

Learning Places Fall 2016

SITE REPORT #1

Gowanus Canal



Gowanus Canal view from the Union Street Bridge.

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INTRODUCTION

On September 7, 2017, we are going to the Gowanus Canal, located in Brooklyn. This trip is our first site visit in which we will learn about the canal's surroundings, the environment and most importantly we get to see the Gowanus Canal. I've never been to the Gowanus Canal and when doing research, I was a bit skeptical. Yes, the Gowanus Canal is a much-polluted canal, usually when you hear polluted you associate it with dirty and unsafe. So, I think that the community might also be dirty, dark or dangerous.



This could be the beginning or ending of the Gowanus Canal. What's interesting of this image is the amount of bubbles mixed in the water, compared to the bottom image where a different location but has no bubbles.



The aerial view of the Gowanus Canal from the Smith Station. This picture depicts how big the canal is and how low the buildings are surrounding it.



This image shows the lake in comparison with the city in the background. Something that I enjoy of New York City is that you can turn the street and the environment changes completely.

SITE OBSERVATIONS: Take notes in your notebook and use those to report your observations

One of the things that I noticed from the site was that the buildings all try to maintain the same height and scale. They're approximately 3- 4 stories max except for the public housing apartments. Most of the buildings are brownstones, others just rectangular buildings, and very linear. What I saw the most were

warehouses, and they were all mostly red conventional bricks. Some of them were painted bricks, for example, when you reach Bond and Union Street the “Green Building” has green painted bricks. Something else that called my attention was the amount of graffiti there is on most of the facades of the buildings. The colors are very bright and inviting, the art work is unique and it feels very urbanized.

The Gowanus community has an interesting number of trees and vegetation. There are at least one or two trees per block and others have trees down the whole block. There is also a garden in the community and many mini gardens in front of homes and shops.

Most of the buildings and spaces in the area are residential, at least towards the beginning of the tour. Then walking a few blocks along the canal there was more coffee shops, and ceramic shops, restaurant along the Union Street Bridge. But aside from little shops there were a few garages that looked like art galleries. The area doesn't have many parks, the closest one will be by Red Hook or Prospect Park. Other than the coffee shops, there really isn't a place where people can get together. Maybe people can gather by Whole Foods but that would be about it.

The area seems organic to me but somehow slightly planned. The fact that the structures and buildings are at a decent height they fit perfectly with the natural environment. You see, in the city you have tall buildings that dominate the city. But in Gowanus the structures are short and makes anyone walking through the community comfortable because the buildings don't dominate the trees or even the people. There is more sunlight as well because of the short buildings.

When walking through Gowanus I came to conclusion that is very quiet at calm. There are not many people walking around, in fact I think that our group was the biggest crowd I saw there. So, the community is very easy to walk through because there is not much traffic. Is also very easy to navigate. The streets are all labeled and usually the canal gives you a sense of direction too. It's hard to say how people interact with the space because there really wasn't many. When approaching the bridges in Union Street and Carroll Street, people would jog over the bridge, some will bike and other will drive. The bridges are where the most people were.

Personally, I fell in love with Gowanus. I find that I can get up early on a Saturday morning and ride my bike to whole foods and then grab a cup of coffee while reading my book. It almost feels like I am at home when walking those streets. Is very quiet and calm, walking through the Belgium Blocks makes me feel like I am living in a different era. The canal has a salty smell but other than that you can really smell the trees and plants. The little bridges that makes the community feel so intimate and private. I honestly am considering moving to this community.

ANALYSIS/DISCOVERIES

The Gowanus Canal may be one of the most polluted canal. But I must say that the Gowanus area is very different than what I expected. I thought it would be unsafe and dirty, but the community is very aware of what it's going to take to clean the canal. The area is very diverse program wise, there is residential, industrial and commercial. Making this area very comfortable because it has a lot in it. So far, they are making a big deal to maintain the area clean and looks like the area is being revitalized. But I fear that it may become gentrified more. This area reminds me of Roosevelt Island because it has a similar feeling of familiarity. Gowanus makes me view Brooklyn differently. It makes me want to be more adventurous and to go explore more from Brooklyn. In relationship to New York City, the area is similar in that every street you change you get a very different feeling of the area. This area has a very peaceful and creative spirit. Almost like a very artistic vibe.

KEYWORDS/ VOCABULARY

1. Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
2. Patt Bruno
3. Pig Beach
4. Urbanized
5. Gentrification

QUESTIONS for FURTHER RESEARCH

1. How long will it really take to clean out the canal?
2. Would the canal ever be decontaminated and clean?

3. Would the community start building higher and how would the community react to it?