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“Crisi e rinascita delle città”

10° INU STUDY DAY

“Crisis and rebirth of Cities”

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From A Highway to A Greenway: A Land Use Dilemma or a Rebirth of a Place?

The case of Northend Park, Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Green Way: Boston, MA, USA

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Abstract

The case study presented in this paper is a manifestation for an urban regeneration project that transformed a highway to a greenway; the first part draws on the understanding of the contextual background of the highway regeneration Project, it analyses the key factors of the debated land use and how the public authorities mandated the development of open public places as a policy. The second part, entails the rebirth of the Public place as part of the Greenway where the role goes beyond the semantics from a park towards being considered the front porch of the city oldest Neighbourhood, the Northend. The last part analyses in depth the cultural programming of the Park and its character as a liveable destination in the heart of the Downtown district; using a public Life Matrix of evaluation to identify users' behavioural patterns through intercept surveys, frequency social activities through intensive three months long physical observation analysis, and lastly in-depth interviews with local Stakeholders, related Governmental bodies and Boston development and planning authorities. The outcomes highlighted a tendency that community involvement in the planning and placemaking process helped inform the public policy about the needs of surrounding neighbourhood; as well as emphasize the Public Private Partnerships in successful urban regeneration projects.

From A Highway to A Greenway: A land use Dilemma

The Northend Park takes part from the - so called- Boston's ribbon of contemporary parks. The Rose Kennedy Greenway is a mile and a half of contemporary parks in the heart of the Boston city. The green way as a roof garden topping a highway tunnel connects people, city scape and fun; The green way connects a series of parks, whereas there are

public art installations, water fountains, historical sites (the freedom trail), public transit and bike sharing stations, food trucks vending locations and public restrooms (Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy, 2017).

Following the removal of the elevated highway (Interstate 93 and 90) as mandated by the (Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1991) a big debated land use dilemma paved the way towards the development of only 75% of the land "as series of parks and urban plazas", and that was adopted later in the "Air-Rights Park plan" mandating the 25% surface development only while the rest remained as public open space (Federal Highway Administration, n.d.; Turner, 2003).

The buried sections of Interstate 93 and 90, are now topped with the 1.5-mile-long Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway. The Project have been federally funded and overseen by the state where the Bostonians recall it as "the battlefield of Menino". Somehow, though, Mayor Tom Menino managed to sell investors and ordinary citizens alike on his vision for the clean, efficient, and business-friendly city that would emerge from the project's dust (Goldhagen, 2010).

"The Big Dig" ballooned into a \$22 billion bondoggle, but Boston came out of it as a better city: Property values have more than doubled, streets are safer, and economy is more robust than ever.

"The Rose Kennedy Greenway will transform the heart and character of Boston in so many ways. We have taken a space that previously hosted an outdated elevated steel highway and turned it into a vibrant park. Today's dedication of the North End Parks is a significant step forward in the overall development of this Greenway". said Governor Patrick in the opening ceremony of the Northend Park (MTA, 2008a).

Context Overview:

The Central Artery Master plan developed in 2001 by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, see Figure 1, provided a framework designating eight acres for open spaces and parks in Bullfinch triangle and Northend. The plan stipulated the parcels development focusing on reconnecting districts with a seam of futuristic-yet historical- open space that knits its' neighbourhoods back together (EDRG, 2006; McCown, 2001).

In 2003, the mapped central artery corridor master plan showed designated specific par-



Figure 1: The Mapped location of the Northend Park along the Green way in Boston, MA.
Source: <http://www.mappery.com/map-of/rose-fitzgerald-kennedy-greenway-map>

cells for open space development; amongst which parcels 19, 21, 22 were assigned to Massachusetts Horticultural Society to develop outdoor gardens and an enclosed winter garden. Then, the Massachusetts Turnpike authority delegated the assignment of developing parcels 6, 12 and 18 to the Greenway Conservancy which created the Dewey Square Park and Fort Point channel parks. The Big Dig plan nonetheless called the creation of a pair of one-way surface road extending the length of the Greenway, now called John Fitzgerald surface road, to handle local traffic that existed underneath most of the replaced Central Artery.

