

REVITALIZATION IN THE HANDS OF CITIZENS – THE BENEFITS AND THE RISKS. A STUDY OF THE HIGH LINE PARK IN NEW YORK

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1. Introduction – model revitalization or a trap?

Since it was opened several years ago, the up in the air High Line park, built on a disused elevated railway, has been one of the attractions of New York. It has also served as a catalyst for profound spatial and social changes which have turned Chelsea from an industrial district into one of the most attractive Manhattan locations. Therefore, the project is generally presented as an example of a model transformation of an existing, degraded post-industrial structure and the use of its potential to strengthen the revitalization process of a larger urban area.

The project is looked upon as innovative in many aspects: not only urban, economic or architectural and landscape but primarily organizational. Right from the beginning, when the idea first arose, through its implementation and the present management of the park, High Line has remained in the hands of a local group of residents – Friends of the High Line. The constant participation of the community in the project, and often it playing a key role, was to guarantee that the investment would be carried out sustainably, respecting local cultural values, the existing social fabric and urban environment.

Unfortunately, today there is growing dissatisfaction among local residents. For many of them High Line is not so much a model to be copied as a trap, as Chelsea is subjected to the pressure of intensive gentrification and the park itself, which was to raise their quality of life, has just become another Manhattan tourist attraction. As shown here, leaving the implementation of a project in the hands of local activists does not guarantee that the revitalization process will be carried out in accordance with the principles of sustainable development and the interests of the residents themselves.

In this article the author gives a “backstage” view of the process of creating the High Line park, with stress placed on the work of local activists:

their mutual relations and relations with the city administration, developers and sponsors. The aim of the author is to pinpoint the moment when, in the aftermath, the residents lost control of the project. Finally, the author carries out a diagnosis of the advantages and dangers concealed in communities undertaking revitalization tasks carried out in public spaces. The work is based on: publications directly discussing the project, statements made by people engaged in the process, commentaries in the press, information to be found on the internet pages of institutions and other publications indirectly relating to the project or discussing the urban and social context in which it arose.

2. High Line – a forgotten place

The district of Chelsea, through which runs the two kilometer High Line park, is a typical post-industrial part of Manhattan. Lying along the west coast of the island, near the port, historically it served as one of the reloading and production areas for New York city. In 1847, as the West Side region became an important center of distribution of goods, the city launched a freight rail line running parallel to the coast, which was to serve the local warehouses and factories. In the crowded neighborhood, the rails ran along the city streets, sharing space with people and other vehicles. In effect, in the following years a growing number of collisions and accidents were noted and more and more people protested, demanding some solution to the problem of the so-called “Death Avenue”¹. A temporary solution introduced by the railway management was employment of horse riders who rode before the trains and warned that an engine was approaching. They were known as the West Side Cowboys. At the same time, in 1927, as a more permanent fix to the problem, it was proposed that an estacade should be built for the railway. This futuristic vision was in accordance with how people envisioned a modern city and was

¹ J. David, R. Hammond, *High Line. The Inside Story of New York City's Park in the Sky*, Ferrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2011, p. VIII.

received enthusiastically by commentators. The first train ran along the newly constructed “skyhigh” route in 1934 and the whole line was finished a year later. The New York Times wrote about the whole investment as one of the greatest public improvements in the history of the city² (Fig. 1, 2).

In the second half of the 20th century, road transport caused a decline in the utilization of the High Line rail track³, so that over the years sections of the railway were successively closed down. In the 1960s the southern part of the estacade was demolished and in 1980 the last train ran down the line⁴. From that moment a heated discussion began about the fate of the unused structure. “The future of the old rail line was uncertain, as adjacent property owners had started a vigorous campaign in the 1980s to tear down the remaining tracks”⁵. In answer, ideas to preserve the estacade as a valuable part of the historical heritage from the Art Deco period cropped up. Prominent historians of architecture stated that the High Line “was eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places”⁶. At the same time there were proposals to give it a new function: Steven Holl’s “Bridge of Houses”⁷, local resident Peter Obletz’s passenger train, an automated car park or a conveyor belt for waste⁸. These ideas were too academic in character or else lacked the support of the community and the city authorities and had no chance of being put into practice. It seemed that the only solution which would satisfy everyone would be to tear down the estacade.

