Organic Approach to Architecture' which she co-authored with Deborah Gans. A Graham Foundation Grant funded the book under the same title