

Learning Places Summer 2017

# **SITE REPORT #1**

## **Gowanus canal**



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## INTRODUCTION

During our first visit, the main focus was on the Gowanus Canal. The canal itself is a 1.8 miles long, located in New York City. The canal connects the Gowanus bay with the Upper New York Bay. While studying the canal we found out that the canal is one of the most polluted bodies of water in the United States and it is considered as a superfund site. The two major pollution are historical pollution which is coal tars and the CSO which means combined sewage overflow.

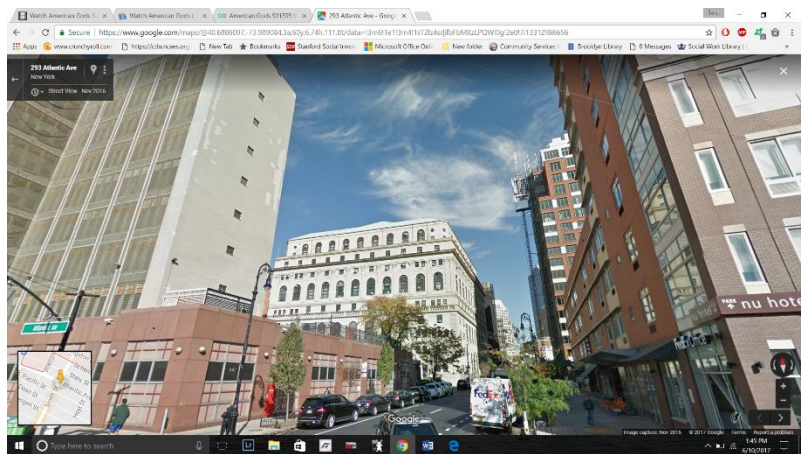
## SITE DOCUMENTATION



This is a photo of the head of Gowanus Canal. We are looking at the head of the canal. This is our main focus where the city is connected to the canal. The canal was a natural swamp where accumulate rain fall, rivers and other water body parts where connected to the sea at a seawater level.

Now it transformed not only to a canal but also as an easier way of transportation from industries to the Upper New York Bay. The main problem we are looking at is the CSO (combined Sewer overflow). Thirteen combined sewages from the city is disposed directly at the head of the canal in addition of rain fall contribute to flood in the Gowanus. Another problem is pollution. We have historical pollution from the past usage from industries in the canal, and we have the overflow of 400 million of raw gallon of water combined with everything type of waste from the city directly dumped at the head of canal. Direct contact with this water on overflow can cause many different type of health issues.

Some of the prevention against those consequences are: Bioswale and superfund. A bioswale can hold up to two thousands gallon off depends. And a superfund is time, money, and resources that the government are using into fixing and cleaning the canal. The city planners were looking at the positive concerns of the canal (more money, easy access, transportation, city drainage, chemical disposal ...) and while dismissing the consequences (pollution, overflow (flood)...).



To the left is a photo of downtown Brooklyn in Atlantic Avenue looking toward Gowanus Canal and to the right is a photo looking in the opposite direction toward City Tech. In the first photo observe more people in the streets, old building, and short block. On the second picture is to total opposite with less people in the street, new building, and super block. This is the impact of gentrification, zoning, and the city planners in a city. They transform streets into Road which differs from one another. In streets

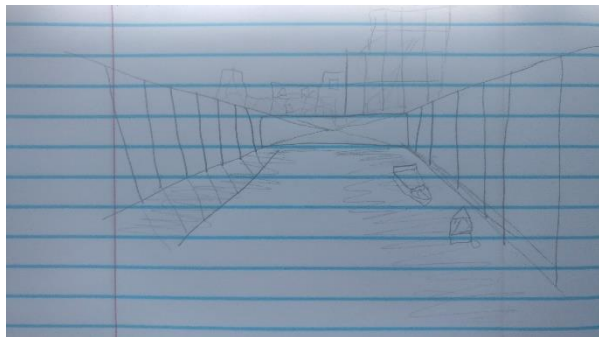
we see more people walking around just like in the picture in the left toward Gowanus while road are meant for car just like Atlantic Avenue which separates the picture from the left to the one to the left. We now have a different environment on different side on Atlantic Avenue which differs from one another.