In 1991 another section of the elevated tracks at the south end was torn down⁹, but the problem of the remaining part of the High Line remained unresolved. The structure stood unused and its upper level was overgrown with weeds. The place did not enjoy a good reputation. The land underneath the rails, partly used for industrial purposes¹⁰, was known primarily as a haunt of drug dealers and prostitutes¹¹. Nevertheless, the impasse in formal

and legal issues meant that the discussions concerning liquidation or transformation subsided. In the meantime, the neighbourhood was changing. “The area underwent a local renaissance, as artists, business entrepreneurs and real estate developers flocked to this community comprised primarily of warehouse spaces, delivery garages and parking lots”¹².

The new functions did not destroy the post-industrial character of the district. “The juxtaposition of long-established manufacturing uses, with new design-oriented businesses gives the area a compelling frisson”¹³. However, as the district gained in popularity, the residents feared that, as a consequence of changes in planning provisions allowing for construction of highrise apartment and office blocks, the local climate and social fabric would be destroyed. Therefore, they concentrated efforts on resisting growing pressure from developers and the expected wave of gentrification. Utilizing the possibilities created by the newly introduced in New York tools for community planning, Community Boards 2 and 4 started efforts to pass so-called “neighborhood plans 197-a” whose purpose was to retain the district’s low-rise character, its mixed housing and industrial fabric and to keep a certain percentage of low and medium budget housing units¹⁴.

However, the High Line estacade was not included in these plans and, in the late 1990s, the decision to tear it down was practically a foregone conclusion. The multi-million dollar lobbying campaign led by the Chelsea Property Owners Association (CPO), “whose membership had close relationships with influential persons in local government”, began to take effect. “The group’s core argument was that removal of the old rail line would create greater opportunities for public and private economic development in the area”¹⁵. The New York city administration was only “one court decision away from demolition”¹⁶. The residents did not

² J. David (ed.), *Reclaiming the High Line*, Design Trust for Public Spaces, New York 2002, p. 48.

³ E. Svendsen, *Civic Environmental Stewardship as a Form of Governance in New York City*, PhD dissertation defended at Columbia University, New York 2010, p. 90.

⁴ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. X.

⁵ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 90.

⁶ J. David (ed.), op. cit., p. 66.

⁷ Ibid, p. 51.

⁸ Ibid, p. 74.

⁹ Ibid, p. 52.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 56.

¹¹ From interview with AV Goodsell (project manager for Friends of the High Line) conducted by the author on 18.09.2013.

¹² E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 88-89.

¹³ J. David (ed.), op. cit., p. 60.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 59.

¹⁵ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁶ T. Topousis, *It's One El of a Park*, New York Post 2007, <http://nypost.com/2007/11/12/its-one-el-of-a-park/> [accessed: 04.2014].

protest, either being in support of the demolition¹⁷ or because they were tired of the long struggle to protect the estacade¹⁸.

