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Seminar 1: Bridge 4 Essay

December 1, 2016

Trash Pick Up Problem in Astoria, Queens

Upon getting off the N train which was the very last stop on 31st street in Astoria, Queens it appeared to be another normal town near New York City. It felt homey as Astoria is small with middle class families. It is one of the commercial neighborhoods in Queens with a population of 78, 793 people. The people are primarily of Greek, Italian, or Arabic descent and compose a mix of older people and young families with kids.

Astoria was originally called Hallet's Cove¹, named after its first landowner William Hallet. Now Astoria is primarily known for its Museum of the Moving Image, a film museum. Other than the museum, Astoria has a plethora of Greek food establishments. There are three major sections to Astoria: Ravenswood, where the East River is located; Astoria Heights where the Guardia Airport is located, and Ditmars, the residential middle class area that my group visited.

Overall Astoria appears nice and like a perfect place for a family to live, but when you take a closer look, you start to notice that there is a lot of litter on the streets. During our group visit to "get lost" in Astoria, I mindlessly kicked a can on the street. I soon noticed that there

¹ "Astoria, Queens - Wikipedia." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astoria,_Queens. Accessed 16 Dec. 2016.

was accumulated trash along the sides of the streets that we were walking on. Although people appeared nice, minding their own businesses, walking their dogs, playing with their kids, or just standing in front of their homes, nobody seemed to notice or care about the trash in the streets.

Even on the main street, 31st street, where the N and the Q train drops people off, and where there are several businesses and restaurants, there was a lot of trash. I started to note that there were not many trash cans. The ones that I did notice were overfilled and found in odd places, like in people's yards.

NYC is known for being a trashy place, "Through most of its history until the mid-1900s, New York's primary method for disposing of its waste was simply to dump it into the ocean. At one point, as much as 80% of New York's garbage ended up out at sea."² Not much has changed, other than New Yorker's learning that trash should not be dumped into the ocean because that kills animals. Knowledge hasn't necessarily changed behavior though, because some people still dump trash onto the streets.

According to the Census ³ the population estimates in New York for July 1, 2015, were 8,550,405 and in 1990 the population was estimated to be 7.322, meaning the population in New York went up 1 million people over the 15 years. Specifically the population of Queens went up about 4.9% between 2010 and 2015. That is a drastic change in population. This growth can be foreseen for Astoria, at the rate it is growing.

² "What does New York do with all that trash? One city's waste – in" 27 Oct. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/oct/27/new-york-rubbish-all-that-trash-city-waste-in-numbers>. Accessed 15 Dec. 2016.

³ "Census Bureau." <https://www.census.gov/>. Accessed 15 Dec. 2016.

The people of Astoria are noticing the consistent population increase and some are concerned about the trash issues that other's turn a blind eye to. Frank Sicoli⁴, a new resident in Astoria, Queens lives on 31st and notices the trash. He notices the trash on the ground and how there are not enough trash cans on the streets and states, "They're getting out of the subway, you have the food carts, the convenience stores on every corner, they're buying stuff, they're walking, and there's no trash cans so they're throwing it on the street."

Sicoli decided to take action and contact the Department of Sanitation to ask for more trash cans for 31 street. The Department of Sanitation has done walkthroughs and believe that 31st street is too residential to get more trash cans. Yet, residents believe that it would benefit that area to get more trash cans. The belief is that if people had somewhere to throw the trash in, they would be more likely to throw it the cans, rather than the streets.

Another person taking note of this issue is Astoria's Mayor de Blasio because he is getting complaints from the residents.⁵ In Astoria they used to have three pick up days for trash but now only have two. Their trash pickup is every Monday and Thursday and Recycle pickup is every Thursday.^{6,7} When the Mayor spoke with the Department of Sanitation they said they were

⁴ "Astoria Needs More Trash Cans to Combat Litter Problem, Some" <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20130506/astoria/astoria-needs-more-trash-cans-combat-litter-problem-some-locals-say>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2016.

⁵ "Astoria Residents Call on City to Add Garbage Pickup as Trash Piles Up." 31 Jan. 2014, <http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2014/01/31/astoria-residents-call-on-city-to-add-garbage-pickup-as-trash-piles-up/>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2016.

⁶ "DSNY -The City of New York Department of" <http://www.nyc.gov/dsny>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2016.

⁷ "Recycling or Trash Collection Schedule | City of New York - NYC.gov." <http://www1.nyc.gov/nyc-resources/service/2320/recycling-or-trash-collection-schedule>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2016.

working on the issue. Several elected officials representing Astoria, Queens are asking that an additional pickup be added between 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.⁸

After our visit to Astoria, my group and I had to come up with a solution for the trash problem for our Studio class. We didn't want to seem invasive, as students from Manhattan telling Astoria residents, that they have a problem and how we were going to fix it; so we came up with an effective yet simple idea to spread awareness of the trash issue. We designed stickers. Using beautiful photos of clean streets of Greece, because of the high greek demographic in Astoria, with little simple captions on them saying "Trash goes in the trashcan." We planned to pass the stickers out to people on 31st street and talk to the residents to get their suggestions and feedback on the issue of trash. We decided that could work as a short term solution.

We learned through the New York meetings calendar⁹ that Astoria's community board meetings were held on the third Tuesday of each month, so as our long term solution, we decided to attend a meeting at the Astoria World Manor at 6:30 P.M. We planned to track the meetings to see what they brought up as concerns. We wanted to see if the trash issue was even brought up as a concern; and learn whether there were bigger problems that we, as visitors, overlooked during our visit. We planned to bring up the trash problem and present our group's solution.

Trash can appear to be a big community problem, and it is a problem everywhere in the world. But just like any major problem, the best we can do is to focus on the community we are

⁸ "Astoria Residents Call on City to Add Garbage Pickup as Trash Piles Up." 31 Jan. 2014, <http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2014/01/31/astoria-residents-call-on-city-to-add-garbage-pickup-as-trash-piles-up/>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2016.

⁹ "Meetings Calendar - NYC.gov." <http://www.nyc.gov/html/qnscb1/html/meetings/meetings.shtml>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2016.

living in and on our very own behaviors. We can start by making sure we throw away our trash into a trashcan. Even if it's something small like a gum wrapper, taking consistent small steps to take care of one's own trash, by disposing of it appropriately can lead to making a bigger difference for a community. One can also, personally contact the Department of Sanitation and request additional trash cans. Just like many of the residents on 31st street did in Astoria. Every bit of progress made helps. It was very rewarding to provide our assistance in helping Astoria become a cleaner place, even with all the gentrification it is experiencing.