In the meantime, the Greenway parks and development parcels were bordered as well by other crossing streets (North, Cross, and Sudbury streets) separating the developed parcels.

Both parcels 8 and 10 gave birth to the Northend parks in 2005 (1).

Northend parks, described as a “city hinge” to connect the old-Italian neighbourhood to the financial district and Downtown of Boston is a major milestone for the recognition to the role of public spaces to generate

social capital and foster communities’ development. In this light, this paper aims to highlight the role of urban regeneration that involves distressed urban areas, through actions, cultural programs, and public policies on a larger scale, to improve the living conditions; development of public spaces, parks, squares, etc. and mobilization of cultural capital (defined as rejuvenation of significant outdoor spaces). This includes the role of economic and human behavioural facts as well about public spaces, which is the focus of economic regeneration process, as an outcome and a useful tool for communities’ development.

The Rebirth of a public space

In a parallel way, The Northend Park and Plaza takes part of The Emerald Network, a 200 miles of greenway networks that is an initiative under the liveable streets alliance. The Emerald Network is a seamless shared-use greenway paths in the urban core of the city of Boston and adjacent cities that provides walking, biking connections through parks. The major aim of the greenway project is to connect people to jobs, to neighbourhoods’ assets by foot, bikes and any non-motorized means (liveable streets, 2017). The later one is an initiative of the Massachusetts Government for “rethinking urban transportation”, nonetheless, the fundamental aim of the planned shared-use paths across the greenway is to connect neighbourhoods with open spaces, transit stations and jobs therefore increase mobility, promote active recreation, improve climate change resilience and enhance the city’s competitiveness in the global economy.

The Northend Parks were designed by Gustafson Guthrie Nichol and Crosby Schlessinger Smallridge in 2005. Both firms commissioned by the Massachusetts Turnpike authority (MTA, 2008b), to design a park that reflects the link between the historic neighbourhood of Northend and the rest of the city. The Northend park and plaza opened in November 5th, 2007, have been replacing an area that was formerly an eyesore, the long awaited controversial sixteen-year-long Central Artery / tunnel project of the “Big Dig”; One of the largest and most expensive public works project in the American History, replacing an elevated highway that bludgeoned the

city for nearly half century, dividing the city waterfront and historic Northend from the adjacent Downtown.

Physical design Concept:

Geographically located in coordinates 42.362358 N, 71.055875 W; the Northend parks and plaza are physically encompassed with a size of 2.83 acres and approximately 12.000 m². The design of the open space and park plaza (identified in Boston Maps geospatially as ID 570 whereas the open spaces layer of data is defined as: the open spaces under conservation and recreation interest in Boston, Massachusetts regardless the ownership (Analyze Boston, 2017) frames the entry to Northend neighbourhood from one side and to downtown on the other.

The notion of design for the Northend park and plaza is that it works as a significant “hinge”, between the grand civic spaces of Quincy market, Government centre and Haymarket; leading the way to approach the intimate Northend, Boston’s oldest neighbourhood. While located at the threshold between downtown and a historic/touristic neighbourhood, the design conception has not been easy, creating a critical link between the importance of Northend as a “home” to largely Italian community since 1890s. In fact, the neighbourhood - still distinguishably abutting the narrow streets and alleys-containing several historical sites remained till now an appealing attraction; hence, local residents have accepted the resulting influx of tourists and the gradual increase of restaurants and retail shops over the years (City of Boston, 2006; Crosby Schlessinger Smallridge, 2016).

A steel pergola lines one side of the site and is the conceptual “front porch” of the North End neighbourhood, complete with site furnishings that encourage its use, makes it an “exception” as described by (Goldhagen, 2010). A reflective water feature separates the porch from a series of lawns and perennial gardens. Through the park design on the circumference by streets and walkways (North Street, Hanover Street, and Salem Street walkway) reconnect the City to the North End; Each cross the gardens, water feature and pergola. The site’s rich history is reflected in interpretive elements that include granite marking the edge of the Mill Pond and the water’s edge, descriptive quotes and a timeline engraved in leaning rails, and an

engraved stone map illustrating the changing landform of the site (Crosby Schlessinger Smallridge, 2016).