3. Friends of the High Line – revitalization in the hands of residents

3.1. Idea and initiative

Unexpectedly, two young Chelsea residents, Robert Hammond and Joshua David became interested in the issue of whether to tear down the elevated railway. Hammond remembers: “The summer of 1999, I read a piece in *The New York Times* that said that Mayor Giuliani’s administration was trying to tear down the High Line. (...) That’s what really got me interested in it, the idea that this industrial relic had lasted so long and was about to be torn down”¹⁹. Both gentlemen, the young entrepreneur and the journalist, previously unknown to each other, decided to attend the community board meeting to express their views. Though at this point they were the only people still against the demolition, they decided to join forces and act. The same year they founded a non-profit organization which they called Friends of the High Line (Fig. 3). “A classic urban battle ensued, pitting the Davids of preservation against the Goliaths of city bureaucracy”²⁰. Though initially the activists had no clear idea what the High Line should be, they were decided to defend the estacade against demolition. They appreciated the unique value of the linear continuity of the structure. Joshua David explains: “That was the trigger for me—that it was so big and that it was unbroken for twenty-two blocks. I had assumed that somebody at some point would have torn down a part of it to build something else, that it was a collection of relics, but it was a single relic, all in one piece”²¹. Hammond explained: “We don’t know what it might become, but we know that if it goes it’s gone”²² (Fig. 4).

A study by the Regional Plan Association prepared earlier suggested that the chance to save the High Line as a whole lay in the federal program *Rails-to-Trails*. “The RPA study had said that making the High Line a park was probably the most appealing, least complicated way of reusing it”²³. Since the 1980s, the program had served to create numerous greenways all over the country²⁴, but the idea of turning a railway estacade in the center of Manhattan into a public park was a novelty.

Right from the start, the Railway Board declared that it was amenable to both concepts, demolition and creating a park²⁵. The city authorities initially took a neutral stance but were finally convinced by the economic argument that the park would increase the value of land for development in the neighborhood and it was estimated that the increase of income from property taxes would pay the cost of the entire investment in about twenty years²⁶. For local residents the prospect of a public park was a key argument, especially important in Chelsea as “of 59 Community Boards in New York City, Board 4, which contains most of the High Line, is currently ranked fourth from the bottom in terms of open space”²⁷.

Friends of the High Line began organizing excursions onto the estacade so more people could personally experience its uniqueness and potential²⁸. The group needed some decided support from the media and Joshua David says: “We had both been in New York long enough to know that what the press wants is famous people, or at least well-known people”²⁹. With time, the project gained ever wider support from people in the art and entertainment world and “several Hollywood actors living in New York City also became enamored with the cause and campaign”³⁰. According to David, “It branded us a celebrity project from this early point. This had a lot of advantages for us, though at certain times it brought us criticism. Mostly it has been an advantage”³¹. The project was also supported by well-

¹⁷ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 21.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 5.

²⁰ A. La Farge, *On the High Line. Exploring America’s Most Original Urban Park*, Thames & Hudson Inc., New York 2012, p. 10.

²¹ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 6.

²² A. Gopnik, *A Walk on the High Line / The Allure of a Derelict Railroad Track in Spring*, [in:] *Walking the High Line*, Steidl, Göttingen 2012, p. 51.

²³ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 8.

²⁴ C. Hellmund, S. Smith, *Designing Greenway. Sustainable Landscapes for Nature and People*, Island Press, Washington 2006.

²⁵ J. David (ed.), op. cit., p. 14.

²⁶ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 46.

²⁷ J. David (ed.), op. cit., p. 78.

²⁸ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 99.

²⁹ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 15.

³⁰ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 97.

³¹ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 27.

known politicians and activists: “In many ways the High Line became the favorite issue of politicians, in part, because they could ascribe to it any number of positive visions for New York City”³².

Friends of the High Line also developed as an organization and Robert Hammond attached great importance to its image, saying: “It has to be fancy and expensive looking”³³. The prestigious Pentagon design studio prepared a professional graphic identity for them *pro publico bono*³⁴. Activists began raising funds. The first 2500 dollars was contributed by a Chelsea resident³⁵. With time the the group began organizing official fund-raisers which brought in increasing amounts of money. They also obtained grants from such foundations as the JM Kaplan Fund and the Merck Family Fund³⁶. The group was also open to business sponsorship. Hammond puts it this way: “People assume that any preservation or community group is going to be anti-business, or anti-development, but we were pro-business. We recognized that the High Line was going to be good for business, and that those businesses could be our supporters”³⁷.

