

LARGE-SCALE URBAN PLANNING SCHEMES IN THE HANDS OF THE CITIZENS – THE GREENWAY IN THE NEW YORK BOROUGH OF BRONX*

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Historically, large scale urban projects have been closely dependent on the will of a strong authoritative power, whether monarchic, imperialist or dictatorial.¹ Today, even though urban planning has become more open and democratic, and allowing social evaluation of space has become a must,² large scale urban schemes, since they require a consistent vision and boldness of execution, are still believed to remain within the powers of a centralized planning administration.³

This principle seems, however, to be disproved by the greenway projects being presently implemented in North America. Planners and landscape architects refer to the idea of greenways as a promising alternative planning model, characterized by its “strategic approach, its record of successful integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches.”⁴ Indeed, “Generation 3 greenways can be locally conceived and initiated. Ultimately, most successful urban greenway projects begin as local efforts. (...) In other words, it is okay to start small and let it snowball.”⁵ Specific spatial configurations of greenways also translate into some specific kinds of partnership.⁶ “Greenways will inspire and motivate a new generation of partnerships and collaborations among individuals and organizations.”⁷

What is more, the spatial, functional and social aspects of greenways make it wholly justifiable to assign them to the category of urban planning schemes. Such an assumption is also motivated by the very origin of the idea, which evolved from European large-scale schemes. In his paper entitled

“Greenways and the Making of Urban Form”, urban planner Anthony Walmsley argues that greenways could and should play an important role in transforming the fabric of today’s metropolises.⁸ Indeed, their linear spatial configuration makes them suitable even for highly urbanized areas: “linear parks and greenways require a relatively small amount of land (...). Also, they can be woven into the urban fabric with minimal disruption.”⁹ Greenways are particularly suited to function as composition “axes” for ongoing urban transformation, helping to integrate individual goals and schemes into comprehensive, large-sale planning visions.¹⁰ Better still, the multi-disciplinary and multifunctional nature of greenways can serve as a perfect guarantor of keeping to the high standards of sustainable space transformations.

Of all greenway designs, the most interesting are those implemented in purely urban contexts, such as the Midtown Greenway in Minneapolis or the Bronx River Greenway, the South Bronx Greenway and the Brooklyn Greenway in New York. The latter two have been put under sociological analysis at Columbia University by Erika S. Svendsen in her 2010 doctoral dissertation titled “Civic Environmental Stewardship as a Form of Governance in New York City.”¹¹ Unlike in other projects implemented in New York as part of the standard planning formula, in these two cases there evolved a kind of hybrid governance, and “within these hybrid decision-making structures, the role of the state and civil society often intertwine.”¹² Furthermore, the author showed how critical a role was played by social organiza-

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¹ P. Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, Oxford, Cambridge 1990.

² D. Kłosek-Kozłowska, *Ochrona wartości kulturowych miast a urbanistyka*, Warsaw 2007.

³ A. J. Filip, *Wielkoprzestrzenne założenia urbanistyczne w czasach urbanistyki społecznej. Bariery i możliwości rozwoju*, in: *Metamorfozy przestrzeni – idea, treść, forma*, Warsaw 2013, p. 27-33.

⁴ J. Ahern, *Greenways in the USA: Theory, Trends and Prospects*, w: *Ecological Networks and Greenways. Concept, Design, Implementation*, R. Jongman, G. Pungetti, Cambridge 2004, p. 54.

⁵ R. Searns, *The Evolution of Greenways as an Adaptive Urban Landscape Form*, “Landscape and Urban Planning” 33, 1995, p. 78.

⁶ P. Hellmund, D. Smith, *Designing Greenway. Sustainable Landscapes for Nature and People*, Washington, Covelo, London 2006, p. 172, 218.

⁷ J. Ahern, op. cit., p. 54.

⁸ A. Walmsley, *Greenways and the Making of Urban Form*, “Landscape and Urban Planning” 33, 1995, p. 125.

⁹ R. Searns, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁰ J. Fábos, *Introduction and Overview: the Greenway Movement, Uses and Potentials of Greenways*, “Landscape and Urban Planning” 33, 1995, p. 8.

¹¹ E. Svendsen, *Civic Environmental Stewardship as a Form of Governance in New York City*, doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, New York 2010.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

tions, which did not inscribe in a ready-made system, but rather participated in creating a new one. Svendsen managed to make some astounding conclusions: “it was the citizen-led task force rather than the government-led task force that took up the cause of long-term planning.”¹³

This article is a case study of the Bronx greenway, analysing the effectiveness of this type of initiative and its ability to create and implement an urban planning vision. My analysis shows the positive and negative effects of adopting such a model. First, I am going to describe the scheme itself; then, I will look “behind the scenes”, focusing on the implementation method and, most importantly, on the involvement of citizens.

The Bronx greenway

The Bronx is one of five boroughs of the New York City. It developed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, from the very beginning constituting a residential and industrial base and a “haven for immigrants attracted to (but unable to afford) Manhattan.”¹⁴

Alas, its close dependence upon Manhattan made the Bronx much more vulnerable than other boroughs to the Great Crisis of 1930s.¹⁵ The urban renewal program of 1949–1973 brought about a further decline of the area.¹⁶ Though the intention behind it was to address the borough’s many problems, the vast urban planning projects implemented as part of the program only deteriorated its socio-economic condition.¹⁷ The investments of mid-20th century, such as Robert Moses’ expressways cutting across the area, contributed even further to the degradation of the district, reinforcing its image as a ghetto for the underprivileged. As time

passed, the Bronx came to be recognized all over the world as a symbol of poverty in a post-industrial city, a crime-infested and dangerous black ghetto. It became known as the “burning borough”.¹⁸

The borough’s bad reputation, especially in its southern parts, attracted the interest of politicians. It was repeatedly visited by Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton,¹⁹ each proposing some kind of governmental support and revitalization program. But it wasn’t until the local residents took matters into their own hands that the borough saw some true change. In late 1970s and early 1980, civic groups such as ‘Banana Kelly’ and ‘Mid-Bronx Desperadoes’ “agreed to take over city-owned buildings, renovating and eventually managing them. Taking the place of the government.”²⁰ In the 1980s and 1990s, an effective advocate for the social interests of the community was a coalition of local parishes – the ‘South Bronx Churches’.²¹ The bottom-up initiative proved much more effective than previous projects imposed top-down. “The planners believe that earlier initiatives failed in part because they had imposed programs that were out of step with the residents’ goals or abilities.”²²

Today, the area enjoys a long tradition of local activism.²³ “In 1997, the Bronx received an All-American City award from the National Civic League because of its successful efforts to rebuild its communities.”²⁴ The South Bronx is undergoing a renaissance, though there is also some alarming evidence of the area’s fast gentrification.²⁵ In such a context, it might be worthwhile to discuss the development of the greenway along the Bronx River, whose beginnings reach back to the first civic initiatives of the 1970s and which is today an important element integrating the many revitalization projects in this part of the city.

¹³ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁴ A. Davidson, *Why Can't the Bronx Be More Like Brooklyn?*, “The New York Times” 10 Jul 2012.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Cf. R. Gratz, *The Battle for Gotham. New York in the Shadow of Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs*, New York 2010; P. Hall, *op. cit.*; A. Majer, *Miasta Ameryki. Kryzys i polityka odnowy*, Warsaw 1999; J. Rooney, *Organizing the South Bronx*, Albany 1995; C. Rosenblum, *Boulevard of Dreams. Heady Times, Heartbreak, and Hope along the Grand Concourse in the Bronx*, New York, London 2009.