The Northend Park as a successful “public place”

The ever-evolving debate about the difference between a “public space” and a “place” goes beyond semantics on the distinction between the two concepts. A place is shaped by the environment in which people invest meaningful times; it has its own history, a unique cultural and social identity that is defined by the way it is used and who are the people using it. In addition, Physical, social, environmental, and economic aspects of communities can be nurtured through the creation of places (Carmona, Tiesdell, Heath, & OC, 2010; Mackenzie, 2015). The Northend park case in particular is characterized by an unmistakable cultural enrichment due to touristic traffic crossing through following the Boston’s historic landmark (the Freedom Trail); that said, the flexible design of The North End Parks features spaces including green landscapes with a path system, plazas with pergolas and water features that run through both parcels and appeal to a wide range of people, including North End residents of all ages and the thousands of tourists and Bostonians who visit each year (MTA, 2008b). The Gustafson Nichol (2017) design for these two adjacent parcels restored views and street connections that were severed for decades by the elevated highway. The North End Parks, that had always been a physical and social threshold, are now one of the most popular Greenway destination in Boston.

Nonetheless, the community involvement in the design process played an essential role towards creating a distinguished public place. The enthusiastic involvement of the neighbourhood community centres and an engaging public process -through local collaboration and public meetings- were fundamental in shaping the design of a new “front porch” for the North End. The residents’ traditional, lively street culture is celebrated in the parks’ design of furnished terraces, intimate garden spaces, and interactive water features. A large pergola defines the North End neighbourhood’s gateway and ‘front porch’ as a place to gather, to stroll, and to be seen.

According to Ken Greenburg an urban design consultant hired by the City to visualize the future of the Greenway, noted the importance of keeping existing businesses in the North End to retain the Italian ambience and help retain a 24-hour environment. Whereas he predicted, the North End’s parks could be “one of the great public spaces in America”(Reidy, 2004). However, since 1950’s, the freedom trail crossed the site in confined space beneath the Central Artery viaducts. Now, the park design weaves high the city’s historic freedom trail that now crosses the main path while it used to sit in the dark shadow of the elevated highway.

Cultural Programming:

More in depth, The Northend Park as listed by June 2015, with a total budget of \$400,000 was subject to face-lifts in lighting fixtures, lights along the freedom trail were returned functional and condensed. Benches have been replaced, along with gliding porch swings under the pergolas and the greenery in the gardens area have been replaced, condensed and redesigned to be more welcoming (RFKGC, 2015). In fact, The Park is programmed to get advantage of all spaces, while the primary use is passive activities (such as watching water fountains, relaxing on lawns and sitting around benches, chairs and existing tables); active engagement programs include free fitness yoga and Pilates classes (Conti, 2012) or Berklee seasonal Musical Concert series during July and August yearly (Berklee, 2017), food trucks vendors, and Galleries on the fence.

Nonetheless, the continuous effort of the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy in promoting the cultural programming of the greenway through festivals and special events such as artistic installations, outdoor movies displays and Dogs carnivals (RFKGC, 2017). In addition to that, the public art program that displays along with the active placemaking activities of creating and activating open spaces have bolstered a longer term economic value creation in the whole urban Downtown business district and the Northend in particular (BRA, 2010; RFKGC, 2016).

The Northend Park as a liveable destination

While the physical analysis is as important for any site, one of the most important

measurable qualities of any public place is its attraction for users; people gather in plazas, walk in parks, the relationship between people and their space is an essential component of urban design (Nassar, 2010, p. 312). Based on this notion, the following in-depth analysis is on the users of the Northend park with the help of a public life matrix toolkit technique; the main outcomes are part of a physical observation analysis, an intercept users’ statistical survey, interviews with on-site and in-field experts, and a video camera surveillance records analysis.