3.2. The project and its implementation

The struggle in the courts to keep the estacade from being pulled down went on for several years³⁸, as did obtaining documents which would confirm the possibility of temporarily changing the function from railroad use to recreational. This necessitated the hiring of lawyers and lobbyists which in turn meant large costs and professionalization of the group’s activities. Finally, in 2004, formalities were dealt with and put in order³⁹. In 2002, Rudolph Giuliani’s term as mayor ended and his successor, Michael Bloomberg, right from the beginning had a very positive attitude towards the project⁴⁰. Moreover, Amanda Burden was appointed director of the Department of City Planning and one of the city councillors was Gifford Miller – both were at the time serving on the board of Friends of the High Line. In such favorable conditions the project was becoming an increasingly realistic vision.

The first professional plan for the estacade was a feasibility study titled “Reclaiming the High Line”⁴¹, prepared in 2002 by the Design Trust for Public Space in collaboration with Friends of the High Line. The study analyzed four options: demolition of the estacade, its reuse for transit, reuse for commerce, reuse as an elevated park. To ensure the objectivity of the assessment, representatives of the two interested sides, the Friends of the High Line and the Developer Associations did not take part in talks with the experts. Nevertheless, the conclusion was unambiguous: “this study determined that preservation offers a greater benefit to the community and City than demolition”⁴². The study also analysed various funding options and noted that a public-private partnership was the only feasible formula for finalizing the project⁴³. The study served as a basis for negotiations and for initial financing estimates.

The next step taken by Hammond and David was to launch an architectural competition. At this stage “The competition would be just for ideas – and the ideas didn’t have to be realistic, or fundable, or buildable”⁴⁴. Its main objective was promotion and popularizing the project in the media. The jury was made up of world renowned New York architects, representatives of the world of culture and art, and of local communities⁴⁵. The competition aroused enormous interest with 720 entries flowing in from 36 countries. Most were presented at a large-scale exhibition organized in the Vanderbilt Hall of Grand Central Terminal. There were some crazy proposals, such as transforming the High Line into a two kilometer long swimming pool or turning it into an urban roller coaster but, as Hammond says, “The strongest common thread running through the entries was an appreciation for the existing landscape. People loved what was up there already”⁴⁶.

In 2004, basing on conclusions drawn from the first competition, a second one was announced in order to implement the project. The organizers (the City of New York authorities and Friends of the High Line) invited four teams made up of well-known architects and landscape designers. The win-

³² E. Svendsen, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

³³ J. David, R. Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55-57.

³⁸ E. Svendsen, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

³⁹ C. Hellmund, S. Smith, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ J. David, R. Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 40-41.

⁴¹ J. David (ed.), *op. cit.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴⁴ J. David, R. Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57-58.

ning proposal was prepared by Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro whose work approached the historic construction with the greatest care, bringing out its architectural values and, at the same time, locating an extensive recreational and park program on the upper terrace. Ricardo Scofidio, referring to other proposals which drastically interfered with and modified the existing structure, remarked slightly tongue in cheek that: “My job as an architect is to save the High Line from architecture”⁴⁷ (Fig. 5).

All four designs were presented at the exhibition “4 Teams, 4 Visions” in the New York City’s Center for Architecture. It can be said that High Line was becoming a fashion⁴⁸. “Only the underlying property owners were still opposing”⁴⁹ and reiterating their demands that the estacade be demolished. There was only one convincing argument which could get them to cooperate – they had to be given a way of developing land they had planned to build on in place of the High Line elsewhere in the district. The Bloomberg administration, interested in promoting the project, decided to adopt re-zoning plans for the newly created Special West Chelsea District⁵⁰. A key element of the new plan was compensating developers by transferring development rights to the new area.