The first two pictures are in a project showing different atmospheres. We have two different parks: one connected to the street which is crowded with kids playing around, and the other one connected to the project by the city planner which is isolated and empty. The results and why we see this case of scenario is because of Gentrification. By getting rid of streets, this project became isolated and dangerous. That is the major reason why the park to the left is empty, while the crowded one is a public park connected to the streets. In the last picture is a summary of exactly what Jane Jacobs was fighting against Robert Moses. People are more concerned about their community, now they are voicing their opinion through any means possible, which is art in this case. On the other hand, developers such as Robert Moses are seeing those changes as possibilities. The more desirable a place is, the more interest developers will have in making changes and transformation. The developer's view varies from the activist's view. While developers are trying to make more with the creation of new buildings and express ways for automobiles; activists like Jane Jacobs view city as accessible public places for the people, constant connection, mixed interaction, and it is too complex to analyze; comparably to a dead city which is empty and predictable.

## SITE DOCUMENTATION

This is a sketch of the Gowanus canal, my main focus was looking at the stretch of the canal toward the end of Gowanus connected to the New York Bay. This is an interesting concept, which proves that the city planners were doing things for their interest (source of income) in the name of the city and not for the city. The reason I say this is because they are not trying to make the canal a better place free of pollution. Also the CSO is not there main focus.



This is a sketch of the head of the canal. My main focus was the flushing tunnel where we have thirteen combined sewage that contributes to the CSO.

### GENERAL NOTES:

- Historical pollution in the Gowanus Canal (coal)
- Bioswale is one prevention method against CSO
- Gowanus is considered as a Superfund Site
- Impact of Gentrification in Gowanus

- Thirteen combined sewages adds up with rain and other water body parts contribute to CSO

## INSIGHTS/DISCOVERIES

When I saw the canal my first impression was nothing was wrong with it. As I was watching and learning more about the environment and the canal I started to realize that we (city) need to pay more attention and see what we can do to help Gowanus canal. While developers are using mean possible such as Rezoning to transform the area into a residential area, the community also need to use all the mean possible to invoice they opinion to protect their city. If the community let the developers make all the changes they will be impacted.



This is a photograph of a bioswale. I learn that bioswale is a landscape system capable of absorbing water. This is one of the prevention that the city is taking against the CSO in the Gowanus.

## KEYWORDS/VOCABULARY & DEFINITIONS

Bioswale: Landscape element designated to focus or remove pollution from runoff water from the surface.

Gentrification: The process by which an (urban) area is rendered middle-class. Also *transf.*

Superfund: *n.* a very large or otherwise exceptional fund (in various senses); *spec.* (U.S.) (frequently with capital initial) a federal government fund established in 1980 to finance the Environmental Protection Agency's clean-up of sites contaminated with hazardous waste; (also) the associated clean-up programme.

Zoning: Dividing into zones.

*spec.* in (Town-) *Planning*, the regulation of land use by particular planning restrictions in designated areas. orig. U.S.

Cornice: A horizontal moulded projection which crowns or finishes a building or some part of a building; *spec.* the uppermost member of the entablature of an order surmounting the frieze.

Modernism: A usage, mode of expression, peculiarity of style, etc., characteristic of modern times. Later more generally: an innovative or distinctively modern feature. Frequently in *pl.*

Lintel: A horizontal piece of timber, stone, etc. placed over a door, window, or other opening to discharge the superincumbent weight.

Propaganda: *trans.* To disseminate or advocate by means of propaganda; to persuade or influence (a person) by propaganda. Cf. [propagandize v.](#)

Segregation: The separation or isolation of a portion of a community or a body of persons from the rest.

Eminent Domain: ultimate or supreme lordship; the superiority or lordship of the sovereign power over all the property in the state, in accordance with which it is entitled to appropriate by constitutional methods any part required for the public advantage, compensation being given to the owner. A term

chiefly used in International Law, and in the Law of the United States of America.

Salt marshes: wetlands that are flooded and drained by salt water brought in by the tides.

Raw Sewage: Untreated domestic or commercial wastewater.

## QUESTIONS

1. How the characteristic changes for zoning will impact the Gowanus?
2. Despite all the redevelopment program that's going on in the Gowanus, will it's structure will still remain the same?
3. Is the community aware of the environment that they are living in?

## References

Oxford English Dictionary. (n.d.). Retrieved June 13, 2017, from <http://www.oed.com.citytech.ezproxy.cuny.edu:2048/>