Starting December 2015, the physical observation of the plaza showed a touristic tendency in the crossing between Hanover street and the Blackstone street whereas the freedom trail path; in other words, in good weather season, the human flow increases, tourists stop often in a specific spot to take pictures, enjoy the view of the waterjet fountains, and maybe grab something to eat from the adjacent bakeries of the Italian neighbourhood. Yet, in some crossings as reported in Vision Zero (2), people run the red lights or even cross away from the crosswalk due to longer walk signal time (City of Boston, 2017).

In compliance with that, the Northend park is as vibrant as one can imagine a public place; an intensive visual observation timeline (3) conducted for three months period from April 2017 till July 2017 showed an attractiveness factor to the usage of the Northend Park as cultural-based destination due to its’ contingency to the Italian Neighbourhood food and restaurants cluster with a special occurrence on weekend days. Whereas sociability (defined as a liveable street life and diversity in public place use and stewardship (Carmona et al., 2010; PPS, 2009; Wortham-Galvin, 2013)) measures a noticeable feminine presence in the plaza and in a frequent time frame between 5:30 pm and 8 pm that peaks the weekends days.

Statistical wise, In the 70 intercepts users’ surveys that have been conducted (4), there has been analysed a tendency of 37% towards the usage of the public space from the surrounding inhabitants of the Northend district. Considering the strong influence of the park parcels in shaping the cultural aspect of the neighbourhood, it is significant that most of the frequent users are from the same zip code of 02113 whereas the park is.

Nonetheless, a noteworthy female attraction of 14% of survey takers during the weekends of 16th and 22nd July due to good weather conditions (recorded an average temperature between 19 and 28°C) and planned Musical Concerts from 5:00 to 7:00 pm. In the interim, the age and gender differences were not substantial, both categories scored between 34 and 38 as most significant quantiles; a noticeable low correlation of 0.80 between gender and age in the survey results.

However, higher correlation was assessed between age and social clusters of users; 57% preferred frequenting the park alone in the average age of 34 and less, while 35% preferred group activities in an age bracket between 35 and 40; at last, only 8% of the survey takers were in couples with average age of 34. While looking at gender in correlation to sociability of the park, 62% of female surveyors were walking alone; and felt neutral or positive about the park vs 38% of the opposite gender. Another important aspect of the users' behavioural analysis is by referring to their yearly income, while 26% declared having an annual income between \$60k and \$90k (with a majority of 29% of male), 23% preferred rather not declare their income (with a majority of 24% of female) (5).

Lastly, the 70 users were divided into subcategories by latent class analysis, while 'daily' or 'weekly' were the highest percentile of female gender frequency with 38%, 'monthly' was the remarkable sub category of opposite sex with just 14% of sample analysis and 95% confidence interval. On the same scale, the female gender scored 48% in staying 30 minutes or more up to 1 hour in the plaza, that however, coincidences with the female superlative value in the sociability of the public place as confirmed with the visual observation analysis.

The third stage of the case study analysis was the interviews with in-field experts; interestingly, the gained insights from the meetings with Boston Development Planning Agency officials, the Emerald Network, and the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy were all concerned about the success of the Northend Park due to its' strategic location in the city Downtown area. Furthermore, a noticeable governmental approach to conserve the age/gender/social class diversity and encourage people mixing along the greenway; meanwhile, on the top of the agenda comes

safety, security, and accessibility from all colours to the park and to surrounding economic activities. In fact, one of the measurable tools to identify the success of the case study of the Northend Park was the Livability performance (6) whereas the transit corridor -where it falls- showed a high ranking in walkability, biking opportunity, accessibility to economic opportunities, social and governmental services, vibrant community and cultural recreation opportunities, healthy and safe neighbourhood while scored low in mixed income housing opportunity and that is expected in the Northend case (Appleyard et al., 2016; Oliver, 2017).