Hammond and David were aware that sooner or later re-zoning would be necessary and that the only way to get the support of the Chelsea Property Owners was to provide them with the possibility of building somewhere else. David remembers the moment when they first learnt of this new strategy: “I reacted very negatively to this notion. I said, »If the result of doing the High Line is that you end up with all these tall buildings that you wouldn’t have had otherwise, I don’t want to be part of it«”⁵¹. This vision was contrary to the interests of the residents: “We didn’t want to set up a dynamic in which the High Line was perceived as being in competition with these other good interests”⁵². When the subject was raised at a Community Board meeting, the High Line Park project lost some of its supporters⁵³. In

spite of this, Hammond, more concentrated on the success of the project, was ready to accept this solution to the problem, which meant, as he recalls, that: “We almost parted ways”⁵⁴.

In 2005 the re-zoning plan was finally approved⁵⁵. At the same time most of the funds needed to make the park a reality had been reserved – over 43 million dollars from the city budget⁵⁶. Work on the project could now be continued. The Friends of the High Line took care to ensure that residents were involved as much as possible in preparing the project. The first meeting with local residents took place just after the ideas competition was decided, another followed the selection of the final winning proposal and further meetings were convened as the design was developed and work on the project progressed. Hammond explains: We made a point of taking the design team into the community regularly. (...) The design team had come up with a slogan to define their approach: Keep it simple, keep it wild, keep it quiet, keep it slow. Most of what we heard from the community supported this idea”⁵⁷.

Work on the design had to run parallel with gathering of funds. “The City had raised its funding allocations to \$61 million, but that wasn’t going to be enough. Back in 2002 we had estimated that the High Line would cost \$65 million to build, but that estimate was based on a far simpler plan that the design team was now working on”⁵⁸. In 2005 the project’s budget was augmented by 18 million from federal funds⁵⁹, but the total sum was still insufficient. So the Friends of the High Line tried to find private donors and to gain support from various foundations. By June of 2009 they had managed to collect that way an additional 44 million dollars⁶⁰.

In April 2005, a separate exhibition featuring the Field Operations’ and Diller Scofidio + Renfro’s winning entry design was put on at the Museum of Modern Art. Due to great public interest, the run of the exhibition was extended twice⁶¹. Hammond recalls: But once we were at MoMA, people thought the High Line was definitely going to happen”⁶².

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 71.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 80.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 64.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 23.

⁵² Ibid, p. 65.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 49.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Internet site of Department of City Planning City of New York, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/home.html/> [accessed: 04.2014].

⁵⁶ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 79.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 96.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 81.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 90-91.

⁶⁰ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 106.

⁶¹ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 86.

⁶² Ibid, p. 86.

3.3. Management and development

Design and construction work lasted until 2009. Responsible for the work was the High Line Task Force appointed by the Mayor's Office, while "The Friends of the High Line was the only civic organization invited to participate in the task force"⁶³. However, it was still unclear who and to what extent would be responsible for managing the park after it was opened. Robert Hammond explains: "Typically, in parks work, friends groups are off to the side. Somebody else, usually the government, pays for the park and runs it, and the friends group raises a bit more for special programs, or plants some extra trees"⁶⁴. This case was different. A considerable portion of the funds needed for the project had been collected by the group and donors stressed that they "didn't just want to support the High Line: they wanted to support Friends of the High Line as the stewards of the High Line"⁶⁵. In the end: "Just prior to the opening, Friends of the High Line finalized its legal partnership with the City of New York. The group now had more than a moral claim to the project. Friends of the High Line were now recognized as the official steward of the park and as such, they were expected to fulfill certain obligations"⁶⁶.

Friends of the High Line now had new obligations: it was responsible for maintaining the park, conservation and gardening work, as well cultural stewardship. For all this about three million dollars is needed annually. The agreement between the Friends of the High Line and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation foresees that one million will come from the city budget while the group will provide the rest⁶⁷. AV Goodsell, executive projects manager for the organization, explains that most of the money comes from contributions – Friends of the High Line has about 6000 members, not only from New York but from all over the world – and from commercial activities such as

sale of souvenirs and food. The organization also receives grants from public institutions and involves local developers, some of whom provide the High Line with financial support⁶⁸. Consistently implementing his business vision, Robert Hammond over ten years has built a large organization employing several tens of staff and operating on a multimillion dollar budget⁶⁹.