¹⁷ P. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 229; A. Majer, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

¹⁸ W. Hu, *Fighting the Image of the ‘Burning’ Borough*, “The New York Times” 2 Jun 2013; C. Rosenblum, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹⁹ M. Fernandez, *In the Bronx, Blight Gave Way to Renewal*, “The New York Times” 5 Oct 2007.

²⁰ D. Gonzalez, *In the South Bronx, the Grass Roots Grow Up; Organizations Born in Protest Uncomfortably Find They’re Now the Establishment*, “The New York Times” 7 Jan 1993.

²¹ J. Rooney, *op. cit.*

²² F. Barringer, *Shift for Urban Renewal: Nurture the Grass Roots*, “The New York Times” 29 Nov 1992.

²³ E. Svendsen, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

²⁴ *The Bronx in Brief*, The Bronx County Historical Society, <http://www.bronxhistoricalsociety.org/bxbrief>, viewed on: 27 Nov 2013.

²⁵ “Bronx Gentrification Conference”, D. Slattery, *It’s High Time to Talk About the Anticipated Gentrification of the South Bronx*, “New York Daily News” 4 Dec 2013.

1. The urban planning scheme

The name used in this paper, the Bronx Greenway, requires a small clarification. It actually includes two distinct stretches of land: the Bronx River Greenway and the South Bronx Greenway. In formal terms, both these sections are independent entities, though the distinction is unclear and inconsistent, since it is derived from very early and practically invalid planning arrangements and from the complex history of the project, with all its organizational difficulties.

The socio-spatial context

Along its entire length, the greenway crosses a variety of different areas: residential in the north, recreational in the centre and industrial in the south (Fig. 2). There is also clear evidence of racial segregation, with African Americans predominating in the north, Latinos in the centre and south, and whites inhabiting the areas further away from the greenway. There is, however, no clear economic pattern of this kind.²⁶

The spatial layout of the greenway is demarcated by three elements: the Bronx River, the South Bronx and the Hunts Point peninsula. Of course, these elements blend with one another – a considerable part of the river and the peninsula are located within the borders of the South Bronx (Fig. 1). The river encircles about one fourth of the peninsula's coastline.

The land along the river is only partly developed: in the central part there is the Bronx Park (created at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, comprising the Bronx Zoo and the New York Botanical Garden) and the north part constitutes the Bronx River Parkway, a linear park founded in mid-20th century. The southern section of the river has been neglected for a number of years. "South of the Garden and the Zoo, the river was polluted and abused, and its banks were bulkheaded and largely barricaded by industrial uses."²⁷ Linda Cox, Executive Director of the Bronx River Alliance, an association for the restoration of the river, said in an interview: "This was

a river that either you didn't know this river was here at all, or, if you knew it, you thought it was an open sewer, just degraded... and not so long ago it was."²⁸

Characteristic elements of the local landscape are the above-mentioned expressway overpasses such as the Sheridan Expressway which goes along the river. The expressway has a pronounced detrimental effect on its nearest vicinity and the area below the elevated highway is one of the most dangerous junctions in the borough, as well as a notorious hub of prostitution.²⁹

The most neglected part of the South Bronx has always been the Hunts Point peninsula. It is dominated by the food industry, but also houses a significant residential community.³⁰ Paradoxically, even though Hunts Point is the biggest food distribution centre for the entire city, it is also its biggest temporary dumping site. "Much of the city's food moves through Hunt's Point, but so does much of its garbage."³¹

The planning context

The first meaningful planning document outlining the concept of a network of greenways all around New York, including the Bronx, was the New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan³² developed by the Department of City Planning in 1992. The plan, focusing on the potential of the vast areas along the city's rivers and bays (930 kilometres of waterfront),³³ opened a new chapter in the history of the city.

The authors of the plan outlined four fundamental prospective uses of these areas: the waterfront as a natural resource, as a public space, as a workplace and as a transformation area, making it clear that "one of the overriding principles of the waterfront plan is to re-establish the public's connection to the waterfront by creating opportunities for visual, physical and recreational access."³⁴ With this in mind, the authors also emphasized the importance of creating a "continuous access parallel to the shore."³⁵ Hence the need for waterfront greenways. The plan, gen-

²⁶ Based on www.city-data.com, viewed on: 10 Dec 2013.

²⁷ J. Byron, M. Greenfield, *Bronx River Greenway Plan*, New York 2006.

²⁸ L. Cox, interview for BronxnetOPEN (2011), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrkzafUKk-0>, viewed on: 11 Dec 2013.

²⁹ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 120.

³⁰ www.nycedc.com, viewed: Oct-Dec 2013.

³¹ N. Gronewold, *Bronx Activists Trying to Turn Park Projects, Stimulus Cash Into Economic Engines*, "The New York Times" 15 Apr 2010.

³² *New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan. Reclaiming the City's Edge*, New York 1992.

³³ NYC Comprehensive... 1992, iv.

³⁴ NYC Comprehensive... 1992, iv.

³⁵ NYC Comprehensive... 1992, iv.

eral in nature, also proposed drafting Interborough Waterfront Trails, which are part of wider regional concepts, e.g. the East Coast Greenway.

The 1992 plan also provided for developing a trail crossing the heart of the Bronx from the north to the south. It should be noted, however, that the southern section of the coastline (the industrial Hunts Point peninsula) was omitted, and the trail was made to be a shortcut. A year later, the Department of Transportation came up with “A Greenway Plan for New York City.”³⁶ Here, too, a greenway encircling Hunts Point was not considered a viable option. “According to a city planner who had worked on the original 1993 greenway plan, the Hunts Point peninsula was better known for its heavy industrial use rather than its potential for parks, open spaces and recreational facilities.”³⁷ The same pattern was repeated in the 1997 “New York City Bicycle Master Plan.”³⁸

At the same time, individual boroughs developed their own plans. Starting from 1991, the Bronx Borough Board Greenway Committee, on which sat representatives of the municipal office, community boards, city departments and non-governmental organizations, took to developing “The Bronx Greenway Plan.”³⁹ The document was published in 1993. As the authors pointed out, the idea of creating greenways within the Bronx was contemplated even earlier, in documents dating back to late 1980s (proposed by The Bronx River Restoration Project⁴⁰) and early 1990s.⁴¹ But theirs was the first document to ever attempt to actually mark it out (Fig. 3).

Planning and transformation

Figure 1 shows the entire spatial layout of the greenway. The project comprises, as any greenway should, a number of parks arranged in a linear pattern, conjoined with pedestrian and bicycle routes.