Conclusion

While the Northend park and plaza were in the heart of the regeneration project of a city-wide scale highway; the forefront of the public place had a historical root of Community engagement and a deeper cultural-based territorial neighbourhood relationship. That said, founding on the notion of the Northend park as a city hinge and the historical freedom trail path, the physical design and the imagery of the park was a challenging task. The city ballooned the economic debt of the big dig giving birth to an ever-evolving economic urban regeneration project of the Greenway; being, then, on the last end of a series of open spaces and parks and due to its location, the Northend park is considered one of the greatest parks and plazas in the city of Boston, MA. By analysing the Cultural Programming of public events occurrence in the park, Users' behavioural patterns through intercept surveys, intensive physical observation analysis, and in-depth interviews with Governmental bodies and related urban development authorities(7), as well as the usage of the livability Calculator, all showed excellent performance keys in the sociability of the park. In Sum, the Northend Park is a set stage to a successful social public place case that brought vibrancy and a diversity of users to the downtown core of the City of Boston; the cultural aspects of the regeneration project are distinguishable, and the human attraction plays a turmoil role in shaping the overall park image.

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1. The Northend Park Parcels are the highlighted in red rectangle on the Figure 1 Map.
2. Vision Zero is a real-time online Platform to report Safety Issues as they occur in the city streets; Supported by the city of Boston and ESRI mapping tool.
3. The Visual observation timeline was conducted from 10 am to 10 pm for full months and divided into 2 hours slots based on a preliminary analysis that most frequent users do not spend more than 2 hours in the Northend Park daily.
4. Statistical analysis of Survey takers was conducted on site using a paper survey form then by building a SAV database with STATA software and re-analysed with DataCracker online tool.
5. The survey was completely anonymous for the 70 users and was tested with local stakeholders and urban experts from the greenway conservancy and Project for Public Spaces (PPS) Consultancy.
6. The livability Performance is an index of a calculator designed to numerically describe the characteristics of an individual transit corridor to identify urban policies to implement based on 12 digits FIPS code and Census Block Groups IDs. The results are integrated in a helix of livability indicators such as 1. quality transit, walking, biking 2. Mixed income housing, 3. Accessible economic opportunities, 4. Social and governmental service, 5. Vibrant community, cultural and recreational opportunities, 6. Healthy and safety neighbourhoods.
7. The results presented in this paper as well as the overall case study are an excerpt of the first author PhD thesis.
8. See <https://courbanize.com/projects/imagineboston/comaps/3?loc=16%2C42.36238887921827%2C-71.05332612991334>

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Consuming colonial nostalgia: commodity fetishism and the hyperreal in China's post-colonial spaces

Andrew Law

Introducing debates on Chinese nostalgia

Debates on nostalgia are ubiquitous in Chinese studies (Jinhua and Chen 1997; O'Brien, Li 1999; Yang, 2003; Liu 2004; Davies 2005; Wu 2006; Constable 2006; Chan 2007; Lee, Yang 2007; Lee 2007; Huppertz 2009). However, often these investigations have viewed sites of nostalgia as social spaces of contemporary critique (whether implicit or explicit) of globalisation, westernisation, (Chan 2007), modernisation and development (Jinhua, Chen 1997), the contemporary economic situation of China, materialistic cultural attitudes (Yang 2003; Davies 2005; 2007), consumerism, (Liu 2004), the Chinese state, (O'Brien, Li 1999; Constable 2006; Huppertz 2009) and sometimes what are regarded as overly traditional and/or conservative Chinese values (Chan 2007); from another perspective, other commentators such as Jing Wu (2006) have pointed to the role of nostalgia in new forms of consumerism and complicity with the state that has seen the appropriation of 'revolutionary', 'imperial' and modernist 'colonial' forms of nostalgia; as Wu has suggested rather than sites of radicalism, nostalgia constructed at these sites is connected to forms of Chinese consumerism amongst the creative industries (by which he means artists, writers, producers, the media and creative entrepreneurs more generally). However, rather than resting with consumer agents alone, Wu also points to the 'political establishment' and 'grass roots' popular memory in the production of 'nostalgic content' (Wu 2006: 360). Here as opposed to an either/or positioning of nostalgia in China as radical or conservative (supportive of the political establishment), nostalgia(s) can be read as a series of *consumable imaginaries* that are taken up and reinforced by actors or actants in different and complex ways. But whilst Wu's writing goes a long way in developing theories of Chinese nostalgia, he does not address the more unpalatable aspects, and