The first two sections of the elevated walkway were opened in the years 2009–2011 and from day one the park became very popular with the public (Fig. 6, 7). In 2011 alone, High Line was visited by 3.7 million people⁷⁰, with up to fifty thousand visitors daily at peak times⁷¹, making the High Line the third most visited place in New York just after the Statue of Liberty and the Metropolitan Museum⁷². Moreover, the magazine *Travel+Leisure* placed the High Line in tenth place on their list of Top New Landmarks of the world in the most-visited category and in fourth place on the list of Top New Parks and Public Spaces⁷³. However, Friends of the High Line are convinced that at least half the people who go there are New Yorkers⁷⁴, of whom many are local residents using the High Line for everyday commuting to work⁷⁵.

But the fight for the High Line was not at an end. The third section of the estacade running through the Hudson Yards railway site was still in danger. Hudson Yards, the last development space in Manhattan was, from the beginning, especially important to Michael Bloomberg's administration, which wanted to turn it into a new business centre for the city⁷⁶, but with a new sports stadium as part of the plan. The first plans for the stadium did not foresee preserving the section of the High Line running across this area, though this was not the main focus of criticism. The concept of such a huge commercial investment met with decided opposition on the part of Chelsea residents and it was only in answer to these protests and in an attempt to give the stadium

⁶³ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 116.

⁶⁴ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 70-71.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 81.

⁶⁶ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 116.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 118.

⁶⁸ From interview with AV Goodsell, op. cit.

⁶⁹ Internet site of Friends of the High Line, <http://www.the-highline.org/> [accessed: 04.2014].

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ M. Fisher, *The High Line. New York City's Park in the Sky*, multimedia presentation 2012, <https://www.planning.org/china/presentations/2012/pdf/fisher.pdf>, [accessed: 04.2014].

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ *Top New Landmarks*, *Travel+Leisure* 2012, <http://www.travelandleisure.com/articles/top-new-landmarks-2012>, [accessed: 04.2014].

⁷⁴ from interview with AV Goodsell, op. cit.

⁷⁵ M. Flegenheimer, *High Line's Best-Kept Secret: It's a Fast Commute*, *New York Times*, 21.07.2013.

⁷⁶ J. Brash, *Bloomberg's New York. Class and Governance in the Luxury City*, The University of Georgia Press, Athens and London 2011.

a more positive public image that the city authorities included the High Line in their plans⁷⁷.

This placed the Friends of the High Line in an even more difficult position. Joshua recalls: “Dan⁷⁸ made it clear that he expected our support for the stadium, while our supporters in the community made it clear that they detested the stadium”⁷⁹. Hammond and David realized that the future of their project depended on both sides of the conflict, so they decided to avoid taking sides and defined themselves as a group concentrated only on building the park and disengaged from other issues relating to the district. Some of the residents perceived this stance as immoral evasion of the problem and the organization was accused of favouring the authorities. “A lot of people were increasingly unhappy with our position on the stadium, or our lack of one”⁸⁰. However, looking at this strategy from the perspective of efficacy, the FHL attained its objective. In 2012 the New York City Planning Commission introduced changes in the zoning plans for Hudson Yards, preserving the estacade from demolition and making the third phase of the High Line park possible. The city was ready to continue supporting the project. The third section was finally opened in September of 2014 and aroused as much delight among observers and users as the two previous sections: “Phase 3 of the elevated park, which opens on Sunday, is a heartbreaker,”⁸¹ wrote The New York Times enthusiastically.