“Some sections of the greenway— particularly in the north—already exist and require only modest path improvements or the realignment of problematic intersections. However, in the South Bronx the greenway is carving out new parkland along the river, creating acres of new green space and access to the waterfront for communities that have long been cut off from the river’s banks.”⁴²

The 2006 “Bronx River Greenway Plan” defines the area as one that “is not only an eight-mile-long [13 kilometres – author’s note] bike/pedestrian path, but a new linear park in the heart of the Bronx, providing access to the river itself, and bringing green space to communities that have long lacked it.”⁴³ It also emphasizes a number of its key functions as a sustainable transportation resource; a vehicle for the ecological restoration of the river and its banks, as well as the wider watershed; a catalyst for the revitalization of the communities along the river; a “blueway,” that is a means of access to the river for boating; and a resource for a wide variety of recreation and education.⁴⁴

However numerous the spatial and social functions of a greenway, its primary objective is to ensure spatial continuity: “despite the fact that recent activities have focused on the southern section crossing the South Bronx, the key goal is to ensure total continuity of the parks along the river.”⁴⁵

Since the last plan was developed, some new parks were created in the area: Hunts Point Riverside Park in 2006 (Fig. 5), Soundview Park in 2008, Concrete Plant Park in 2009 (Fig. 4) and Starlight Park in 2013. There also appeared bicycle routes between the parks, linking them to preserve the system’s integrity (Fig. 6). This integrity, however, has not yet been fully accomplished (Fig. 7) – the Concrete Plant and Starlight parks, for example, are still waiting to be so connected.

Simultaneously, another project is being implemented – the South Bronx Greenway. Even though the Hunts Point Riverside Park, as “the first new waterfront park in the South Bronx in over 60 years”⁴⁶, contributed to some extent to both these projects, they have not been so far covered by one comprehensive planning scheme nor has it been possible to entrust them both to one agency. Still, the distinction between them is rather artificial. They both constitute a continuous whole and are located within one borough, which means they are subject to the same administration authorities and local planning programs. Moreover, they share the same objectives, methods of implementation and social perceptions.

³⁶ *A Greenway Plan for New York City*, New York 1993.

³⁷ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 120.

³⁸ *The New York City Bicycle Master Plan*, New York 1997.

³⁹ *The Bronx Greenway Plan*, New York 1993.

⁴⁰ M. Kimmelman, *River of Hope in the Bronx*, “The New York Times” 19 Jul 2012.

⁴¹ *The Bronx Greenway Plan*, op. cit., p. 2.

⁴² J. Byron, M. Greenfield, op. cit., p. 2.1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.1.

⁴⁵ J. Linton, interview by the author, 7 Sep 2013.

⁴⁶ J. Byron, M. Greenfield, op. cit., p. 2.5.

The Hunts Point Task Force appointed by the New York authorities has restricted its operations to the peninsula alone, bearing in mind, however, that its activities are only meaningful in the context of a wider spatial vision: “Recommended actions include the commitment to completing both the Bronx River and the South Bronx greenways (...).”⁴⁷

The Task Force defined its goals from the very beginning as very convergent with those of the Bronx River Greenway, emphasising that the development of the peninsula’s waterfront must serve the local residents.⁴⁸ At the same time, one of the four objectives of the Task Force’s 2004 Hunts Point Vision Plan was ‘creating connections’, which includes completion of the greenway, among other things. The authors pointed to the necessity of connecting the peninsula with its waterfront and with other residential areas of the Bronx.⁴⁹ The South Bronx Greenway is intended to function as a necessary keystone, a backbone of the entire system, ensuring public access to its facilities.

So far, two parks have emerged as part of the South Bronx Greenway: the Hunts Point Riverside Park (belonging to both greenways) and the Barretto Point Park. A third park is to appear in the future, under the working name of the New Waterfront Destination. Connecting the parks is happening in stages, depending on the availability of land and the necessary funds. The latest achievement was the initiation of works on the last section of the greenway, Randall’s Island Connector, linking the greenway with Randall’s Island (Fig. 9). The grand opening is expected to take place in 2015.⁵⁰

The planning effect

The authors of both these urban planning schemes not only believe the greenways to influence widespread social and spatial change, but also to drive it and become its symbols. “There is no doubt that the greenway has the potential to stimulate economic development in the neighborhoods alongside the Bronx River.”⁵¹

A significant outcome brought about by the development of the idea of greenways is the general change of the transformed areas from “black”

– bringing up connotations of deprivation of the African American residents – into “green”, associated with a healthy lifestyle and recreation. One of the slogans used by Sustainable South Bronx to promote its initiatives was “Greening of the ghetto.”

Another noticeable effect is the changed functional structure of the area. Parts of the land have been transformed directly from industrial or post-industrial wasteland into public parks. Connecting the parks also leads to local changes in the organization of traffic, making it more cyclist- and pedestrian-friendly. The mere marking of bicycle routes, particularly in Hunts Point, requires constant struggle to limit the truck traffic, which might have a profound bearing on the land use patterns.

Also noteworthy are the present actions aimed at closing the Sheridan Expressway and reducing traffic in this section down to the local level. Here, too, the starting point and decisive argument is the implementation of the greenway: “The Expressway restricts access to the revitalized Bronx River, new parks such as Concrete Plant Park and Starlight Park, and the South Bronx Greenway.”⁵²

The social reception

Not so long ago, “the Bronx has traditionally been seen as the dumping grounds for New York City.”⁵³ The first efforts in the 1990s to create parks in this poor industrial area were not treated seriously. This is how Paul Lipson, director of a social organization called The Point Community Development Corporation, remembers the beginnings of working to bring some nature to the area: “Not everyone was convinced that spending \$7.3 million to build the park was a good idea. (...) Everyone said nobody would go back there. They would say, ‘Why would you bring your mother to the end of Hunts Point?’ And look at it now; it’s such a destination.”⁵⁴

The transformation is generally perceived as a positive phenomenon by the local residents, but planners and organizations managing the projects are well aware that these perceptions might turn downright negative should the greenway and the related changes bring about sudden gentrification of the area. This is why documentation for both green-

⁴⁷ *Hunts Point Vision Plan*, New York 2004, p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Hunts Point Vision Plan*, New York 2004, p. 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁰ P. Wall, *A Long-Delayed Path from The Bronx to Randall’s Island May Soon Be Built*, “DNAinfo New York” 13 Sep 2013.

⁵¹ J. Byron, M. Greenfield, *op. cit.*, p. 5.6.

⁵² www.prattcenter.net, viewed: Oct-Dec 2013.

⁵³ N. Gronewold, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ D. Gonzalez, *A Bronx Oasis With a Gritty, Industrial Past*, “The New York Times” 15 Jul 2011.

ways addresses this problem and makes it one of its objectives to counteract it. “Both the Greenway and the economic development it generates raise the issue of gentrification, as displacement due to rising property values is a primary fear of both residents and businesses in the area.”⁵⁵

Alternative visions

The Bronx river and the Hunts Point peninsula are a battle ground where the civic organizations working to transform the area’s industrial grounds into open public access spaces fight with the previous users – big industrial enterprises that would rather continue their business there uninterrupted.

While the war still lasts, local activists have already won a number of battles over the space, protesting against increasing the number of dump sites in the peninsula (a concept reaching back to the time of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani), against constructing a penitentiary institution on the post-industrial grounds of Oak Point Yards (times of Michael Bloomberg)⁵⁶ or persuading the city to set up parks on grounds it previously intended to sell to private investors.

However, as we are about to see, the development of the greenway projects has been often hindered from within by internal conflicts among the activists who found themselves unable to come up with one common organizational vision that would encompass the entire greenway. It is these conflicts that resulted in dividing the greenway into two separate projects. In a sense, the two are mutually competitive.

