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By: Erwin Berghuis

At Stevens Institute of Technology, Alex Washburn the former Chief Urban design of the New York City Depart of City Planning guided us into the world of urban design in a city like New York City. He explained that urban design brings politics, finance and design together with the objective to develop a city. New York city is still growing and in the next years another 1.000.000 people will want to live and work in New York city. To maintain sufficient or improve quality of life in such a city it is important to improve the quality of public space. This can be achieved through the two corner stones of urban design, according to Washburn. Firstly, fifty percent of a city must be public space. Public space is everything where people can move freely (i.e. parks, streets or sidewalks). New York City has around thirty-five percent of public space. Secondly, every building in a city must by itself produce a little of the resources it consumes (food or energy).

The people designing New York City

In urban design plans for New York City from early 1800s there was no place like central park. There was enough public space near the rivers. This changed around 1850. The city was growing at a faster pace and the development of steamboats made the public places around the edge of Manhattan less popular. New recreational area located in the center of Manhattan was the solution. A design competition was initiated, which was won by Olmsted. He created the idea of Central Park. Moreover, he also figured out how to combine the politics, finance and design to eventually get his Central Park approved.

In 1916 the groundwork was laid for the urban design of New York by formulating the Zoning regulation. This regulation regulated shape, form and size at certain building heights and it was initiated by the development of the Equitable building. This 40-stories high office building robbed surrounding buildings of its light and air. This regulation was one of the reasons why the Chrysler Building has its unique “triangular-like” shape.

Shortly after an urban planner rose in power and influence and initiated many projects which lay the groundwork for the infrastructural network of New York City. Robert Moses is another important figure in the history of New York City. He favored highways over public transport, and combined with his political power he succeeded in shifting funds to his infrastructural projects. His influence on the urban design of New York City kept increasing over the years. This ended when he wanted to demolish the Pennsylvania Station. This station is one of the major architectural landmarks in New York City. In 1961 the book *The death and life of great American cities* by Jane Jacobs was published. Jane Jacobs was the very opposite of Robert Moses. She believed integration between residential and work space and not strictly separated them as Moses believed to be the best urban design for a city.

Professor Washburn explained that New York is built upon the ideals of Olmsted, Moses and Jacobs. *“The best urban planner uses the numbers (financing and politics) of Moses, the quality perspective of public space from Jacobs and building with nature perspective from Olmsted.”*

A prime example is the High Line park project. Local industry moved out of New York City, which made the West Side Line train network obsolete. Quickly after, private developers bought the land underneath the railroad when it was still cheap. Air rights (the right to develop the space above the land owned) is a lucrative business in New York City. Therefore, when the railroad would be removed opportunities rise for development for these private owners. Instead, initiatives came to change the railway into public open space. The project became a success through successful public-private

partnership. The New York city government saw opportunities for private investors to get involved into the project. The owners of the land underneath High Line park also had air rights above the park. These air rights where necessary for the development of the project. Therefore, project developers where trying to find ways to perceive the air rights form the private owners to prevent development above High Line park from happening. Eventually a system was developed where air rights above High Line park could be exchanged with air rights above surrounding buildings. This made High Line park a lucrative project for private investors. New York City government spend 50 million dollars on the project while private investors spent 150 million dollars. The success of High Line park became a model for public-private partnership best practice in urban design, according to Washburn. Firstly, negotiate and define the total project objectives (whole defined package) upfront and after this go and collaborate with private money to formulate the best possible way of realizing the project.

Future urban design

The past years, Washburn explains the believe that solely problem solving is not enough in improving the quality of life in cities has grown among engineers and designers. Engineers where used to solve the problem politicians defined for them. To increase the quality of life in New York City, engineers must define the problems regarding urban design themselves. Therefore, they have to communicate with communities. The disconnection between experts and the communities must be torn down. Communities are now able to use high tech urban design tools through innovation and combined with their sole objective to make quality of life better in their community demands for urban design engineers to engage with these communities.