

## **The Dynamic Metropolis**

### **First Assignment**

#### *Group Presentation*

#### *Examining the Multilayered Metropolis via a Small Urban Place*

#### Overview

Central to Urban Studies is the idea that the small spaces that we move through every day are connected to and shaped by broader patterns in time and space. And yet, every small space present itself to us as unique, quirky, idiosyncratic--or, if not wholly unique, then at least novel in terms of the combinatorial patterns and the arrangement of elements.

Every space of the city, then, reveals layers of physical and social complexity both particular to the site as well as connected to broader metropolitan systems. This is not to say that we can comprehend the metropolis merely by reading its parts, nor is it to say that we can comprehend the parts merely by applying what we know of the whole. The reality lies somewhere in the grey area between. In other words, the vast metropolis and the small urban space constitute each other through dynamic, shifting, and unevenly distributed social and physical systems that operate at a variety of scales.

#### The Project

In this first assignment, you will work with a team to examine a well-defined small place, with special attention to what is unique to the place as well as to the broader patterns that intersect with and shape it. The main goal of the project is to extend our skills of urban observation using tools readily available, while deepening our understanding of the layered complexity of the urban fabric that surrounds us. The specific challenge is to execute a careful study of a defined place in order to tease out relationships between the physical and social conditions of everyday urban life. This is predominantly a descriptive project, though some analysis and interpretation will be required.

#### The Study Area

The choice of the study site is up to each group. It could be a street intersection, commercial corridor, rail hub, dross space, brownfield, beachfront, promenade, park or playground, public space, or building group. However, certain parameters should be followed in order to control the scope of the work. The study area should be no more than a few city blocks in length or area, and it should be located somewhere accessible to the group--i.e., within the metropolitan region. The Grand Concourse in the Bronx would be too large for this paper, for example. But the vibrant commercial area at the intersection of the Grand Concourse and Fordham Road would make an ideal site to study. If you are interested in the Ocean Parkway (designed by Olmsted and Vaux), then select a few constituent blocks to study. Entire dissertations have been written about Central Park, so you would have to drill down to some specific site within the park. The site you study can be famous or obscure, spectacular or ordinary; it does not matter.

#### Presentation

To ensure uniformity in evaluation, each group will present their findings through a ten-page powerpoint document. A cover page should appear first with the title, study site, and names. The presentations will be uploaded to Blackboard for review by the entire class. The document should be uploaded in .pdf for ease of translation across platforms. Each group will receive one grade; the assignment is worth 100 POINTS, 20% of total grade for the course.

## Elements of the Presentation

There are many ways to present the characteristics of a small urban place, so feel free to explore through as many media as seem useful to the task. Video, sound, drawing, diagrams or schematics are all media that can be reasonably employed. At the very least, presentation should include the following elements:

**Maps** Include at least four maps in your presentation, each of which clearly identifies the location of your study site as well as surrounding businesses, institutions, and features (you can annotate maps with ink pen, that is fine). The first map should be at the level of the borough and the second at the Community District level, while the third map should show the study site and its immediate surrounding blocks. The fourth map should be the same as the third, only showing an aerial view.

To obtain maps visit the city government's Community Data Portals:

--[http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/neighborhood\\_info/nhmap.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/neighborhood_info/nhmap.shtml)

--<http://gis.nyc.gov/doit/nycitymap/>

With the first URL, you will hit a page that provides an overview of the Community District within which your site is located. From there, scroll down and click on the hotlink for "Community District Profile." This will provide maps, charts, and statistics. The second URL is especially useful for information on individual properties as well as viewing sites via satellite imagery. You can also use Google Earth for this task.

**Images** Include at least five images, but no more than twenty. Images can take the form of photographs, drawings, diagrams, or other media. Each image should be accompanied by a caption that identifies the subject, location, and date, along with explanatory text. Graphic materials may originate in various formats (.tif, .gif, .pict, .jpg), as long as they load to powerpoint, are visible in .pdf, and translate across platforms. Please use resolutions no higher than 150dpi. Feel free to draw on or to overlay your images in whatever way makes sense for the presentation of information that you wish to convey.

**Stats** Each group should present statistical data that it deems useful to the presentation. In other words, stats should not be included for their own sake, but rather to provide evidence of claims or to lend weight to certain observations. The selection of specific data to include will differ from group to group. But each group should include at least three tables that characterize the site, and one table that compares the site to the borough and to the city along selected variables.

The best source for U.S. Census information can be found at:

--<http://gis.nyc.gov/dcp/pa/address.jsp>

This is a valuable GIS-based tool for obtaining information down to the level of census tract, and it lets you combine census tracts to create aggregate tables. That will be especially important for those of you working on sites that fall at the intersection of census tracts, or that have no inherent census data (like parks).

**Text** Each group will provide textual interpretation of the maps, data, and on-ground observations. The text should be limited to 500 - 750 words, embedded or interspersed through the presentation. The narrative should describe the site, its uses, the layers of physical change over time, current social conditions of the surrounding area, and the iterative relationship between the social and physical. Consult course readings for models, and be sure to edit the work.