2. Grassroots initiative

The Bronx River Greenway and the South Bronx Greenway are examples of visions that originated to a large extent from the needs and dreams of local residents. An organizational strategy and goals had already been developed there by social organizations and were well established when the city’s officials decided to get involved. But since the local initiators found themselves unable to form one individual entity that would take up responsibility for

the entire Bronx Greenway, implementing the project as a single uniform whole became impossible. The fortunes of its two sections diverged, also as a result of organizational problems on the part of the community groups. While the Bronx River Greenway can now be considered an exemplary case of effective inter-sector cooperation, the South Bronx Greenway, despite numerous efforts to the contrary, surrendered the leading role to the municipal institutions.

The idea and initiative

The beginnings of the movement which gave rise to the idea of the greenways reach back to the 1970s and are connected directly with the Bronx River. In 1974, long before the Department of City Planning came up with the first transformation project for the city’s waterfronts, two Bronx residents, Ruth Anderberg and Anthony Bouza, created the ‘Bronx River Restoration Project’, a group which promoted restoration of the river and its banks. In late 1980s, the group started advocating the creation of a cycle route along the river, which is now considered a prototype for the Bronx River Greenway.⁵⁷

The operations of the ‘Bronx River Restoration Project’ were typically local, social and volunteer in nature. This changed in the 1990s, when the river became a point of interest for a New York non-governmental organization called City Parks Foundation, which, in cooperation with City Parks, brought to life the Partnerships for Parks project to promote intersector partnerships.⁵⁸ Jenny Hoffner, Bronx River Catalyst Coordinator, initiated the ‘Bronx River Working Group’ partnership project, in which participated numerous social organizations and public institutions, both municipal and federal. Among the cooperating non-governmental organizations were, among others, The Point Community Development Corporation, which focused on the cultural and economic revitalization of Hunts Point,⁵⁹ and the Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, which promoted the involvement of young people in the efforts to rebuild the South Bronx.⁶⁰

Initially, the partnership’s operations focused on restoring the southern part of the river. “If some-

⁵⁵ *Maintenance Funding Recommendations for the South Bronx Greenway*, New York 2007, p. 2.

⁵⁶ A. Mindlin, *It’s a Dump, but People Can Dream*, “The New York Times” 21 May 2006.

⁵⁷ J. Byron, M. Greenfield, op. cit., p. 1.1-1.2; M. Kimmelman, op. cit.

⁵⁸ www.cityparksfoundation.org, viewed: Oct-Dec 2013.

⁵⁹ www.thepoint.org, viewed: Oct-Dec 2013.

⁶⁰ www.ympj.org, viewed: Oct-Dec 2013.

one went out to the river in the late nineties, they would've seen the river full of cars (sic!) (...). People just treated the river as a place to dump their garbage.”⁶¹ The first funds the partnership managed to acquire were used to pull out 70 cars and 5,000 car tyres from the river.⁶² As the present head of The Point emphasizes: “it was important to put the resources of the community in first and to show that people respected this and wanted this. So we cleaned it up ourselves.”⁶³

In 1997, the Bronx River Working Group received a grant of 121,000 US dollars to support the NGO initiatives around the river. A year later, The Point's representative, Majora Carter, obtained 10,000 dollars from that grant to conduct revitalization of a selected area later named Hunts Point Riverside Park.⁶⁴ “Hunts Point Riverside Park was one of the first projects of the Bronx River Working Group, and when completed, it became the first park of the Bronx River Greenway.”⁶⁵ In 2006, the park underwent extensive redecoration performed by municipal institutions. But the first success it represents, achieved by common effort of the community with the help of a little funding, became the symbol of the transformation of the South Bronx, popularized local activism and paved the way for the future projects of this kind.

It must be remembered that the Bronx River Working Group, just as its predecessors, focused on inspiring change along the Bronx River. From that perspective, Hunts Point Riverside Park marked the southern limit of the greenway. But Majora Carter – a Hunts Point resident – and The Point wanted the greenway to go further and circumnavigate the entire peninsula. Making this happen turned out to be much more difficult. First of all, that fragment was never envisaged in planning documents, where the route followed a “shortcut”. Second of all, a considerable part of the peninsula was industrialized, which made some opinion leaders to question the validity of such a scheme. Last but not least, the waterfront land was occupied by private businesses.

Despite all these adversities, The Point managed to bring forward a concept for the southern section of the greenway. One of the project's first and most ardent proponents was Congressman Jose Serrano (Congress representative of the Bronx district). He recalls: “In 1997, The Point came to my office requesting my support for the creation of a ‘green necklace’ around the Hunts Point and Port Morris neighborhoods. At the time, the concept of a ‘South Bronx Greenway’ seemed outlandish to many, but I have continued to support this vision for the future of our waterfront and have secured close to \$2 million in [federal – author's note] land acquisition funds for this greenway.”⁶⁶

At the time, the operations of the Bronx River Working Group were gaining momentum and popularity. In 1999, the first ‘Golden Ball’ initiative was organized, which was an artistic happening where a giant golden ball was floated down the river. The artistic idea behind this was to represent the integrity of the entire river, manifest its uninterrupted continuous character. This is how Maggie Scott Greenfield, the present Vice President of the Bronx River Alliance, explains the meaning of this event: “people may live in the northern part of the Bronx along the Bronx river and they may not know the folks who live along the southern part of the Bronx River, so the Golden Ball was this idea of saying (...) ‘we're all going to celebrate this river that connects us’.”⁶⁷ Up until 2007, this was a yearly celebration, before it expanded into an even bigger cultural event – the Bronx River Festival.

The Bronx River Greenway was from the very beginning a river-oriented project, put forward by organizations focused on the river. When in 1999 the partnership published the ‘Bronx River Action Plan’, one of whose five major objectives was establishing a greenway, what the authors had in mind was naturally only the part closest to the riverbank.⁶⁸ While it did not make other organizations acting for the Hunts Point peninsula withdraw their support for the Bronx River Greenway, they were

⁶¹ M. Greenfield, interview for The Bronx Journal 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHIIMS3IAP4>, viewed on: 11 Dec 2013.

⁶² *I am the Bronx River*, video by the Bronx River Alliance 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8v63Iq62Ak>, viewed on: 11 Dec 2013.

⁶³ K. Sepulveda, interview for The Bronx Journal 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHIIMS3IAP4>, viewed on: 11 Dec 2013.

⁶⁴ *Hunts Point Riverside Park*, 2009, p. 59; J. Byron, interview by the author, 12 Sep 2013.

⁶⁵ *Hunts Point Riverside Park*, op. cit., p. 66.

⁶⁶ www.nycedc.com, viewed: Oct-Dec 2013.

⁶⁷ M. Greenfield, op. cit.

⁶⁸ J. Byron, M. Greenfield, op. cit., p. 1.2.

apparently left alone in their efforts to extend the greenway all around the peninsula.

Meanwhile, the operations of the Bronx River Working Group gained more and more recognition. In 1999, New York's Parks Commissioner Henry Stern announced the year of the Bronx River.⁶⁹ The declaration was symbolic in nature, but just a year afterwards, a true breakthrough came about. New York State Governor George Pataki earmarked an 11 million dollar subsidy to the implementation of the Bronx River Greenway project. The then Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Congressman Jose Serrano added another 22 million, half of which came from the city budget and the other half from federal funds. All in all, the partnership obtained a whopping sum of 33 million dollars for the greenway alone.⁷⁰

But because the Bronx River Working Group was an informal coalition,⁷¹ it could not act as a direct receiver of such a big amount of money, nor could it take up the responsibility for project implementation. This necessitated reorganising the group and finding a new platform of cooperation with the city administration authorities.