4. Conclusions – the benefits and the risks

Park High Line, in itself, is an extremely successful project, enjoying great popularity. It not only brings in the tourists but can constitute a model for other groups of residents wishing to undertake similar transformations: QueensWay (New York), High Line for Harlem (New York), Harsimus Stem Embank-

ment (New Jersey), The 606 (Chicago) or High Line for London. In The New York Times, Kate Taylor wrote: “The High Line has become, like bagels and CompStat, another kind of New York export”⁸². On the other hand, more and more opposition voices are being raised, noting, first of all, the high price which Chelsea had to pay for making the park happen, and such initiatives as QueensWay are met by grass-roots counter-initiatives on the part of local residents such as NoWay-QueensWay⁸³. Already, tourists visiting the High Line can meet with signs of discontent and irritation on the part of residents – towards the end of 2013, fliers were posted reading: “Attention High Line Tourists. West Chelsea is not Times Square. It is not a tourist attraction”⁸⁴.

When we evaluate the outcomes of the High Line project from a wider social-urban perspective, the result can be assessed as negative. As Jeremiah Moss writes in one of the most critical commentaries on the project: “The High Line has become a tourist-clogged catwalk and a catalyst for some of the most rapid gentrification in the city’s history”⁸⁵. The expectations of residents trying to preserve the district’s human scale in buildings, a variety of functions and social and cultural continuity remained unfulfilled – Chelsea is now built over with numerous luxury office and apartment buildings which give it a new scale, both in the sense of high buildings and high prices. David Harvey notes that “the creation of this kind of public space radically diminishes rather than enhances the potentiality of commoning for all but the very rich”⁸⁶. The new developments along the Park are sometimes referred to as Starchitect Row⁸⁷ (Fig. 9, 10), and High Line itself as “a brooch in the luxury transformation of Chelsea”⁸⁸. The community fought the heights of these buildings but lost. (...) »We didn’t want it to become completely gentrified«⁸⁹, says Lee Compton, chairman of Community Board 4.

⁷⁷ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 67.

⁷⁸ Dan Doctoroff – New York City deputy mayor for economic development.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 68.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 80.

⁸¹ M. Kimmelman, *The High Line Opens Its Third and Final Phase*, New York Times, 19.09.2014.

⁸² K. Taylor, *After High Line’s Success, Other Cities Look Up*, New York Times, 14.07.2010.

⁸³ Internet site of the NoWay QueensWay organization, <http://www.nowayqueensway.org/> [accessed: 04.2014].

⁸⁴ J. Moss, *Attention High Line Tourists*, <http://vanishingnewyork.blogspot.com/2012/05/attention-high-line-tourists.html> [accessed: 04.2014].

⁸⁵ J. Moss, *Disney World on the Hudson*, New York Times, 21.08.2012.

⁸⁶ D. Harvey, *Bunt miast. Prawo do miasta i miejska rewolucja*, Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana, Warsaw 2012.

⁸⁷ R. Gratz, *The Battle for Gotham. New York in the Shadow of Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs*, Nation Books, New York 2011.

⁸⁸ M. Powell, *Reducing Some City Parks to the Status of Beg-gars*, New York Times, 27.05.2013.

⁸⁹ C. Wilson, *Turning the High Line Into... the High Life*, New York Times, 18.12.2005.

In a symbolic fashion, the construction of the High Line park was completed at the end of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's final term, which also marked the end of a certain chapter in the history of New York City. The aim of the new mayor, Bill de Blasio, who represents a decidedly more democratic and prosocial option, is to place greater stress on raising standards in the poorer parts of the city and counteracting the negative effects of the rapid gentrification process. That is why de Blasio diplomatically distances himself from the success of the High Line, not participating personally in events and celebrations and admitting openly: "I have not visited"⁹⁰.

Today we should ask how it was possible that a project in which the community at every stage played such a significant and influential role, turned against the interests of that same community. Undoubtedly, local activists were successful in creating a consistent vision, achieving a consensus between residents, investors and city authorities, and continually soothing frictions between sides while the project was in the works, which was key for the success of the investment. All partners played important roles and contributed towards the creation of the park, but the actual redistribution of benefits ensuing from the project turned out to be unjust.

