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November 15th, 2014

Sustainable Systems

10-Week Observation Reflection

The process of observation that I did continuously over ten weeks at Williamsburg’s Waterfront was both fully of discovery and extremely surprising. As someone who grew up mostly in a place with weather so mild as Mexico City’s, I had very few times experienced the change of seasons, but never, as intimately like this time around. I had of course been before to colder places, skiing mostly, and even to New York in the fall to spend Thanksgiving with family, however, never had I realized the unpredictability of this weather during such a short span of time. For me, it was always temporary, and I was always prepared. However, I did get a more intense taste of what the seasons are like when I lived in Vancouver for a year, and later on, for six months in Denmark. From Vancouver, the thing I remember the most was that it never stopped raining, but I guess that not keeping track intentionally of changes in weather makes ones interactions with the place limited to “what will I wear today?” Denmark was different because by the middle of April it was impossible to tell whether it was going to snow or a day for shorts. But again, my interactions were limited to clothes and “oh, look at that beautiful landscape!”

When I began doing these observation I had never been to the Williamsburg Waterfront before, nor had I so consistently and intentionally visited the same place before. At fist, the most interesting observations for me were people, and how many were there during certain days of the week or at certain times. It was very interesting for me to discover that there were so many kids soccer teams training around the area during the evenings, or that during certain days a lot of couples sat in the benches contemplating the view. Other days it was almost completely empty and I wondered if it was because of the weather, or simply because of the time and day of the week. Later on, my attention became more focused on the inconsistency of the incoming coolness of fall. There were days were it seemed to be almost winter, with high speed winds that required layers of clothing, and within only one or two days it was back to a mild 20 degrees and only a light sweater. Within this period I, as anyone who has never really experience fall, became completely enamored with the colors of the trees and falling leafs. It was incredible to see the gradual transformation and still in some places, the contrast between the remaining green leafs and the deep orange and yellow.

As the semester, and the observations progressed, I also started seeing different things such as questioning if this part of the water was polluted by the spill that happened a few years ago, or if the wind or temperature affected the air quality in any way. I began to realize that the saying that “New York is always changing” goes in parallel with the weather, because it is, from moment to moment, and from day to day. I realized that the weather is part of a much larger system and was shocked at myself for not having made that connection before. Some things we just take for granted, until we being to notice them on the most part when they begin to affect us.

Although it was a very rewarding time of observation that allowed me to get to know both my neighborhood, and the changes in weather better and from a closer perspective, I would definitely try something different next time. This, in the sense that I would like to chose a specific time of when I go, and a specific time of how many days pass between each visit. Even though what I did helped me get a better overview of different times, and how these change the manner in which people interact with the space, I would very much like to observe change more consistently to be able to come to more specific conclusions.