Around the same time, New York City Parks gave 3.27 million dollars to create the Hunts Point Riverside Park and thus continue the process of revitalization started by Majora Carter and The Point in 1998. As part of the project, the city collaborated with the Hunts Point organizations, which can be assumed to be the starting point for the implementation of the South Bronx Greenway.⁷²

To sum up, the year 2000 saw the initiation of two separate greenway projects. The Bronx River Greenway project was managed by the Bronx River Working Group, which had undergone a reorganization and formalization process to be able to hold and dispose of the funds allocated to the project. The South Bronx Greenway, on the other hand, was initiated single-handedly by The Point, which, despite the strong support from Congressman Serrano and the money he secured for the project, had to face the necessity of creating a larger coalition in order to push the project forward.

Partners

At the stage of project initiation and shaping its underlying vision, the key role was played by the local residents themselves. Members of the Bronx River Restoration Project, later partners of the Bronx River Working Group, as well as the strong supporter of both greenways and "Godfather of the Bronx River"⁷³ Congressman Jose Serrano – they were all Bronx people who grew up in the borough. Equally important was the role played by social organizations, including The Point and Youth Ministries, who managed the first funds and organized the first task forces. They also repeatedly collaborated with New York city departments, but this cooperation was not yet formalized and remained task-based.

Both greenway projects were from the very beginning supported by an academic group called the Pratt Center for Community Development, whose assistance had been sought by The Point already back in 1993.⁷⁴ Since that time, primarily through the agency of urban planner Joan Byron, Pratt Center had remained deeply involved with both projects. In 1999, in cooperation with local organizations, it initiated the Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance – a coalition aiming at closing and transforming the Sheridan Expressway.⁷⁵

It must be noted that none of the groups involved in the greenway project has just this one objective in its statutes. The greenway projects are brainchildren of organizations and institutions whose scope of operation has always been much more extensive; the greenways are therefore meant to serve a purpose: reclaiming the Bronx River or the revitalization of the South Bronx area, or the transformation of Hunts Point etc.

Land ownership

The Bronx River Greenway runs in most part through lands owned by the Department of Parks and Recreation. The South Bronx Greenway, on the other hand, crosses a number of properties owned by private businesses and several city or state agencies.⁷⁶ This is why the execution prospects of both

⁶⁹ *Hunts Point Riverside Park*, op. cit., p. 69.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁷¹ J. Byron, M. Greenfield, op. cit., p. 1.2.

⁷² *Hunts Point Riverside Park*, op. cit., p. 59.

⁷³ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 135.

⁷⁴ J. Byron, op. cit.

⁷⁵ www.southbronxvision.org, viewed: Oct-Dec 2013.

⁷⁶ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 124.

greenways were different: the Bronx River Greenway project could be implemented almost immediately, while the South Bronx Greenway was more of a long-term vision.

Financing

The first steps of the social groups were mostly based on volunteering. Only when the City Parks Foundation got involved was it possible to use the grant obtained by the foundation to create the Bronx River Restoration Project and carry out the Partnerships for Parks project. The first park, the Hunts Point Riverside Park, came into existence owing to the great commitment of the local community and small financial support from the Partnerships for Parks project. In late 1990s, when considerable funds were earmarked for the implementation of the projects, it became clear that new intersector structures were necessary to be able to steward those funds.

Project and implementation

Substantial funds earmarked for the implementation of both greenways greatly changed the standing of the projects. By then, the concepts had been well-known and appreciated, and the civic groups that had initiated them had become credible enough for the public sector to want to join in the final execution of both projects. Both parties in question, that is the civic groups and the public sector, had it in their interest to maintain a partnership based on cooperation. The public sector held the financial resources, titles to properties or the ability to purchase them, and the administrative apparatus capable of making all the required investments. Meanwhile, the civic organizations that had been working closely with local communities and earned their trust, proved an invaluable partner to the authorities, as the investment could only be successfully finalized in a positive atmosphere of social consensus.

In view of all this, in 2001, the Bronx River Working Group, which by then had already associated more than sixty organizations,⁷⁷ and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation created yet another organization called the Bronx River Alliance. This new coalition was formed as an inde-

pendent non-governmental organization and could boast an advantage in that its Executive Director, Linda Cox, was at the same time an employee in the Department of Parks and Recreation, where she held the office of the Bronx River Administrator.⁷⁸ This created an exceptional situation where the Bronx River Alliance is involved on both sides of leadership: the community and the authorities. It is independent and able to raise funds on its own, but at the same time its Executive Director Linda Cox and one other person are full-time employees of the city department. Even the seat of the Alliance is located in the Department of Parks and Recreation building.⁷⁹ According to the organization's Deputy Director "this duality is our strength, but we need to be advocates and bureaucrats at the same time."⁸⁰

There are two teams in the Bronx River Alliance whose objectives coincide with the organization's two fundamental scopes of activity: the Ecology team, which focuses on the river, and the Greenway Team "comprised of community-based and agency planners, designers and advocates, [which] guides the planning and implementation of the Bronx River Greenway"⁸¹ (Fig. 8).

In 2006, the latter team, including urban planners Joan Byron (Board Member and the then Greenway Team Leader) and Maggie Scott Greenfield (Deputy Director), developed the Bronx River Greenway Plan which demarcated the key objectives and measures to be taken in order to implement and maintain the Bronx River Greenway. All the subsequent actions and initiatives taken in cooperation with the Department of Parks and Recreation were based on that document. The implementation of the greenway was not treated as a goal in itself, but as a tool for the revalorization of the area: "The Bronx River Greenway will transform the lower Bronx River, as well as the communities along its banks."⁸² The plan makes it clear that the Bronx River Alliance's priority is to support community initiatives complying with the greenway vision and to counteract anything that would be to the detriment of that vision. While focusing on the implementation of the greenway, the Alliance should also act as an advocate for improving the quality of the local environment.

⁷⁷ A. Kober, *Connecting Communities to Their River*, <http://www.americanrivers.org> 2011, viewed on: 12 Dec 2013.

⁷⁸ *Hunts Point Riverside Park*, op. cit., p. 60.

⁷⁹ J. Linton, op. cit.

⁸⁰ M. Greenfield, op. cit.

⁸¹ www.bronxriver.org, viewed: Oct-Dec 2013.

⁸² J. Byron, M. Greenfield, op. cit., p. 1.5.

The work of the Bronx River Alliance has directly contributed to the creation of two new parks: Concrete Plant Park and Starlight Park. But the group also helped the greenway as a whole. “While each of the many actors involved in planning and realizing the greenway might prioritize some of its aspects over others, the Bronx River Alliance views them holistically and provides a forum in which it is possible to understand the trade-offs and synergies among them.”⁸³ Unfortunately for the unity of the entire Bronx Greenway, all the transformations implemented so far were done in the section to the north from the Hunts Point Riverside Park. The southern part, i.e. the South Bronx greenway, seemed beyond the group’s interest.

One of the key driving forces behind the Bronx River Alliance has been Majora Carter. While still working for The Point, she brought about the revitalization process of the first park belonging to the greenway – the Hunts Point Riverside Park. When the Alliance celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2011, Carter was among the four guests of honor – so-called founders.⁸⁴ Committed as she was in the development of the organization in the very beginning, Carter’s later relationship with the Bronx River Alliance remained loose.