It is worth noting that right from the beginning the project had two aspects. On the one hand, it's local, grassroots and community character was underlined – the park was to answer to the needs of residents and improve their environment and quality of life. On the other, the High Line was touted as an international attraction, as that was the only way to draw to the cause famous actors, well-known politicians and big business. This two-track strategy was reflected in the attitudes of the project's leaders. As Robert Hammond recalls: "Josh and I were very different. I was in business, and liked business. I thought of him as a community guy, very grassroots, very anti-development – a classic New York liberal, in the best sense of the term"⁹¹. Hammond had no fears about entering into alliances with influential politicians, businessmen and the media, while David wished first of all to accomplish the project in the spirit of Jane Jacob's local values⁹². Initially

it seemed that such a combination of opposing personalities would guarantee a balance in the development of the project and that the interests of all parties would be taken into account.

However, a close analysis of the project's history shows that at crucial moments of the process, mostly the probusiness logic won – both at the initiative stage, when the organization was given a "rich" image and celebrity character, and at the design stage when the importance of the highest quality of the design was stressed and the foremost architectural studios were engaged in the work. Nevertheless, the key moment for the building process and the much criticized today gentrification of the district came with the approval of the re-zoning plans and the transfer of development rights (Fig. 8). From that moment the developers, who for years had been bitter opponents of the High Line project, lobbying for demolition of the estacade, suddenly became its enthusiastic supporters. "Ironically, some of the most significant contributions and pledges of support came from former members of the Chelsea Property Owners"⁹³.

Maybe, otherwise the park project would not have had a chance. Be that as it may, during ten years the responsibilities of the Friends of the High Line were narrowed down solely to issues related to the construction of the park itself, putting aside the wider perspective of social needs, which became very evident when discussions about development of the Hudson Yards area were taking place. In spite of this, the FHL's community image was consistently exploited by the city authorities – politicians readily pointed to the organization as representatives and advocates of community interests⁹⁴. Therefore, in this case one could say that a certain amount of manipulation was taking place. Critics underlined that: "While the park began as a grass-roots endeavor – albeit a well-heeled one – it quickly became a tool for the Bloomberg administration's creation of a new, upscale corporatized stretch along the West Side"⁹⁵.

The leaders themselves, Robert Hammond and Joshua David, reject accusations saying that "a real estate boom was happening all over the city"⁹⁶ and

⁹⁰ Remark made by Bill de Blasio, [in:] M. Grynbaum, *High Line Draws Millions, but de Blasio Isn't One*, New York Times, 1.10.2014.

⁹¹ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 10.

⁹² Ibid, p. 73.

⁹³ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 106.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 108.

⁹⁵ J. Moss, op. cit.

⁹⁶ J. David, R. Hammond, op. cit., p. 107.

that “The High Line was only one of the forces shaping the zoning”⁹⁷. On the other hand, Hammond readily points out in the media that the High Line project brought the city about half a billion dollars in the form of taxes revenues from new real estate (ten times more than was first estimated), where the estimates of course include all investments carried out on the basis of the re-zoning⁹⁸. It is easy to see inconsistencies here – depending on context and the question asked, the speaker either minimizes or accentuates the influence the park had on changes taking place in the district.

Therefore, one can view the achievements of the Friends of the High Line with great admiration, without their commitment New York would not have a wonderful park. But, at the same time, one has to remember about the costs to the residents and about the partial loss of Chelsea district’s unique character. Attempting to remain impartial, the author of this text has presented the history of the project and the accompanying narratives as complex and unclear. In effect, the lesson learned from this analysis of the High Line’s story remains ambiguous.

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⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 65.

⁹⁸ R. Hammond, *Building a park in the sky*, TED presentation 2013, <http://www.ted.com> [accessed: 05.2014].