Majora Carter not only did not join the Bronx River Alliance, but she also left The Point and in 2001 she set up her own NGO called Sustainable South Bronx. The organization’s objective was to initiate the realization of the broader greenway vision, which would encompass Hunts Point. Admittedly, the idea was not new – it first appeared in 1997, when Carter worked for The Point, and already then Congressman Jose Serrano secured appropriate funds for the works to begin. What was missing was a true leader of the project. The Point failed to assume this role and this is why in 2001 Carter decided to take the idea of the South Bronx Greenway with her to her own organization. As Erika Svendsen remarks in her dissertation, Carter’s resigning from The Point was probably due to her personal conflict with Paul Lipson, the then Executive Director of The Point.⁸⁵

In 2003, Sustainable South Bronx obtained a grant from the ‘Active Living by Design’ program carried out by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. “Because the South Bronx Greenway project was a central project for Sustainable South Bronx, it became the focus of the Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative.”⁸⁶ The funds allowed for starting an extensive coalition for the South Bronx Greenway – the South Bronx Greenway Partnership. The coalition comprised, apart from city departments, all organizations that had so far worked for the implementation of the project: the Bronx River Alliance, The Point, the Youth Ministries, the South Bronx River Watershed Alliance and the Pratt Institute.⁸⁷ Hence, Majora Carter “took the lead on private sector partnership for the South Bronx Greenway.”⁸⁸

In the same year, the New York City Economic Development Corporation started its efforts to create a comprehensive vision of transformation for the entire Hunts Point peninsula. A special Hunts Point Task Force was created, with the participation of the Economic Development Corporation, Department of Parks and Recreation and Department of Transportation, a local business representative Small Business Services, the office of Congressman Jose Serrano and social leaders: The Point and Sustainable South Bronx.⁸⁹

In 2005, the Task Force published the Hunts Point Vision Plan, which made the South Bronx Greenway the backbone of the entire planning project: “The South Bronx Greenway provides a framework and series of recommendations for concrete actions to create sustainable connections between the waterfront and the residential and business communities in the Hunts Point peninsula.”⁹⁰ The greenway became a natural core around which all the provisions of the plan were oriented.⁹¹ “(...) The greenway design was used by city planners to physically link other features of the Hunts Point Vision Plan.”⁹²

A year later, the Task Force developed the South Bronx Greenway Master Plan, which additionally reinforced the concept of the greenway as the key element of the entire planning scheme. The South

⁸³ Ibid., p. 5.1.

⁸⁴ L. Cox, op. cit.

⁸⁵ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 134-135.

⁸⁶ *South Bronx Greenway Partnership. Evaluation of Active Living by Design 2003-2008*, New York 2008, p. 4.

⁸⁷ *South Bronx Greenway Partnership*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁸⁸ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 131.

⁸⁹ *Hunts Point Vision Plan*, op. cit., p. 24.

⁹⁰ www.nycedc.com, viewed: Oct-Dec 2013.

⁹¹ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 130.

⁹² Ibid., p. 131.

Bronx Greenway Master Plan focuses on realizing five major objectives: improving safety, fostering economic development, improving environmental quality, promoting physical fitness and encouraging community-based stewardship.⁹³

As can be seen, starting from 2003, plans were developed by a multitude of organizations affiliated in two partnerships. The Hunts Point Task Force, lead by a city institution called the Economic Development Corporation, was busy working for the entire area of Hunts Point, and treated the greenway as an important, though not the only, element of the planning project. The other coalition, the South Bronx Greenway Partnership, whose leader was the Sustainable South Bronx community group, focused most on the implementation of the South Bronx Greenway.

Initially, this mode of cooperation and allocation of responsibilities might have seemed promising. In the years 2003–2008 (the financing period of the South Bronx Greenway Partnership), the Partnership participated in the selection of designers who would be consultants in the South Bronx Greenway project. The Group also secured 1.25 million dollars from federal funds to conduct a feasibility study for the greenway; the study later allowed to secure another 28.5 million dollars from federal funds for the final realization of the project.⁹⁴ The Partnership cooperated with city departments in developing guidelines for the transformations envisaged for the Hunts Point peninsula; it also actively advocated (as a partner to the Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance) the demolition of the Sheridan Expressway. In addition, a number of social campaigns were organized as part of the project, promoting the prospective South Bronx Greenway as a place of considerable recreational and transformational potential.⁹⁵

Unfortunately, despite the six years' hard work Majora Carter's group contributed to the project, they failed to build a stable and reliable partnership equivalent to the Bronx River Alliance. Worse still, disagreements started to weigh on the collaboration between the South Bronx Greenway Partnership and the Hunts Point Task Force.⁹⁶

In the summary of their six years' effort, the South Bronx Greenway Partnership admits that: "Although there was funding for phase one of construction, the Greenway Project did not break ground during the funding period. Delays were due to several reasons,"⁹⁷ among them formal and organizational matters such as the numerous agreements and necessary approvals to be obtained, the need for plan modifications due to infrastructure problems and costs, the difficulties of developing a common plan with such a great number of partners and the requirement for developing a full maintenance plan for all parts of the project.⁹⁸

But many people have also mentioned another factor – the personal factor. According to Erika Svendsen, Majora Carter's group's suitability to act as the actual leader of long-term transformation has been put to question by some authority representatives and this made cooperation between them more and more difficult. Sustainable South Bronx kept being identified with its founder, who, a charismatic activist as she is, was at times perceived as a confrontational figure, drawing out as many supporters as opponents.⁹⁹ The old conflict from the times of The Point might have some bearing here, since The Point's former Executive Director was now Chief of Staff working for Congressman Jose Serrano – the one person who held most of the financial means set aside for the implementation of the project.¹⁰⁰

In 2008, the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation appointed an independent consulting organization to conduct a feasibility study on future realization and financing of the Bronx greenway. "After interviewing key stakeholders, the consultants identified deep rivalries amongst some of the local civic organizations."¹⁰¹ Another conclusion was the necessity to create a brand new organization able to manage the project from then on.

Despite the apparent slowdown and difficulty, the project was not abandoned and when in 2009 New York was assigned a considerable subsidy from the federal funds for revitalization projects, by the decision of the Mayor, 22 million dollars went to the South Bronx and the greenway.

⁹³ *Maintenance Funding...*, op. cit., p. 8.

⁹⁴ *South Bronx Greenway Partnership...*, op. cit., p. 10.

⁹⁵ *South Bronx Greenway Partnership*, op. cit., p. 13-16.

⁹⁶ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 141.

⁹⁷ *South Bronx Greenway Partnership*, op. cit., p. 12.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹⁹ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 132-133; J. Byron, op. cit.

¹⁰⁰ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 134-135.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

“In early 2010, it remained unclear whether a new or existing civic organization will coordinate stewardship activities in and around the South Bronx Greenway.”¹⁰² Public administration was reluctant to single-handedly choose one from among the organizations, so eventually the project was taken over by city departments. Still, the ongoing cooperation difficulties between the social organizations, as well as the absence of one reliable partner that could take up the responsibilities of a negotiator and community representative, make it difficult for the city departments to efficiently continue with the undertaking despite the considerable funding.¹⁰³

Partners

A peculiar organization structure that emerged after 2001 has made the Bronx Greenway a responsibility of many people and organizations, including several coalitions affiliating largely the same organizations, but under different leaders. The section north from the Hunts Point Riverside Park, that is the Bronx River Greenway, is developed by the Bronx River Alliance, whereas the southward section, the South Bronx Greenway, is being implemented by a number of parallel groups: the South Bronx Greenway Partnership, the Hunts Point Task Force and a minor organization created in 2006 called the Barretto Bay Conservancy. There is also a coalition advocating the demolition of the Sheridan Expressway, which goes along the greenway in the South Bronx and is also a point of interest for all the aforementioned groups. Leaders of all the partnerships are also partners in most other coalitions.

Moreover, let us not forget the many personal affiliations between the organizations. Paul Lipson and Majora Carter leaving The Point – the former to work for Congressman Serrano and the latter to co-create the Bronx River Alliance and later on to set up her own organization, Sustainable South Bronx – are just two major examples. Besides that, one of the chief planners in the Economic Development Corporation is a former Sustainable South Bronx employee, while a former employee of the Bronx Borough President’s office has recently been appointed the new director of Sustainable South Bronx.¹⁰⁴

These personal matters are not without bearing on the projects in question: “building partnerships depends largely on skilful diplomacy.”¹⁰⁵ From this perspective, the central personality seems again to be Majora Carter, who first had a difference of opinion with the director of The Point, and later was one of the reasons why the Bronx River Alliance could not reach an agreement with Hunts Point organizations.¹⁰⁶ She was also referred to by people working in the Hunts Point project: “city planners have acknowledged feelings of distrust or an awkward tension as they participate with Carter on public task forces and working groups.”¹⁰⁷

On the other hand it was Majora Carter who became known as the initiator and leader of projects carried out in the South Bronx. She was repeatedly awarded for her work, receiving, among others, the prestigious MacArthur award. “By singling out individuals, the \$500,000 MacArthur awards can sometimes engender resentment. Perhaps partly for this reason, Ms. Carter is a controversial figure in certain activist circles. (...) Others say that Ms. Carter has achieved some of her fame by taking or getting credit for accomplishments or funding that haven’t been only hers to claim, or for projects that have not yet been completed, such as the Bronx River Greenway.”¹⁰⁸

Among those involved in the project some recognition is due to the people who have been and still are positive links and mediators. Such a person is Congressman Serrano, who has from the very beginning supported both the Bronx River projects and Hunts Point transformations. He is sometimes referred to as the “Godfather of the Bronx River.”¹⁰⁹ Between 1999 and 2005 his office managed to provide nearly 25 million dollars for the reactivation of the Bronx River and prospective parks of the river greenway.¹¹⁰ He was also the first to secure funds for the realization of the South Bronx Greenway.

Another important figure is urban planner Joan Byron, who works for the Pratt Center and on behalf of her employers gets involved in the activities of many organizations. She is now Member of the Board of the Bronx River Alliance, where she first led the Greenway Team, and in 2006 she co-developed the Bronx River Greenway Plan. At the same

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁰⁵ J. Byron, op. cit.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 137.

¹⁰⁸ Holloway Marguerite, op. cit.

¹⁰⁹ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 135.

time, she co-created the Bronx River Watershed Alliance and works e.g. with The Point to support the development of the South Bronx Greenway.

Land ownership

Many activities of the Bronx River Alliance are located on the property of the Department of Parks and Recreation, which, thanks to the Alliance's close collaboration with the Department, definitely facilitates its daily operations. Only when setting up new parks was the city required to buy out land (Concrete Plant Park in 2000) or relinquish plans to sell land that was otherwise unused (Starlight Park).

In Hunts Point, some of the investments for phase one of the project went to creating cycle routes along the existing roads, which made the manager of the roads, the Department of Transportation, a significant player in the project. And since the vision of making the peninsula more resident-friendly is starting to grow on some of the local businesses, one of them has even designated a 30-foot-wide (9 meters) strip of land along its property to the greenway project.

Financing

The Bronx River Alliance works in close cooperation with the Department of Parks and Recreation, which provides it with offices and ensures remuneration for the two Alliance people who are at the same time Department employees. Other funding is obtained by the Alliance's own operations as an NGO. Meanwhile, the Sustainable South Bronx, which is deprived of the comfort of regular cooperation with a public entity, has built the South Bronx Greenway Partnership on the grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In both cases, the funds obtained are used to administer and manage the projects, to develop plans and to organize social and promotional campaigns.

Actual implementation of transformation plans is where public funds and administration come to play. The partnerships assist city departments in obtaining support from state and federal budgets, which – along with the city budget – constitute the major sources of funding.

The South Bronx projects are rather unlikely to attract generous private benefactors, since the bor-

ough is very poor indeed. An exception might be corporations operating in the Hunts Point peninsula, some of which have proved willing to contribute considerable resources to the greenway project.¹¹¹ In 2005, New York Times announced the appearance in Hunts Point of two new food companies. One of them was Anheuser-Busch, which “will invest \$1 million in community projects, including the development of the South Bronx Greenway.”¹¹²

Management and maintenance

An important part of the operations of social organizations working for the greenways is their commitment to maintaining those elements of the greenway infrastructure that have already come into existence. Community groups not only initiate projects or drive social demand for their implementation, but also take up responsibility for keeping them in good shape once they are realized. Permanent care from the community is also important for fostering a deeper emotional connection between the local people and the urban space they use; it reinforces the sense of co-ownership and common responsibility.

In the case of the two greenways, this role, albeit to a different extent, is played by all the groups involved in the project. The leaders, however, are the Bronx River Alliance in the north and along the river, and the Sustainable South Bronx in the south. They both obtain additional funding from NGO programs to support city departments in managing maintenance and conservation activities in the area, as well as keeping it clean and safe for the local community.

As compared to public administration institutions, civic organizations are much more skilful in attracting and managing volunteer involvement. The Deputy Director of the Bronx River Alliance is always eager to emphasize this social aspect of their activity: “We love volunteers and we always need volunteers on the Bronx River, there's plenty to do. We have a Conservation Crew, which is a ten member crew of people from the Bronx who work on the river every day doing restoration plantings, clearing blockages on the river...”¹¹³ Volunteers are there also to examine water quality at different points along the river, keeping it constantly monitored. Anybody

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 135.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 130.

¹¹² W. Hu, *2 Companies Plan to Expand And Add Jobs in Hunts Point*, “The New York Times” 2 Dec 2005.

¹¹³ M. Greenfield, op. cit.

who wants to help restore some part of the river, for instance around their home, can undergo a quick training and receive the necessary equipment.

Sustainable South Bronx works in a way similar to the Bronx River Alliance. It “is also dedicated to the upkeep and beauty of the existing Greenway. We employ a full-time Greenway Steward to keep the trees, shrubs and other components of the Greenway healthy and litter-free.”¹¹⁴

What is more, both groups make sure that the public space under their care is used for cultural, recreational and social events. The major annual event organized by the Bronx River Alliance is of course the above-mentioned Golden Ball Festival, which has now been transformed into the Bronx River Festival. There are also river paddles, bike trips, concerts, movie screenings, tree planting and river cleaning actions.¹¹⁵ The South Bronx Greenway Partnership has also conducted numerous social campaigns promoting the South Bronx as a place of enormous recreational potential and encouraging appreciation for the transformations already made; they have organized runs along the planned greenway, bike trips, walks, paddling and fishing trips, as well as music festivals and many other. The Partnership also used to help the Bronx River Alliance organize the Golden Ball Festival.¹¹⁶

Partners / land ownership

Social activism on the property owned by city departments obviously must not be exercised without the agreement of the landlord. This makes it easier for the Bronx River Alliance, which cooperates closely with the Department of Parks and Recreation and does not need to agree its actions with the Department’s representative for the river and riverbanks, since this representative is the Alliance’s own Executive Director. On the other hand, encouraging volunteers to help an organization which seems to be part of public administration is becoming more and more difficult: “Initially, all the work around the river was community-driven, but as time passes, after the Bronx River Alliance was established, this changed and now the Alliance is mostly full-time staff-driven.”¹¹⁷

Financing

When it comes to urban public space, just building things is not enough. The key is to manage and maintain a space after it is built, which requires appropriate organizational resources and permanent funding. “The fundamental problem is that acquiring funds to establish a park is not enough; there are regular maintenance costs to be borne afterwards. This is why the Department for Parks and Recreation is reluctant to have more green space if it cannot be sure there will be money to keep it.”¹¹⁸

Groups which steward the most prestigious public spaces in New York, such as the Central Park Conservancy or Friends of the High Line, can always depend on there being generous investors, even private ones, willing to help them out financially. In the South Bronx, the situation is different: “There is a fundamental problem we have had for a long time: unless it is a big, sophisticated project with value to tourists or businesspeople, it’s forgotten. Our parks only serve the people here.”¹¹⁹

One of the few exceptions is Barry Segal Family Foundation, which in 2007 joined forces with the Clinton Global Initiative to donate 300 thousand dollars to finance three years of training and coordination of the Greenway Stewards, in order to ensure maintenance of the South Bronx Greenway, including the Hunts Point Riverside Park.¹²⁰

Summary

The above discussion of the state of affairs around the Bronx Greenway features many figures, organizations, coalitions, plans and initiatives. Many of them have never been coordinated with one another, some have been even treated as independent, separate projects. This dispersion on the organizational level not only hindered the implementation of the greenway as a unified whole, but was also the source of the many basic problems in the realization of the south section of the project.

This state of affairs has its origins in the community’s inability to find a common ground that could be represented by a single organization, preferably one created specifically for that very purpose. Based

¹¹⁴ www.ssbx.org, viewed: Oct-Dec 2013.

¹¹⁵ www.bronxriver.org, viewed: Oct-Dec 2013.

¹¹⁶ *South Bronx Greenway Partnership...*, op. cit. p. 13-16.

¹¹⁷ J. Linton, op. cit.

¹¹⁸ J. Byron. op. cit.

¹¹⁹ Majora Carter, quote from: D. Gonzalez, *Carving Out Havens and Facing Down the Skeptics*, “The New York Times” 8 May 2007.

¹²⁰ *Hunts Point Riverside Park...*, op. cit., p. 60.

on the above discussion, there are four main reasons for this situation:

1. The stretch of the greenway extending around Hunts Point was not included in the first urban planning schemes. This factor cannot be, however, treated as decisive, as these schemes were no more than preliminary concept drafts, and were later amended as a result of pressures from the interested parties. The authors of the schemes themselves saw them as mere suggestions, meant to initialize the planning process which was to be later fleshed out during locally-run community consultations;
2. The topographic features of the area shaped the future identity of the projects. It should be noted, however, that the Hunts Point Riverside Park is not located right by the estuary of the Bronx River – the river flows further around the peninsula (along around 25% of its coastline). The stretch of the greenway that extends around the peninsula is identified with the entire South Bronx area, where all the Bronx River Greenway parks developed by the Bronx River Alliance are also located;
3. The aims and fields of activity of the organizations, none of which was appointed by statute to develop the greenway alone. In each organization, the greenway project, even if considered a priority, was subordinate to other organizational goals;
4. The interpersonal conflicts, among which those surrounding Majora Carter are most often cited.

Out of the four reasons enumerated above, the first two have undoubtedly made the situation more complicated, but it is the latter two that played the decisive role.

Erika Svendsen notes that “At the same time, there is a veiled desire on behalf of government groups for the Bronx River Alliance to take over the responsibilities of the South Bronx Greenway.”¹²¹ For as long as the organization has been active, it has been working to attain and maintain its good reputation both with the authorities and with local non-governmental organizations. Although Maggie Scott Greenfield diplomatically points out that because of the nature of the areas surrounding

both greenways and the ownership structure of the land „the Bronx River Alliance cooperates with the Department for Parks and Recreation, while the South Bronx Greenway as a project belongs to the Economic Development Corporation and the Department of Transportation”¹²², this does not seem that important, since, for example, the stretch of the Bronx River Greenway between Westchester Avenue and East Tremont Avenue is being developed jointly by the Bronx River Alliance and the New York City Department of Transportation.¹²³

Majora Carter’s confrontational attitude might be treated as an expression of her personal ambition and uncompromising character. It might also be assumed, however, that she simply decided to protect the interests and priorities of the inhabitants of the South Bronx. This possibility was pointed out by Erika Svendsen. In 2005, when amendments to the Hunts Point Vision Plan were being developed, the relations between Sustainable South Bronx and the Economic Development Corporation deteriorated. This was, as Svendsen recalls, primarily because Carter opposed the proposed amendments, which included a plan to build a new stadium for the New York Yankees in an area initially described as green – a project unwanted by the local community.¹²⁴

In conclusion, the question appears whether the project’s turbulent history and resulting fragmentation should be judged as unambiguously negative. First of all, if the civic groups had not actively taken up the topic, a large part of the greenway might not have been created at all. It should also be said that the creation of the greenway was not the sole purpose of those organizations, which significantly lowered the efficiency of their efforts. On the other hand, the very idea of greenways presupposes precisely this kind of broad scope of operation, as the implementation of greenways is, in the long run, meant to be a means to reaching much broader environmental and social goals. Therefore, this conflict-ridden process might in the end turn out to be a positive model, and the results of a project so developed, although they take longer to be achieved, may be far more environmentally and socially sustainable.

Translated by Z. Owczarek

¹²¹ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 146.

¹²² M. Greenfield, op. cit.

¹²³ J. Byron, M. Greenfield, op. cit., p. 2.8.

¹²⁴ E. Svendsen, op. cit., p. 137.

Important dates

- 1974 The Bronx River Restoration Project is created;
- 1993 The Point starts collaboration with the Pratt Center for Community Development;
- 1997 Jenny Hoffner initiates the creation of the Bronx River Working Group coalition;
- 1997 The Point starts collaboration with Congressman Jose Serrano;
- 1998 Majora Carter (on The Point's behalf) is awarded the first grant for the cleaning of the lot where the Hunts Point Riverside Park is later to be created;
- 1999 The Bronx River Working Group publishes the Bronx River Action Plan;
- 1999 The Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance is created;
- 2001 The Bronx River Working Group creates the Bronx River Alliance;
- 2001 Majora Carter creates the Sustainable South Bronx;
- 2003 Sustainable South Bronx initiates the South Bronx Greenway Partnership,
- 2003 EDCNYC initiates the creation of the Hunts Point Task Force;
- 2004 The Hunts Point Task Force publishes the Hunts Point Vision Plan;
- 2006 The Bronx River Alliance publishes the Bronx River Greenway Plan;
- 2006 The Hunts Point Task Force publishes the South Bronx Greenway Master Plan;
- 2006–13 new parks opened: Hunts Point Riverside Park, Barretto Point Park, Soundview Park, Concrete Plant Park and Starlight Park.

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